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INSIDE

MONEY 10
STOCK MARKETS TO END 2024
WITH POSITIVE RETURNS
DESPITE ROLLER COASTER RIDE

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Humpy makes history with a rapid win

PTI ■ NEW YORK

India's Koneru Humpy bagged an epochal second World Rapid Chess Championship title, beating Irene Sukandar of Indonesia here on Sunday.

Humpy had won the event back in 2019 at Georgia and the Indian No 1 is only the second player after China's Ju Wenjun to clinch the title more than once.

The 37-year-old Humpy finished the tournament with 8.5 out of 11 points.

"I'm very excited and I feel very happy. In fact, I expected it to be a very tough day, like some sort of tie-break. But when I finished the game, I only got to know when the arbitrator told me, and it was a tense moment for me," said Humpy, who began with



India's Koneru Humpy (R) during a match at the FIDE World Rapid Chess Championship, in New York

champion in the classical format World Championship recently in Singapore. In September, India had won its first-ever gold medals in Open and Women's categories in the Chess Olympiad in Budapest.

The seasoned Humpy admitted that she was not thinking about the title after her first-round defeat here.

"I think, after the first round loss, I was nowhere thinking about the title, but things turned out well, especially yesterday winning the four games in a row helped me," she said.

However, Humpy faced some challenges off the board too as well because of the big time-gap between India and the USA.

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black pieces, after her victory. "So, this is quite unexpected because the whole year I have been struggling a lot and I

had very bad tournaments where I just ended up in last place. So, this came as a surprise," she added.

Humpy's achievement capped a sensational year for Indian chess after D Gukesh defeated China's Ding Liren to emerge



Firefighters and rescue team members work near the wreckage of a passenger plane at Muan International Airport in Muan, South Korea

Plane crash in South Korea claims 179 lives

AP ■ SEOUL

A passenger plane skidded off a runway at a South Korean airport Sunday, slammed into a concrete fence and burst into flames after its front landing gear apparently failed to deploy. All but two of the 181 people on board died in one of the country's worst aviation disasters.

The Jeju Air plane crashed while landing in the town of Muan, about 290 kilometres south of Seoul. The Transport Ministry said the plane was a 15-year-old Boeing 737-800 jet that had arrived from Bangkok and that the crash happened at 9:03 am.

A total of 179 people — 85 women, 84 men and 10 others whose genders weren't immediately identifiable — died in the fire, the South Korean fire agency said. Emergency workers pulled two people, both crew members, to safety. Health officials said they are conscious and not in life-threatening condition.

Among the 177 bodies so far

found, officials have so far identified 88 of them, the fire agency said. The passengers were predominantly South Korean, as well as two Thai nationals. Thailand's Foreign Ministry said its embassy in Seoul received confirmation from South Korean authorities that the two Thai passengers were among the fatalities.

The fire agency deployed 32 fire trucks and several helicopters to contain the blaze. About 1,570 firefighters, police officers, soldiers and other officials were also sent to the site, according to the fire agency and transport ministry.

Footage of the crash aired by South Korean television channels showed the plane skidding across the airstrip at high speed, apparently with its landing gear still closed, overturning the runway and colliding head-on with a concrete wall on the outskirts of the facility, triggering an explosion. Other local TV stations aired footage

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Cold wave, dense fog to hit North India for New Years eve

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As New Year's celebrations draw near, residents across North India, including Delhi and its surrounding regions, are preparing for an intense cold wave and heavy fog that could impact festivities. While the recent rains have subsided, a significant shift in weather patterns is expected to take hold in the coming days, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

The IMD has forecast a period of very dense fog and a cold wave for Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan between December 30 and January 2. This sudden drop in temperatures, combined with reduced visibility, is likely to disrupt New Year plans for many. In Delhi, the city's maximum temperature has already dipped to 18 degrees Celsius, about 2.4 degrees below normal, while the minimum settled at 13 degrees Celsius, six notches above the average. However, a sharp drop in the minimum temperature by around six degrees is expected over the next few days.

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WEATHER

LUCKNOW
MAX 19.8°C(-1.3)
MIN 13.4°C(+6.0)



Delhi Police deports illegal Bangladeshi immigrants

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Intensifying its drive against illegal immigrants in the national Capital following Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena's orders, the Delhi Police has deported 17 Bangladeshi nationals who were residing in the south and southwest districts of the national capital.

On Sunday, the Delhi Police claimed to deport 15 Bangladeshi nationals illegally residing in the national Capital illegally. The police also arrested five such illegal immigrants in the south district.

In Southwest district, the police claimed that they deported eight such immigrants residing in Rangpuri area. Deputy Commissioner of Police (Southwest) Surendra Choudhary said, "Those deported are Jahangir, his wife Parina Begam and their six children including four sons and two daughters, hailing from Kekerhat village in Madaripur district of Bangladesh."

According to police, Jahangir admitted to entering India through unofficial routes and subsequently, bringing his family over. They had destroyed their Bangladeshi identification documents and were living in Delhi while concealing their original identities.

"A team from the Vasant Kunj South police station was tasked to identify illegal immigrants. As part of the intensified efforts to address concerns about unauthorised migrants, police conducted door-to-door verifications of 400 families in Rangpuri," Choudhary said.

He added that verification forms were sent to the addresses of suspected individuals in West Bengal and a special team was dispatched to manually verify their documents.

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Rajnath Singh calls India "Not Very Lucky"

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BHOPAL/MHOW

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday termed India a "not very lucky" nation on the security front and urged soldiers to keep a sharp eye on internal and external foes who he said are always active.

He was addressing Army personnel at the more-than-two-century-old Mhow cantonment in the Indore district of Madhya Pradesh. "Taking the security scenario into account, Bharat is not a very lucky country because our northern border and western border continuously face challenges," said Singh, who is on a two-day tour of the state.

Mhow cantonment, 25 km from Indore, is home to three premier training institutes - Army War College, Military College of Telecommunication Engineering and Infantry School - other



Photo: PTI

than the Infantry Museum and Army Marksmanship Unit.

"We also face challenges on the internal front. In the backdrop of this, we can't sit quiet, unconcerned. Our enemies, whether internal or external, remain

active always. In these circumstances, we must keep a close eye on their activities and take appropriate and timely effective steps against them," he told the Armymen.

To make Bharat a developed and self-reliant country by 2017, the role of the Army is very crucial, said the defence minister. "As the country's defence minister, I would like to tell you that we should be alert always. This patch of time, though often referred to as peacetime, struck me deeply when I arrived and witnessed the discipline and dedication with which you are undergoing training. Your regimen is no less than that of a war," he told the gathering.

"To maintain such a level of discipline, dedication and firm conviction are needed," he added.

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Karnataka Police registers case over alleged kill plot

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BENGALURU

The Karnataka police has registered a case against the close aide of Karnataka Minister Priyank Kharge, Raju Kapanur and five others in connection with hatching a conspiracy to kill BJP MLA Basavaraj Mattimadu and other leaders. Priyank Kharge, is the son of Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, and the State is ruled by Congress led K Siddaramiah government.

The case was registered based on a suicide note by a civil contractor, Sachin Panchal, who had mentioned that the Congress leaders had connived to kill Mattimadu, Siddalinga Swami of Andola Math, BJP leaders Manikant Rathod and Chandu Patil. Priyank however hit out at the BJP for making baseless allegations against him and politicising Sachin's death. He said nowhere in Panchal's death note is his name mentioned, and added that there were financial transactions between Panchal and Kapanur which need to be investigated.

Panchal, a contractor from Bidar, allegedly ended his life by lying down in front of an approaching train on Thursday. In his suicide note, he had accused Kapanur and his aides of making death threats.

Meanwhile, the Bidar District-In Charge Minister, Eshwar Khandre, who holds



the forest portfolio, visited Panchal's residence in Bhalki Taluk. As soon as the officials visited the house, the angry family members shouted at them to go away as they held them responsible for Sachin's death. Khandre consoled and assured them that action would be taken against the accused persons involved in the death. Later, the minister announced an ex gratia of Rs 10 lakh to the family members of Panchal. Khandre said the Government Railway Police (GRP) is probing the suicide case and the government would also consider handing over the investigation to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID).

The BJP has taken the case seriously. It has demanded that the case should be handed over to the CBI.

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Boy dies after 16-hour rescue from borewell in MP's Guna

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Even after multiple agencies tried to save the life of a 10-year-old boy for 16 hours, he died after being rescued from a 140-feet borewell in Madhya Pradesh's Guna district. The boy, Sumit Meena, slipped into the open shaft of the borewell at around 9.30 am on Saturday in Pipliya village under Raghogarh assembly segment, located 50 km from the Guna district headquarters. Officials said that he was unresponsive when he was brought out at around 9.30 am on Sunday.

The boy was rushed to a hospital in Raghogarh on life support system, Guna Superintendent of Police Sanjeev Sinha said. "Sorry to say, he is no more," Guna district chief medical and health officer Dr Rajkumar Rishishwar told reporters at the hospital.

"The child was in the narrow borewell for the entire night in the chilly weather. His hands and feet were drenched and swollen. His clothes were also wet and mud was found in his mouth," he said. Doctors examined whether the body parts froze due to hypothermia (a condition that occurs when the core body temperature drops below 95 degrees Fahrenheit), he said.

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A dug up drain and an open drain near the Saket metro station



Photos: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

Delhi struggles with overflowing drains

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

The national Capital is plagued by the problem of a bad drainage system which consistently leaves a stench in many areas and overflows with even a drop of rainfall. Exacerbating the problem, the civic authorities responsible to desilt and clean them to ensure that it don't make the area inhabitable and hamper the lives of the common people, often shrug their responsibility.

One such drain flows from Lado Sarai and Chattarpur area and through most of the posh South Delhi areas. It is open in front of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) camp and the Saket metro station. Residents and people working in the area complain of persistent foul smell from the drain, even as they are forced to carry on with their lives amid the stench.

Many do not even remember if they ever saw civic agencies undertaking cleaning work of the drain, which lies right in the heart of the city. Some suggest it was years ago when they saw such an activity. An autodrivers who parks his vehicle

right near the drain said that it emits a foul smell, making it very hard to work. "You can get the smell yourself. We smell it daily but what can we do? We have to work here only because customers come here," Lakhinder Singh said.

He resides in Sangam Vihar with his family, which is also not free from the foul smell. A resident of a nearby colony expressed his dissatisfaction with the government over not being able to carry out a cleaning drive on a regular basis. "As far as I remember I have only seen any cleaning of this drain three years ago. Since then, at least three monsoons have passed when waterlogging becomes a very big issue. This drain overflows during the monsoon and creates a very bad situation in the area, especially for people who have their homes here," he said.

Another person, who puts up his food stall nearby, recalled how summer makes things even worse when it smells even worse. "A lot of people and tourists come to the Saket area and hence we put our stall here so we can earn some money but sometimes it smells so bad that customers do not want to stand here

and eat. The government agencies should clean such big drains," he said, adding that when foreigners come it tarnishes our image on a global level.

Residents in the Khanpur and Sainik Farms area who are experiencing discomfort in their normal lives on a daily basis due to the construction work of Delhi Metro share how the drain is making their lives even worse. "When the smell from the drain reaches even our home, which is not located very close to it, you can assess how it must be," a man residing in Sainik Farms said, adding that it also overflows in monsoon causing waterlogging in the streets and making it hard to travel through the stretch.

Even as there are multiple agencies in Delhi that manage the city's big and small drains, the high court has called for a single agency to look after them. Moreover, the current design of the drainage system, which was put in place almost 50 years ago in 1976, needs to be overhauled since it can only easily drain 50mm of rain in a day with the city coming to its knees whenever it witnesses massive intense rains.

Diaspora voter turnout disappoints despite high registrations

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Overseas Indians showed great enthusiasm in registering as electors, with nearly 1.2 lakh enrolling in the voter list, but very less people turned up to exercise their franchise in the Lok Sabha elections this year. As per the data released by the Election Commission, as many as 1,19,374 registered as overseas electors in 2024, with Kerala witnessing the highest registrations at 89,839. In 2019, as many as 99,844 had registered as overseas electors. The poll authority said only 2,958 overseas electors flew down to

India to participate in the largest democratic exercise in the world. Of these, an overwhelming 2,670 were from Kerala alone.

Several large states such as Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu saw zero turnout of overseas electors. Gujarat, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home state, saw only two out of 885 overseas electors casting their votes in the Lok Sabha elections. The same was the story in Maharashtra, where only 17 of the 5,097 NRI electors voted. Despite an increase of little over 19,500 registered overseas electors since the 2019 general election, their participation in the latest polls was

poor. While NRI voters is a generic term, the EC describes them as overseas electors — Indians living abroad for a variety of reasons and eligible to vote in the Lok Sabha, assembly and other direct elections. According to the existing electoral law, registered NRI voters have to come to their respective Lok Sabha and assembly constituencies to cast a vote. They have to show their original passport as proof of their identity. Data show that while there were 7,927 registered NRI electors in Andhra Pradesh, only 195 flew down to vote. According to EC, while eligible Indian citizens who



enrol in electoral rolls are called electors, those who actually exercise their franchise are described as voters. In Assam, none of the 19 registered electors voted. Similar was the case with Bihar where none of the 89 registered NRI electors exercised their franchise. Goa too witnessed a similar scenario with none of its 84 voters casting their ballots.

In August 2018, the 16th Lok Sabha passed a bill to allow proxy voting rights to eligible overseas Indians. The bill, however, could not be brought to the Rajya Sabha. In 2020, the EC proposed to the Union Law Ministry to extend the

Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS) facility, so far available only to service voters, to eligible overseas Indian voters as well. It would require changes in the election rules. But the government has so far not taken a call on the issue. The EC had then told the government that it had been receiving several representations from the Indian diaspora to facilitate voting through postal ballots. The electors cited travel costs, compulsions of employment overseas, and education, among other things, as the reasons for their inability to cast their votes in person, the EC said.

Elderly jeweller hit on head with hammer, robbed

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

At a stone's throw distance from a police booth near the Bulaki Adda trisection in Bazaarkhala, an elderly jeweller was repeatedly hit on the head with a hammer and robbed of valuables worth about Rs 40 lakh and Rs 1.2 lakh in cash.

The victim has been admitted to a private hospital in a serious condition.

Local police have been accused of negligence in the investigation, but they say that the matter is being probed.

According to reports, the victim, Suresh Prasad Agarwal, from Yahaganj's Narayandas Lane, owns a shop named Triveni Jewellers just a few steps away from the police booth near Bulaki Adda trisection. His son, Nitesh Agarwal, said that, as usual, his father Suresh was alone at the shop on Saturday. At 6:54 pm, some

miscreants arrived posing as customers. They asked Suresh to show them gold and silver jewellery, which the jeweller began displaying. Before the victim could understand what was happening, the miscreants, who were looking at the jewellery, seized him. When the victim tried to cry out and raise the alarm, one of the miscreants gagged him. Not only that, the victim, Suresh, was struck on the head with a hammer several times.

Blood started oozing from his head, causing him to lose consciousness. Meanwhile, the miscreants looted the cash kept in the cash box and gold and silver jewellery worth about Rs 40 lakh before fleeing the scene.

After Suresh regained consciousness, he managed to stagger out of the shop. The shopkeepers in the neighbourhood were stunned to see him covered in blood.

When they asked him, the victim jeweller informed them about the incident. Local residents then took him to Avtar Hospital in the area, where he received first aid before being referred to KGMU Trauma Centre.

Nitesh alleged that he took his father, Suresh, to the trauma centre, but he was not admitted. Suresh was later admitted to Icon Hospital in Jankipuram in critical condition, where he is undergoing treatment.

Nitesh said that he had informed the police about the incident at 7:28 pm via the 112 emergency number. Two policemen on a bike arrived at the scene and told him to get his father treated first and then file a complaint at the Bazaarkhala police station.

Nitesh alleged that the police did not take the matter seriously. Meanwhile, a female doctor was robbed of her purse in

Krishna Nagar area here on Saturday evening. The woman was heading home in an auto when the bike-borne miscreants targeted her. The victim filed a report late on Saturday evening. The victim, Dr Purnima Dhusia, who lives in the Lok Bandhu Hospital premises, is posted at the Sarojinagar CHC.

Purnima said that she had booked an auto to go home on Saturday. She had reached near Spring Dale School in Krishna Nagar when two men on a bike came from behind the auto and snatched her purse. They sped off the scene before the victim could react.

The woman told the police that the purse contained a bank passbook, keys, a stethoscope, and cash.

Inspector PK Singh said that the accused were being identified through the footage, and they would be nabbed soon.

Man found with throat slit

Lucknow (PNS): A man was found in a critical condition with his throat slit in Diwanganj village, Mohanlalganj, on Sunday morning. The victim, identified as Arun Lodhi alias Munnu (43), was discovered lying in a pool of blood in a field. Police rushed him to hospital where his condition remains critical.

According to reports, Arun had gone to guard his wheat crop early in the morning. Shortly afterward, villagers informed his family that he was lying injured in the field with a deep cut on his neck. Panicked, the family immediately alerted the police.

The police arrived at the scene and sent Arun for emergency treatment via an ambulance. They received the first report of the incident from the PRV team at around 8 am. The victim's family has not yet filed a formal complaint. Police suspect the attack was motivated by robbery. "The victim was attacked with a sharp-edged weapon," police said, adding: "We are investigating the case to uncover the motive and identify the assailants."



Devotees during 'Nagar Keertan' as part of 'Prakash Parv' of Guru Govind Singh in Lucknow on Sunday

From maths teacher to cyber fraudster!

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Cyber thug Krishna Kumar previously worked as a mathematics teacher. He joined a gang that digitally arrests victims by threatening them with police action and earned huge profits from the scams.

"There was some trouble at home, so I started working at a medical store. I used to earn Rs 250 per day. The owner understood my financial needs and talked to me about earning more money. I needed the money, so I was convinced by his words," he confessed.

He said he was given the task of arranging the bank account used in the fraud, and in just 15 days, he earned several lakh. "Everything was going well, but I got caught," he said.

Krishna Kumar had duped a doctor out of lakhs of rupees by digitally arresting him.

He was arrested on Friday, marking the eighth arrest in the Dr Ashok Solanki cheating case. Seven accused were arrested earlier.

The victim, Dr Ashok Solanki, a resident of Lucknow, received a call from an unknown number in August 2024. The caller introduced himself as a police officer and claimed that there was a parcel in Solanki's name that was illegal, and that he could be jailed for this crime.

When the doctor denied owning the parcel, he was asked to talk on a video call.

The thugs put the doctor on a video call, digitally arrested him, and threatened to implicate him in a major case.

They managed to get Rs 48 lakh transferred to the bank accounts they had provided. Later, when the doctor realised

he had been defrauded, he reported the incident to the police.

The UP STF became involved in the investigation. So far, the STF has arrested eight people in connection with this case. According to the police, the gang members keep their operatives active in major cities. Their main targets are cities like Delhi, Ghaziabad, Noida, and Lucknow. People come to these cities in search of jobs and easily fall into their trap.

New members joining the gang are not involved in the main cheating process. They are initially given the task of arranging bank accounts.

Once the ill-gotten money is credited into these accounts, a portion is handed over to the new members.

Krishna Kumar stated that he used to earn Rs 3,000 to Rs 4,000 daily. His associates carried out the fraud.

Krishna Kumar told the police that he wanted to marry his girlfriend. When he shared this with his family, there was a quarrel because their finances were not good, and they could not afford to welcome a new member into the family.

In anger, Krishna left home and started working at a medical shop in Jeetpur, Muradnagar, before turning to cybercrime.

On August 12, Rajkumar called Krishna Kumar via a WhatsApp call to a hotel in Sector 52. There, he gave him the bank account details, ATM card, net banking password of corporate bank account holder Nagendra Pathak, and a mobile SIM.

After this, Krishna Kumar began his fraudulent activities. He later told the police that he had gone to Manali with the mastermind, Mofizuddin, the medical store owner and his former employer Rahul, and another person.

On August 28, the police apprehended him in a fraud case from there and recovered Rs 20,000 from him. He was released from jail on November 1, and his accomplices were also freed.

Year 2024 marks achievements across various sectors in UP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Since taking charge of Uttar Pradesh in 2017, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has played a pivotal role in reshaping the state's perception and steering it towards the path of progress, officials noted.

The year 2024 has marked unprecedented achievements across various sectors, propelling Uttar Pradesh to new heights, they said.

The year began with the historic occasion of Lord Ram's ceremonial arrival in Ayodhya, his birthplace, with the construction of the temple on the Ramjanmabhoomi site. And, as the year draws to a close, the state is engrossed in grand preparations for the Maha Kumbh, a testament to Uttar Pradesh's dedication to preserving its heritage while embracing modernity.

UTTAR PRADESH'S MILESTONES IN 2024

► **Lord Ram's arrival in Ayodhya:** After a 500-year wait, the idol of Lord Ram was ceremonially installed in his temple in Ayodhya on January 22. Prime Minister Narendra Modi conducted the installation ceremony, with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath in attendance.

► **Groundbreaking Ceremony 4.0:** Following investment proposals worth Rs 40 lakh crore received at the Global Investors Summit 2023, the Yogi government turned Rs 10 lakh crore worth of projects into reality during the Groundbreaking Ceremony 4.0 held on February 19-20, 2024. The event, inaugurated by PM Modi at Indira Gandhi Pratishthan in Lucknow, marked a historic milestone for Uttar Pradesh.

► **18 new medical colleges opened:** Uttar Pradesh witnessed remarkable progress in healthcare in 2024 with the establishment of 18 new medical colleges. Government colleges were opened in districts like Bijnor, Bulandshahr, Kushinagar, and others, while private and PPP-mode colleges also began operations. Additionally, PM Modi virtually inaugurated AIIMS, Rae Bareilly on February 25, making it the second operational AIIMS in the state, alongside Gorakhpur.

► **Increased scholarships for Sanskrit students:** For the first time in 24 years, the Yogi government revised scholarships for Sanskrit students, tripling the amount. Over 1.5 lakh students benefited from this initiative, including those in

grades 6, 7, and 8. On October 27, CM Yogi distributed scholarships to students at Sampurnanand Sanskrit University, Varanasi.

► **Deepotsav sets new record:** Deepotsav 2024 in Ayodhya set a new Guinness world record by lighting over 25.12 lakh lamps, surpassing the 2023 record of 22.23 lakh. As many as 25,12,585 lamps were lit in Ayodhya this year. For the first time, 1,121 Vedacharyas performed the Sarayu Aarti, setting another historic record.

► **Farmers' compensation increased in Jewar:** On December 20, CM Yogi addressed Jewar farmers, announcing an increase in land acquisition compensation for the third phase of Jewar Airport development from Rs 3,100 per square metre to Rs 4,300 per square metre.

► **First flight lands at Jewar Airport:** On December 9, the first validation flight successfully landed at Noida International Airport in Jewar, marking a significant milestone. Under the leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the vision of a "New Uttar Pradesh in New India" is soaring on the "runway of development." Preparations are underway to start the airport in 2025.

Chinhat bank heist investigation transferred to Gomti Nagar police

Lucknow (PNS): The investigation into the Chinhat bank heist has been transferred to the Gomti Nagar police. Now, Inspector Rajesh Kumar Tripathi, SHO of Gomti Nagar, will lead the investigation. To ensure a comprehensive and objective inquiry, the case was transferred from Chinhat to Gomti Nagar police on Saturday.

Following this, the team inspected the crime scene and its surroundings, recorded statements from witnesses, and initiated legal procedures, including the issuance of a B-warrant. The heist occurred late at night on December 21, just steps away from the Matiyari police

outpost. The thieves broke into the Indian Overseas Bank's Chinhat branch and managed to cut open 42 lockers, 40 of which were in use. The police arrested the accused—Arvind Kumar (22), Balram Kumar (28), and Kailash Bind (28)—on December 23 following an encounter near Lauli village in Chinhat. The next day, two more accused, Sovind Kumar (25) and Sunny Dayal (22), were killed in separate encounters in Lucknow and Ghazipur districts. The police arrested the seventh and final accused, identified as Mithun Kumar (28), from Dewa Road on Friday. The team is also work-

ing to identify individuals who may have provided shelter to the criminals. Forensic experts were consulted to gather additional evidence. Inspector Tripathi said that efforts to interrogate the alleged mastermind, Vipin Kumar, under a B-warrant were in progress.

"We believe questioning him will yield critical evidence. Once the court reopens, the procedure to take him on a B-warrant will be completed," he said. The police also plan to take the other arrested suspects into remand for further interrogation, aiming to uncover the full extent of the crime and its planning.

Investors submit ₹225-cr claim in real estate fraud

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Investors in the city have submitted a claim of Rs 225 crore in the infamous land investment scam allegedly committed by realtor Rashid Naseem, who ran Shine City Infra Project Private Limited. Meanwhile, another FIR was registered against the director of Shine City Infra Project Private Limited, Rashid Naseem, at the Gomti Nagar police station on Sunday.

So far, about 150 FIRs have been registered at different police stations in the city. More than 80 complaints have been made at the Gomti Nagar police station alone.

The company has allegedly cheated people out of crores of rupees by luring them with cheap plots.

Anand Kumar Mishra, from Kalyanpur, Kanpur, filed a complaint against Rashid Naseem, the director of Shine City Infra Project Private Limited, and other employees of the company.

He said that in 2014, he had booked four plots, each measuring 1,000 square feet, in the Shine Valley project located in Mohanlalganj, through Shine City Infra Project Private Limited.

Rashid Naseem, the owner of the company, has been living in Dubai for five years and is out of police reach. Recently, his telephonic and digital contact with his partners/mentors had come to light.

ANOTHER FIR WAS REGISTERED AGAINST THE DIRECTOR OF SHINE CITY INFRA PROJECT PRIVATE LIMITED, RASHID NASEEM, WITH THE GOMTI NAGAR POLICE ON SUNDAY

"The price for each plot was quoted at Rs 3.51 lakh. On February 28, 2014, the contract letter was received from the company. Even after paying the full amount for the plots in 2018-19, the plots were not registered. Subsequently, the company shut its office and executed a moonlight flit, cheating us of Rs 15 lakh," he said.

A case has been registered following a complaint to the DCP. The police are investigating the matter. Before auctioning the seized property of the company, the Enforcement Directorate is verifying the claims of fraud made against the investors.

So far, investors have submitted claims worth Rs 225 crore. Anyone who has invested in the aforementioned project can file a complaint by February 15. The court had earlier given investors one month's time to present their claims. So far, more than 1,800 investors have submitted their papers. Meanwhile, the ED has verified more than 600 claims.

MD of firm working on highway project booked for sexually harassing woman

Shahjahanpur (PTI): The managing director of a firm working on a national highway project here has been booked for allegedly sexually harassing a female colleague, police said on Sunday. An FIR was lodged against Manoj Yadav following a complaint by the 26-year-old woman employee, police said.

"The accused contacted the woman who works as an account manager at his office. On December 5, he called her to a local hotel, stating his desire for physical relations," Additional Superintendent of Police Sanjay Kumar said, citing details from the FIR. The complainant from Barabanki avoided the meeting by making an excuse, he said.

She further alleged that Yadav continued to harass her with inappropriate phone calls and sent her explicit pornographic videos on her mobile phone, the officer said.

According to the FIR, she has recordings of these instances as evidence. The FIR also claims that Yadav summoned the woman to the company's head office, where he allegedly touched her inappropriately. When she angrily left the room, Yadav allegedly threatened her, saying, "Don't tell your mother about this. If you cooperate with me, I will take care of you and your family." Police said they have registered an FIR against the accused under sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), including Section 75(2) (touching a woman's body without consent), Section 351(3) (threats to life), and Section 67(1) of the IT Act for sending obscene materials.

CLASSIFIEDS

NOTICE

Informed That, Army Records My Daughter Name Nishita is wrong. Correct name is on Be half Aadhar Card No. 372151783286 Nishita Patel. In future, I would be known and recognised by this name only. Ex. Havelard 14626772H Vinay Kumar R/o Village Murapur Post Padhara Tahsil Bindki Distt. Fatehpur.

NOTICE

I, Maish Tarin W/o Saiyed Moallim Husain, R/o 16/76 civil lines, Kanpur -208001 have changed my name to Maish Tarin Husain for all future purposes.

NOTICE

I, Ritu Mishra W/o Sudhir Kumar Mishra R/o 174 Jawahar Nagar Unnao, I have lost my original chain deed of A.B.Nagar Unnao. Executed by Brijesh Kishore S/o Mahesh Prasad in favour Pradeep Narain Diwedi S/o Braj Bhushan Diwedi Regd. at SRO, Unnao in B-1 Vol. 1325 P- 319-336 Sl. 4913 dt. 19.08.97. I have not used the said sale deed in any financial institution.

Minor detained for kidnapping, murdering Class XI student

Lucknow (PTI): Police have detained a minor friend of a Class XI student in connection with his alleged abduction and killing in Uttar Pradesh's Meerut district, an official said on Sunday.

Kankarkheda Station House Officer (SHO) Vinay Kumar Singh said the 17-year-old Class XI student, a resident of Rohta Road, had left home for coaching classes on Saturday. His family informed police when he did not return home after a few hours. The SHO said police questioned a minor friend of the missing student and acting on the information provided by him, found the body of the boy from a spot close to a tube well behind Garh Marg, near a college.

Police have also found a hammer that they suspect was used to kill the boy. The deceased's two-wheeler, an ATM card and Rs 4,400 in cash have also been found, police said. The SHO said the suspect, also 17 years of age, is being questioned further. The body has been sent for post-mortem examination, he added.

Meanwhile, three people were killed, and one person was injured in a collision between a tractor and a loading truck in Mathura district early Sunday, police said. "While one person died on the spot, two others suc-

cumbed to their injuries in the hospital," Inspector Sanjay Kumar Tyagi of Chhata Kotwali said. According to police, the accident occurred in front of Chhata Sugar Mill on NH-19 where a speeding canter, attempting to overtake a brick-laden tractor trolley, collided with it. Both vehicles were going towards Mathura from Chhata when the incident took place this morning.

The injured have been identified as Puran Singh (who was sitting on the tractor), Prince, the canter driver, and Dharmendra Yadav.

All three were rushed to KD Medical College, where Puran Singh and Prince succumbed, while Dharmendra Yadav remains in critical condition, Tyagi said. The lone fatality at the scene was Umesh, he said. Victims' ages have not yet been ascertained. In another incident, a seven-year-old girl was found hanging under mysterious circumstances at her house in Bhadohi, police said on Sunday. The cause of the suicide is yet to be ascertained, said a senior police officer, adding the matter is being investigated. The girl's body was found hanging with a saree through an angle from the tin-shed of the room around 11 am, said Additional Superintendent of Police Tej Veer Singh.

BJP worker beaten over old enmity

Lucknow (PNS): A BJP worker was allegedly beaten by rivals in Dubagga here reportedly due to an old enmity. The accused dragged him nearly 100 metres from his house and assaulted him with sticks. Based on the victim's complaint, the police have registered a case against six individuals, and three have been arrested so far.

The victim, Suraj Dhiman, a resident of Hata Ghulam Safdar Ward, is an active BJP worker. He has previously served as a zonal secretary and booth president. According to Suraj, he was heading towards his farm when the attackers ambushed him.

"They came from behind near the transformer on the road leading to Badhauna village and started beating me," he recounted, adding, "They dragged me towards their house and continued to assault me with sticks. I kept screaming for help, but they didn't stop. Somehow, I managed to escape with my life."

The police have confirmed the arrest of three suspects while the investigation continues. Efforts are underway to apprehend the remaining accused involved in the assault.

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NOTICE U/S 13(2) OF SECURITISATION & RECONSTRUCTION OF FINANCIAL ASSETS AND ENFORCEMENT OF SECURITY INTEREST ACT 2002 (HEREINAFTER CALLED 'ACT')

It is to bring to your notice that your loan account has been declared as NPA by secured creditor Shubham Housing Development Finance Company Limited having its registered office at 608 - 609 , 6th Floor, Block - C Ansal Imperial Tower, Community Center, Naraina Vihar, New Delhi - 110028. (herein after called 'SHDFCL') and you are liable to pay total outstanding against your loan to SHDFCL. You are also liable to pay future interest at the contractual rate on the aforesaid amount together with incidental expenses, cost, charges etc. Therefore, we hereby call upon you to discharge in full your liabilities to SHDFCL within 60 days from the date of this notice failing which SHDFCL will be empowered to exercise the power under Section 13(4) of the ACT. The details of borrowers and secured assets are as under:

S. No.	Loan Account No. Borrower(s) Name	Applicant Address	Demand Notice Amount & Date	Secured Asset
1.	VRN 1406 023799, Nitesh Prasad, Nikes Nirmal	H.No. E. Parahupur Ward No. 5, Ansh Parahupur, P.S.-Mugalsari, Teh & Distt. Chandauli, Uttar Pradesh - 232101	Rs. 8,00,564/- & 23/12/2024	Arazi No. 236, Mauza - Harshankarpur Pargana-Ralhu Teh & Distt -Chandauli, Uttar Pradesh - 232101
2.	OLKW1907000005021807, Pankaj Kumar Agrahari, Deeksha	House No. 58/245, Ram Mandir Lane Hussain Ganj, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh -226001	Rs. 6,11,157/- & 23/12/2024	House No. (C), Constructed Over Khasra No.153 & 155, Situated at Rheimnagar Dudauli Plot No. 68 & 69, Faizullaganj, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh -226001
3.	OLKW2212000005054937, MUKESH KUMAR, GAURI	12, Basant Vihar Camra Garhi Madiyavan Near Parashuram Mandir, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh - 226021	Rs. 20,15,878/- & 23/12/2024	House built on Part of Plot No.183-A, Part of Khasra No.199, Situated in Semra Gaudi Ward Faizullaganj Tehsil and District Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh -226020
4.	OLKW1904000005019632, FIROJ KHAN, BANO	House On Plot No. 534 K Gram Navikot Nandana Pargana Mohana Bkt Near Bhuiyan Devi Mandir, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh -226001	Rs. 5,70,430/- & 23/12/2024	House on Part of Plot No-534K, Part of Khasra No. 498/4, 498/5, 498/9, Situated Gram Navikot Nandana BKT, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh -226001
5.	OKAN1902000005017659, RAM SINGH, SHUBHAM SINGH, RAMA KANTI YADAV	2/39, Rama Devi Chauraha Harjinder Nagar, Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh -208007	Rs. 16,37,820/- & 23/12/2024	House No 164 Safpur Second, Kanpur Nagar Arzi No 162 Majla Safpur, Kanpur Nagar, Uttar Pradesh -208011
6.	OKAN2012000005032789, Shailja Singh, Abhishek Kumar Singh	159 - Tiwaripur - 1 Adarsh Nagar Jajmau Kanpur, Tiwari Sweets Kanpur Nagar Uttar Pradesh - 208010	Rs. 20,74,784/- & 23/12/2024	House No. 159 situated at (Part of Arazi No. 159) Tiwaripur First, Adarsh Nagar, Wazidpur Alias Jajmau, Kanpur Nagar, Uttar Pradesh -208010
7.	KAN 1405 022185, Sunil Kumar Pandey, Asha Pandey	H.No.- 505, W-2 Basant Vihar Naubasta Behind - Naubasta Thana, Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh -208027	Rs. 6,66,880/- & 23/12/2024	House No 29-A built on Plot No 29-A situated at Part of Arazi No. 67, Situated at Gram/ Mohalla- Faizullaganj, Ward - Faizullaganj, Pargana, Tehsil & District Lucknow Uttar Pradesh -226021
8.	OLKW2306000005064273, Fagulai Alias Ashutosh, Rita Bharati	Plot No. 14 Ram Nagar Naubasta Khurd Madyaon Near Ram Leela Maidan Lucknow Uttar Pradesh - 226024	Rs. 8,97,980/- & 23/12/2024	Khasra No. 201/2, Situated At Vill- Rasoolpur Kayasath, Pargana- Mahona, Tehsil - BKT Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh -226021
9.	OADR2108000005038631, RAM BAKSH, GEETA, TARA DEVI	Plot No. 10 Krishna Lok Colony Fajjullaganj - Nirala Nagar, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh -226017	Rs. 3,19,501/- & 23/12/2024	House Built on Residential Plot No.10, Minjuma of Khasra/ Gata No. 67, Situated at Gram/ Mohalla- Faizullaganj, Ward - Faizullaganj, Pargana, Tehsil & District Lucknow Uttar Pradesh -226020

PLACE: GURGAON, DATE: 28-12-2024 SHUBHAM HOUSING DEVELOPMENT FINANCE COMPANY LTD.

AUTHORIZED OFFICER,

Akhilesh pitches for ballot voting, says EVMs not trustworthy

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav has called for elections to be conducted using ballot papers, citing a lack of trust in electronic voting machines (EVMs).

The former Uttar Pradesh chief minister said this at a press conference at the SP headquarters here on Sunday, alongside Rahul Kumar Kamboj, an Indian-origin member of Parliament in Germany.

"Even a country like Germany conducts elections using ballot papers. But in India, elections are conducted with EVMs to serve vested interests," Yadav said.

Emphasising the need for elections that inspire confidence, he said, "No one trusts EVMs. Even the faces of those who win elections seem dejected as they too do not have faith in the system."

At the press conference, Kamboj highlighted the benefits of Germany's ballot-paper voting system. "In Germany, voting is still conducted using ballot papers. It is an important system because any discrepancies can be addressed with a recount," he explained.

Reflecting on his visit to Lucknow and his longstanding relationship with Yadav, Kamboj said, "My efforts are focused on fostering a collaboration between Indian-origin individuals and Germany, so that the qualities of both countries can come together. We aim to facilitate cultural exchanges and I invite everyone to participate in the upcoming cultural festivals in Germany. Visa issues will no longer be a hurdle," he said.

Kamboj also spoke of building a bridge between opportunities in Europe and their implementation in India, specifically in Uttar Pradesh. "If we can identify the opportunities available in Germany and Europe, and bring them to places like Lucknow, it will open new avenues. That is my mission," he added.

Welcoming Kamboj, Yadav expressed enthusiasm for strengthening ties. "Your visit has created an opportunity to deepen the relationship between our regions, which will benefit the people of this state and country," he said.

Highlighting the need for a stronger future for the next generation, Yadav said, "Our youngsters need better education, training and skills to secure good jobs. Building bridges between opportunities will open pathways to progress."



Lucknow: Samajwadi Party President Akhilesh Yadav felicitates Rahul Kumar Kamboj, Parliament Member of Frankfurt in Germany, during a press conference at party office, in Lucknow, Sunday.

'There is Shivling under CM Yogi's residence, should be excavated'

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday claimed that there is a Shivling beneath the official residence of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and that excavation should be conducted by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). He said that excavation by an expert agency like the ASI is necessary to discover the ancient relic. With the discovery of the Baoli (stepwell) and koop (well) in Sambhal, excavation for temples has dominated the political agenda of the state for over a month. "It's my definite information that there is a Shivling beneath the official residence of the Chief Minister at Kalidas Marg and excavation should be conducted by the ASI to recover the same," the SP chief said.

Sharing a personal anecdote, Yadav recounted his government trip to Germany. "I

remember visiting Frankfurt and deciding to travel to Hannover by road. The roads in Germany are among the best and that inspired me to replicate them in Uttar Pradesh. Today, when people drive on the Agra-Lucknow

Expressway, they feel that it is one of the best roads in the world," he said. Yadav reiterated his commitment to creating opportunities for the younger generation while strengthening ties between India and Germany.

fake news. It propagates lies, files false cases against opponents and always conspires to defame the Samajwadi Party leadership. The BJP government has weakened the constitutional institutions, and it is on the path of dictatorship," he claimed. The SP chief also said that the BJP has never worked for the poor people and farmers. "It took decisions for its capitalist friends and made them profits. The country's economy was destroyed by the decisions of the BJP government," he added. Inflation and unemployment have reached their peak. The poor did not benefit from the decision of demonetisation. Where did the black money go? Jobs and employment have ended. Today, the youth do not have jobs and employment," he said.

"The BJP is the originator of

the anti-drone system, first deployed during the consecration ceremony at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya this year, will also be deployed during the Maha Kumbh.

UP government earlier last week said a detailed security apparatus has been put in place to ensure the safety of every individual during the Sangam Snan (bathing at the confluence). The underwater drones, expected to provide round-the-clock surveillance, can function effectively in low-light conditions.

With the ability to operate at a depth of up to 100 meters, these drones are capable of providing accurate information under any circumstances, said a police officer. Inspector General of Police (Eastern Zone, Prayagraj) Rajeev Narayan Mishra launched a high-speed underwater drone recently. "This state-of-the-art underwater drone can dive up to 100 meters and transmit real-time activity reports to the Integrated Command and

Yogi condoles Acharya Kishore Kunal's demise

Lucknow (PNS): Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday condoled the demise of former IPS officer and the secretary of Patna's Mahavir Mandir Trust, Acharya Kishore Kunal.

Kunal died of cardiac arrest in Patna on Sunday, his family said. A 1972-batch Indian Police Service (IPS) officer, he was the chief of the Bihar State Board of Religious Trust (BSBRT) and the founder secretary of Patna's Mahavir Mandir Trust, which runs several hospitals in the state.

"The demise of Acharya Kishore Kunal ji, Secretary of Mahavir Mandir Trust, is extremely sad and an irreparable loss to the social and religious field. Humble tributes to him! I pray to Lord Ram to grant a place to the departed soul at his feet and provide strength to the bereaved family and well-wishers to bear this immense loss," Adityanath said in a post on X.

Meanwhile, Bihar's Minister of Rural Development Department, Shrawan Kumar said the demise of Acharya Kishore Kunal is an irreparable loss for the social and religious field. Kumar said that Acharya Kishore Kunal did many remarkable works while holding administrative post and later his interest grew towards religious works. "The establishment of schools and many hospitals are his unique contributions. He contributed the most for the upliftment and development of Mahavir Mandir of Patna and he adorned the post of Secretary of its Trust," Kumar added.



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday met President Droupadi Murmu at the Rashtrapati Bhavan and invited her to attend the upcoming Maha Kumbh. Held every 12 years, the Maha Kumbh will be organised in Prayagraj in Uttar Pradesh from January 13 to February 26. "Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath Ji met President Smt Droupadi Murmu at Rashtrapati Bhavan and invited her to attend the upcoming Maha Kumbh 2025," the president's office said in a post on X in Hindi, sharing a photograph of the meeting.

Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust to install three lifts in Ram temple premises

PTI ■ AYODHYA

In a bid to facilitate a smooth movement for the devotees, who may find it difficult to reach the first floor of Lord Ram temple in Ayodhya, the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust will be installing three lifts within the temple premises, an official said.

"We have told you on earlier occasions that the temple of Shri Ram Janmabhoomi is a three-storeyed one. Ram Lalla, who is present on the ground floor, is visited by lakhs of devotees on a daily basis. On the first floor, there will be the Lord's 'Darbar' (court), there

will be the family (of the Lord). There will be a floor above that as well in which there is a sanctum sanctorum. It is not yet decided what will be in that," Anil Mishra, a member of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, told reporters late Saturday evening.

Mishra said that people, who are going to see Ram 'Darbar', can go from the first floor using the stairs.

"For those people who want to go up, but cannot do it with the help of stairs, we have made arrangements for them to go to the temple from the 'Parkota' long back. The 'Parkota', which connects the corridors of the

temples, will be completed. Those who want to go up for darshan will go from behind the temple, arrangements are being made to install a lift there," Mishra said.

"When the 'Parkota' is built, a lift will be installed. The construction agency is making arrangements for installing the lifts. Two lifts will be installed. One lift of big size, which can be used by wheel chair-bound devotees. In this way, there will be a lift in the north direction from where the VIP entry is. A small lift will be installed for the prominent people and saints who come. In this way, arrangements for three lifts

are being made in the parks," he added. Mishra said 'Parkota' connects the corridors of the temple.

Reacting to the development, Prajwal Singh, who runs a hotel near Tulsi Udyan in Ayodhya, told PTI, "The step taken by the Ram Temple Trust to install lifts in order to help the elderly and the physically-challenged, who come from far and wide braving a host of adverse circumstance only to have the glimpse of their Ram Lalla, is indeed a welcome step. This will certainly prove to be a boon for the devotees from different walks of life."



A view of a luxury cottage at the 'Dome' city for pilgrims ahead of Mahakumbh at Sangam, in Prayagraj on Sunday

Drones to secure Maha Kumbh 2025: From 100m underwater to 120m in air

PTI ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The upcoming Maha Kumbh will feature unprecedented security measures with the deployment of drones capable of monitoring 100 metres underwater and 120 metres above ground, officials said.

More than 45 crore pilgrims are expected to participate in the grand gathering. In a first for Uttar Pradesh, underwater drones will be deployed in the Sangam area while tethered drones will make a debut in the skies during one of the largest religious congregations on the planet between January 13 and February 26, 2025.

The anti-drone system, first deployed during the consecration ceremony at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya this year, will also be deployed during the Maha Kumbh. UP government earlier last week said a detailed security apparatus has been put in place to ensure the safety of every individual during the Sangam Snan (bathing at the confluence). The underwater drones, expected to provide round-the-clock surveillance, can function effectively in low-light conditions.

With the ability to operate at a depth of up to 100 meters, these drones are capable of providing accurate information under any circumstances, said a police officer. Inspector General of Police (Eastern Zone, Prayagraj) Rajeev Narayan Mishra launched a high-speed underwater drone recently.

"This state-of-the-art underwater drone can dive up to 100 meters and transmit real-time activity reports to the Integrated Command and

Loknath Temple: A sacred destination for devotees

Mahakumbh Nagar (PNS): Prayagraj, one of the most ancient cities rooted in Sanatan culture and faith, is revered for its historical and spiritual significance. Known as 'Tirthraj', or the 'King of Pilgrimages', it is believed to hold supremacy over all other holy cities and pilgrimage sites. In the city's bustling Chowk market lies the famous Loknath locality, named after the sacred Baba Loknath, considered a 'pratiroop' (reflection) of Kashi's Baba Vishwanath. While the exact origin of the Loknath Mahadev temple remains a mystery, priests state that references to Baba Loknath can be found in the Rewa Khand of the Skanda Purana and the Shanti Parva of the Mahabharata. Devotees believe that offering prayers and seeking the blessings of Baba Loknath can help overcome worldly struggles. During the grand Maha

Kumbh 2025, to be organised under the leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, thousands of Lord Shiva's devotees are expected to gather at this sacred temple, seeking solace and divine blessings. While Loknath locality in Prayagraj is famous for its delectable food street offerings like rabri, malai, lassi, Hari ke samose, and the iconic Bharati Bhavan Library, the area derives its name from the revered Baba Loknath Mahadev. The temple of Baba Loknath is located just behind the Bharati Bhavan Library. Gauri Shankar Pandey, the priest whose family has been worshipping Baba Loknath for four generations, describes the deity as a Swayambhu (self-manifested) Shiva Linga. He cites the Rewa Khand of the Skanda Purana, which refers to Baba Loknath as: "Vamadeva Mahadev Deva Sureshwarah, Loknath

Control Center (ICCC). "It can be operated over an unlimited distance and provides precise information about any suspicious underwater activity or incident, enabling immediate action to be taken," he added. In addition, more than 700 boats will be on standby with PAC, NDRE, and SDRF personnel onboard to keep a watch on the waters. A large-scale deployment of remote-controlled life buoys has been introduced to enhance safety, the government said.

Pahi-Pahi Prananaath Kripakarah." Additionally, mentions of Baba Loknath can also be found in the Shanti Parva of the Mahabharata. Special worship is performed at the temple during the holy month of Sawan, Pradosh, and Shivratri. Devotees from Prayagraj and across India, especially those visiting the sacred Sangam, make it a point to seek the blessings from Baba Loknath.

According to Gauri Shankar Pandey, Matsyendranath, a revered figure of the Nath tradition, once spent the 'Chaturmas' period at this temple in ancient times. The temple houses ancient idols of Lord Loknath, his mount Nandi, Lord Ganesh, Goddess Parvati, and Sheshnag. Over time, local devotees have also installed idols of Goddess Durga, Lord Hanuman, and other deities in the temple complex.

"The anti-drone system uses radar to continuously scan the airspace for unidentified aerial objects," one officer said, requesting not to be identified. "If a potential threat is detected, high-resolution optical sensors assess the drone's nature and intent. Countermeasures like jamming radio frequencies can disrupt its navigation and render it inoperative," the person said. This is crucial, the officer added, as rogue drones could carry contraband, weapons, or surveillance equipment that

threaten public safety. Tethered drones, meanwhile, offer sustained monitoring without battery limitations due to their ground-connected power source. "Equipped with high-definition cameras, these drones provide live feeds to the ICCC in the Mela area. This helps officials monitor crowd flow, identify bottlenecks, and respond swiftly to emergencies," another officer told PTI. "Their range extends beyond the Mela area to other critical junctures such as railway sta-

tions, bus terminals, and the airport to manage potential crowding," the officer said. UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has emphasised the use of cutting-edge technology to ensure safety and operational efficiency.

"The CM wants the Maha Kumbh to set a new global standard for safety and security by integrating modern systems with the traditional essence of the event," the first officer noted. "Security risks for the congregation cannot be denied," he added. In addition to drones, AI-enabled cameras will analyse crowd movement, predict congestion, and enable real-time headcount. Facial recognition technology will further bolster security.

"AI systems act as technological eyes, helping authorities preemptively address challenges before they escalate," an officer said. "For instance, the tethered drones will not only provide real-time updates about the location of any unauthorised flying object or a drone in the air but also provide us with the location of its operator in terms of exact latitude and longitude," the officer told PTI on condition of anonymity.

Tethered drones — capable of reaching heights up to 120 metres — will provide aerial views to identify swelling crowds or areas requiring medical or security intervention. Held every 12 years, the Maha Kumbh is not just a spiritual event but a logistical challenge of unprecedented scale. "We're leaving nothing to chance. With over 40 crore visitors expected, even a minor lapse could have significant repercussions," the second officer emphasised.

Archaeological dept considers taking over Manhar Kheda Fort

Muzaffarnagar (PTI): The Uttar Pradesh Archaeological Department is reviewing a proposal to take over the historic Manhar Kheda Fort in Shali district's Jalalabad on the recommendations of its advisory committee, officials said on Sunday.

"The department had sought revenue documents from district authorities to proceed with the proposal. The relevant documents have been forwarded to the Archaeological Department," Shamli Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM)

Hamid Husain told PTI. "The Director of Uttar Pradesh Archaeological Department, Renu Dwivedi, recently sent a letter to the Shamli district administration requesting revenue documents related to the fort as part of the proposal to designate it as a national heritage site," he said. The fort, currently inhabited by several families, also houses the residence of Rashtriya Lok Dal's Thana Bhawan constituency MLA Ashraf Ali Khan. Demands for the fort to be declared a national heritage

site were spearheaded by activists from the Vishva Hindu Parishad, led by the district president Pradeep Singh Pundir. The activists had also submitted a memorandum to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath urging him to preserve the fort as a cultural and historical landmark. Later, the UP Archaeological Advisory Committee surveyed the fort. The department is now considering the fort's takeover, pending the submission and evaluation of revenue and ownership documents.

Minister: Youth look forward to 'Mann Ki Baat' programme

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Uttar Pradesh Minister of State (Independent Charge) for AYUSH Dr Dayashankar Mishra 'Dayalu' said not only Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) workers but the countrymen, especially the youth, eagerly wait for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Mann Ki Baat' programme. The minister listened to the programme along with his scores of supporters and party workers at the camp office located in Rajan Shahi Colony in Mahmoorganj here on Sunday.



UP Minister Dr Dayashankar Mishra 'Dayalu' listening to PM's 'Mann Ki Baat' programme at a booth in Varanasi on Sunday.

The BJP workers listened to 'Mann Ki Baat' programme broadcast on the last Sunday of every month and took a pledge to imbibe it. During his address, the PM wished people a Happy New Year. Apart from this, the PM also talked about the Constitution. In the 117th episode of 'Mann Ki Baat', Prime Minister Modi said that on January 26, 2025, our Constitution will complete 75 years of implementation and it is a matter of great pride for all of us as our Constitution is a guiding light for us. Speaking on Prayagraj Maha Kumbh, PM Modi said that the

specialty of Maha Kumbh is not only in its vastness but also in its diversity as crores of people gather together in this event and lakhs of saints, thousands of traditions, hundreds of sects, many akharas, everyone becomes a part of this event. There is no discrimination anywhere, no one is big, no one is small. Such a scene of unity in diversity will not be seen anywhere else in the world, the PM added. Apart from the UP Minister, regional BJP president Dilip

Patel listened to the PM with booth office-bearers and party workers at booth number 132 (Sundarpur), located in Ravidas Mandal of Varanasi city unit. District party president and MLC Hansraj Vishwakarma listened to 'Mann Ki Baat' programme with party office-bearers and party workers at his residence in Kanchanpur under Rohania assembly constituency. After the 'Mann Ki Baat' programme, five booth presidents of Kanchanpur were honoured

by garlanding them with shawls by the MLC. City BJP president Vidyasagar Rai listened to the PM at booth number 64 of Varanasi Cantt assembly and former MLA Jagdish Patel at booth number 327 (PM Jan Sampark Office, Jawahar Nagar). Regional media in charge Navratan Rathi listened to PM Modi's 'Mann Ki Baat' programme at booth number 327 of Jawahar Nagar and co-in-charge Santosh Solapurkar at booth number 257 of Bindu Madhav Ward.

2 burnt alive in accident

PTI ■ HAMIRPUR

Two people were burnt alive following a collision between two trucks in Hamirpur district, police said on Sunday.

The incident occurred around 8:30 pm on Saturday on National Highway 34 in the Sumerpur area, Circle Officer (CO) Rajesh Kamal said.

"Two trucks were involved in the accident. One truck caught fire following the collision, leading to the deaths of the driver and his assistant. Their identities are yet to be established," the officer told PTI. "The occupants of the other truck fled the scene and search is underway to locate them. We have not received any complaint in the matter yet. We are trying to contact the owners of both trucks," he added.

The police said a fire brigade was called to the site and rescue and relief measures were initiated. Some locals at the scene were reportedly seen capturing pictures and videos of the incident, they said.

One of the video clips of the incident which surfaced on social media allegedly shows the assistant attempting to open the truck door to escape, while his body was almost entirely engulfed in flames.

SSU presents project proposal of ₹262 cr to chief minister

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The Sampurnanand Sanskrit University (SSU) has presented a project proposal of ₹262 crore to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. The university administration has prepared a comprehensive action plan to connect ancient learning with modern technology and the project has been proposed to be completed in three phases. The project is an important step towards establishing ancient Sanskrit learning on the global platform and making the students technically competent. According to the proposal, in the first phase of the project, emphasis will be laid on improving research and teaching process. Under this, there is a plan to set up facilities like smart classrooms, computer labs, video conferencing, digi-

tal boards, projectors etc. These measures will help in making the education of students more advanced and effective. In the second phase, the renovation of buildings will be done. There is also a proposal to renovate the old buildings of the university, including preservation of these buildings of historical importance on priority basis. In the third phase, there is a proposal to develop sports grounds, auditoriums and indoor games to promote sports and cultural activities. This will give students an opportunity to participate in sports and other activities along with studies. Recently, during the scholarship distribution ceremony here, the CM had asked the university to submit a detailed action plan. Vice-Chancellor Prof Bihari Lal Sharma met the CM at latter's official residence in Lucknow a

few days ago and during the meeting, the SSU V-C informed the CM about the development plans and progress of the university. Prof Sharma said that work is being done on employment-oriented courses, research and innovation in education under the Online Sanskrit Training Centre in the university. Demanding smart classrooms and computer labs, he said connecting students with modern technology is the need of the hour. However, he added that due to lack of financial resources, many schemes like renovation of hostels, preservation of manuscripts and republication of rare texts have not been able to take concrete shape till now. The CM assured the V-C of all possible cooperation for the solution of these problems and development of the university.

Motorcyclist meets tragic end

Kanpur (PNS): A motorcyclist was killed after being run over by an unidentified speeding vehicle near Sonik Power House under Dahi police area of Unnao late on Saturday night. He was identified as Arpit (25) of Pitamber Nagar, Sadar Kotwali, Unnao. His

friend Shibu of Rajepur who was sitting behind him, also sustained injury in the incident. Police sent the injured to the district hospital by an ambulance and informed the kin of the deceased. After the incident, there was a huge jam of vehicles and residents on the

highway and the police had to toil hard for about one hour to clear it. The deceased was a bachelor and engaged in installing CCTV cameras. The incident took place when he was returning from his aunt's house in Naval village under Ajjain Kotwali police station area.

Char Dham Padyatra conducted

Varanasi (PNS): Char Dham Padyatra was completed on the occasion of Paush Krishna Chaturdashi under the aegis of Shri Lat Bhairav Kashi Yatra Mandal here on Sunday. The devotees started the journey from the premises of Lat Bhairav Temple in Kajjapura. They prayed for the fulfillment of their wishes by visiting the deities of all the four eras i.e. Badri Narayan of Satya Yuga, Rameshwaram of Treta, Dwarkadhish of Dwapar and

Jagannathpuri of Kalyuga. According to the Tirtha Prakaran of Skanda Purana, the participants said the welfare of the devotees is achieved by just visiting the four Dhams located in the four directions of the country. With the Ramnan Sankirtan, the devotees concluded the padyatra by visiting replicas of Badri Narayan located at Badrinarayan Ghat, Rameshwara located at Manmandir Ghat, Jagannathpuri located at Assi Ghat and

Dwarkadhish located at Shankuldihara Pokhara. Organisation president Kewal Kushwaha said every Sanatan Dharmi wishes to do Char Dham Yatra at least once in his/her life. Scores of devotees, including Shivam Agrahari, Govind Vishwakarma, Ashish Kushwaha, Utkarsh Kushwaha, Jai Prakash Rai, Ritesh Kushwaha, Anand Maurya, Markundi, Ravi Shankar, Pawan Gupta, Keshari Kumar Rai and others were present in the padyatra.

NCR releases timetable of unreserved trains

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

For the bathing festival of Maha Kumbh, North Central Railway (NCR) has released the timetable of unreserved trains. Most of the special trains will be run towards Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya route. These trains will have double zero in front of their numbers. Seven trains will be run on this route on Makar Sankranti snan. It will run from Prayagraj at

9:30 am, 12 noon, 3:30 pm, 6:00 pm and 7:30 pm. Apart from this, it will run from Chheoki station at 8:30 pm and from Prayagraj Junction at 9:30 pm. Similarly, the first train for Kanpur will depart at 5 am, the second at 4:05 pm, the third at 7:50 pm and the fourth at 9:30 pm. The first train from Prayagraj to Manikpur, Jhansi route will depart at 1:30 pm, the second train for Banda will leave from Chheoki station at 4:45 pm and the third train will

leave from Naini station to Chitrakoot Dham at 6 pm. Four trains will also run for Madhya Pradesh on Makar Sankranti. The train will leave from Prayagraj Junction for Katni at 10:40 am, second train at 8:15 pm, third train from Chheoki at 8:55 pm and fourth train from Naini station at 9 pm and will go to Satna station. NCR Senior Public Relations Officer (SPO) Amit Malviya said the schedule for non-stop unreserved trains on Paush

Purnima has also been released. On January 13 three trains will run for Kanpur, four for Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya, three on Manikpur-Banda route and three for Katni in Madhya Pradesh and one for Satna. **MAN FOUND DEAD:** A 32-year-old man was found dead under mysterious circumstances in an area under Bara police station area here. He went to sleep in the room after having dinner and did not

wake up in the morning. On getting information the police reached the spot and sent the body for postmortem examination. The exact cause behind his death will be known only after getting the autopsy report. Bholanath Kannaujia went to sleep in the room after having dinner at night. When he did not wake up in the morning, his family members found that he had stopped breathing. Police reached the spot and questioned the family members.

Kanpur Metro launches series of events to mark third anniversary



Poets being felicitated on the third anniversary of Kanpur Metro.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The third anniversary of Kanpur Metro's operations was celebrated with great joy and enthusiasm. To mark the occasion a poetry seminar, Kavyotsav, was held at Motijheel Metro Station, where both senior and young poets from the city captivated the audience with their performances. Students from the Government Girls' Inter College in Chunniganj also contributed by creating an artistic rangoli at Motijheel Station, offering their congratulations to Kanpur Metro and the city's residents. Since its inception, Kanpur Metro has covered a remarkable distance of about 23 lakh kilometres.

To celebrate the third anniversary of its operations, Kanpur Metro launched a series of events at Motijheel Metro Station. Students

from the Government Girls Inter College in Chunniganj welcomed Kanpur Metro with a vibrant rangoli display at Motijheel Station, ushering in the New Year. The students also enjoyed a Metro ride, during which they were educated about the facilities, features and operations of Kanpur Metro. On its third anniversary, passengers had the opportunity to experience the creativity of the city's senior poets at the poetry symposium Kavyotsav, organised in collaboration with V&S Company at Motijheel Metro Station. The event began with a Saraswati Vandana, "Namami Matu Sharde," performed by young poetess Shipra Gyanendra. The atmosphere was charged with energy when poet Omprakash Pathak Om, who also conducted the session, recited his muktak: "Hua Aaj Ke Divas Hi Metro Ka Aarambh, Yah

Aisi Uplabधि Hai Kyon Na Karen Hum Dambh." The audience responded with enthusiastic applause. Poet Lal Singh 'Prahar' moved the crowd with his poem dedicated to the sacrifice and valour of soldiers defending the nation's borders. Dinesh Neeraj charmed the listeners with his Bhojpur and Khadi Boli songs, particularly his rhythmic rendition of "Aye Ho Bedardi Kahiya Le Aiba..." Senior poet Jai Ram Singh Jai captivated the audience with his poignant pieces, "Saath Mein Pathhar Ke Rahne Ka Asar, Dil Bhi Pathhar Hone Lage Hain" and "Gao Ki Chaulalon Ne Batiana Chhod Diya, Isiliye Khushiyon Ne Muskana Chhoda Diya..." The attendees were deeply moved by his heartfelt verses. The poets expressed their gratitude to Kanpur Metro for organising this cultural event and offered their best wishes for the metro's future endeavours.

On this joyous occasion Managing Director Sushil Kumar extended his congratulations to the people of Kanpur. He said, "The support and cooperation of the city's residents are our greatest strength. Our goal is to provide Kanpur with a safe, accessible and convenient mode of public transport. As we enter the new year, we are excited to bring the dream of extending the metro from IIT to Kanpur Central to fruition. Wishing everyone a very happy third anniversary of Kanpur Metro's passenger services and we look forward to your continued cooperation in the future."

Auto drivers in Kashi warn of symbolic strike on Jan 6

Varanasi (PNS): The auto drivers have warned of symbolic strike on January 6 accusing the railway administration of 'illegal recovery' and 'corruption'.

They demanded a detailed investigation into the matter in which a dispute has come to light between the auto drivers and the railway administration over prepaid recovery. At a meeting held here on Sunday, the auto drivers urged the higher officials, including the Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) of Lucknow Division (Northern Railway) to take strict action against the culprits. Auto drivers said if prepaid receipts are not issued by January 1, then the auto drivers will go on a symbolic strike on January 6. The local railway administration will be fully responsible for any inconvenience caused to the upcoming Maha Kumbh passengers. President of Auto Rickshaw Drivers Union Bhagwan Singh, general secretary Devnandan Singh, Taxi Union chief Taj Mohammad, Sanjay Rai, Kailash Gupta, Subhash Singh, Akhilesh Yadav, Vinod Sonkar, Vikas Srivastava, Ratan Das, Rajkumar Raja, Vikas Srivastava and many other drivers participated in the meeting and expressed their views.

DM hears grievances of people

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

District Magistrate Rakesh Kumar Singh heard the grievances of people in Ghatampur tehsil on Saturday. He expressed displeasure over the lackadaisical attitude of the police and officials of the district administration for not disposing of complaints quickly. He took them to task and told them that the report of their work will be sent to the chief secretary and chief minister. He directed the SDM to organise Janata Darshan programme daily from 10 am and dispose of grievances of people quickly while ensuring proper conduct. He said in matters of land or personal dispute, the issue be resolved by calling both the parties. At the same time, the joint team of Revenue and Police departments should visit the spot and resolve the



DM Rakesh Kumar Singh hearing the grievances of people at Ghatampur tehsil

dispute in front of people of both the parties, he added. Ram Nares of Chandanpur of Ramsari Gram Panchayat informed the district magistrate that his son Lala Singh had earned wages for cutting the wood of the Forest department. On Lala Singh asking the contractor to pay his wages, the latter allegedly beat him up and hit him with a loader, injuring him. Lala Singh was admitted in the

LLR (Hallet) Hospital and not getting proper treatment there. The DM immediately contacted the additional district magistrate (ADM/City) and asked him to go to hospital to arrange for proper treatment of Lala Singh. He also directed the Kotwali in charge Dhananjay Kumar Pandey to initiate stern penal action against the guilty. Tehsildar Laxmi Narain Bajpai, naib tehsildar and others were also present.

Vocalist's performance captivates audience

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Noted vocalist Dr Shalini Ved Tripathi's captivating performance enthralled the audience at the ghazal evening show 'Aghaaz' organised at the United Public School auditorium here on Saturday. Organised under the aegis of Shalini's School of Cultural Society (SSCS), she sung a number of ghazals of renowned poets in her melodious voice which left the audience spell-bound. The programme began with a presentation by the budding artiste Mohit Malhotra in 'Ye Gazaar Si Nigahen, Ye Shabab Ye



Vocalist Dr Shalini Ved Tripathi performing in a ghazal evening programme.

Adaiyen' after which Shalini took over the reins and sung a series of

emotional and inspiring ghazals. Followed by a couplet of Hasrat Jaipuri, the Sufi ghazal 'Deewana Ban, Deewana Kar' penned by Jagdish Prakash presented by her captivated the people present. Thereafter, Shaqueel Badauni's 'Mere Hamnaqas, Mere Hamnaqas' and Jagdish Prakash's 'Ishaq Bas Ho Gaya Dhekhe Dhekhe' filled the atmosphere with emotional and romantic fervour. Local poet Farooq Jaisi's 'Hasti Ko Hami Raakh Banaye Hue Hai' and Ludhyanvi's 'Tum Mujhe

Bhool Bhi Jao' presented by her mesmerised the audience. Dr Nishant Singh accompanied her on tabla with Jeeshan Khan on Sarangi, Raj Kumar Singh on harmonium, Rishiraj on synthesizer and Roshan on pad. Earlier, local poet Farooq Jaisi explained the intricacies of ghazal and its different meanings. Rupina Mishra anchored the programme. The other dignitaries and music lovers present were Dr Indra Mohan Rohatgi, Manisha Singh, Dr Rita Verma, Dr Ved Prakash Tripathi, Pradip Srivastava, Dr Renu Nigam and Ayush Dwivedi.

Literature incomplete without women: Dr Dwivedi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The three-day All India Women's Literature Conference and International Seminar, jointly organised by Hindi Department, Banaras Hindu University (BHU) and Yugdarshini Educational and Charitable Trust (Vijayapur, Karnataka) concluded at Swatantrata Bhavan, BHU here on Saturday. The main objective of this conference was to highlight the creative contribution of women, their social awareness and their important role in literature. In the closing session, prizes were distributed. Prof Maya Shankar Pandey (Dean, Faculty of Arts), Prof Vashisht Dwivedi (Head, Hindi Department) and founder of Yugdarshini

Educational and Charitable Trust Dr Saraswati Chimmalgi were present as the chief guests. Special guests were Siddappa Aijeri, Suda Ravinad, Diwali Agarwal, Prof Shraddha Singh, Dr Ashok Kumar Jyoti and Dr Neelam Kumari. The session started with lighting of lamps and offering flowers to the statue of Mahamana Pt Madan Mohan Malaviya. Thereafter, the university's Kulgeet was sung. Yugdarshini Marvelous Award was given to Prof Shraddha Singh, Neelam Singh, Lt Seema Sharma and Dr Rajesh Srivastava. The results of the Desh Bhakti Geet Competition were announced, in which the team of the Faculty of Music and Performing Arts secured the first position and the team of



discussed discrimination against women with the example of Indian women and British literature through 'Indian knowledge tradition and ancient history'. Dr Vashisht Dwivedi said, "Literature is incomplete without women and only strong literature brings about change in society." Dr Saraswati Chimmalgi said, "The basic foundation of women empowerment is education and literature, which gives a new dimension to their thoughts." Earlier, in the first session of the third day, the second technical session was organised in which research papers were presented by various participants. Prof Shashikala Tripathi, (former Acharya, Hindi Department, Vasant College for Women, BHU) was the chief guest in the session. Prof Sumita Chatterjee (Head, Department of Bengali, BHU) and Dr Nalini Singh (Mirzapur) were special speakers. Dr Kajju Kumari Sao (Asansol), Dr

discussed discrimination against women with the example of Indian women and British literature through 'Indian knowledge tradition and ancient history'. Dr Vashisht Dwivedi said, "Literature is incomplete without women and only strong literature brings about change in society." Dr Saraswati Chimmalgi said, "The basic foundation of women empowerment is education and literature, which gives a new dimension to their thoughts." Earlier, in the first session of the third day, the second technical session was organised in which research papers were presented by various participants. Prof Shashikala Tripathi, (former Acharya, Hindi Department, Vasant College for Women, BHU) was the chief guest in the session. Prof Sumita Chatterjee (Head, Department of Bengali, BHU) and Dr Nalini Singh (Mirzapur) were special speakers. Dr Kajju Kumari Sao (Asansol), Dr

Pankaj Kumar, Dr Ekadashi Jaitwar, Dr Priya Kumari, Dr Devi Prasad Tiwari and Preeti Singh Patel presented their research papers as participants. The function was conducted by Amit Kumar and vote of thanks was proposed by Pooja Singh. Prof Shashikala Tripathi said "Literature is the basis of women empowerment, which not only gives recognition to the voice of women but also gives a new direction to the society." Prof Sumita Chatterjee said, "The role of women in literature is a living proof of their struggle and achievements. Their writing enriches every aspect of society." Dr Nalini Singh said, "Women's writing is a powerful medium, which establishes a dialogue between history and the present and gives a new vision to the

future." In the second session, Hindi Kavyadhara was organised, in which people expressed their feelings through various poems. Prof Abha Gupta Thakur (Hindi Department, BHU) was the chief guest while Prof Rachna Sharma presided over the session and Karuna Jha and Dr Shailaja Singh were special guests. Dr Sapna Bhushan, Nirmala B, Dr Supriya Singh, Dr Priyanka Pathak, Dr Asmita Tiwari, Dr Preeti Vishwakarma, Nivedita Pathak, Rishita, Khushi Mishra, Akanksha Mishra, Vandana, Sonali, Vaibhav Lakshmi, Vidhyotama Mishra and Suchitra Tripathi recited their poems. The session was conducted by Priyanshi Tiwari and Dr Preeti Vishwakarma. The vote of thanks was proposed by Shikha Yadav.

Constitution has stood the test of time, remains guiding light for us: PM Modi in Mann ki Baat

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the Constitution has stood every test of time, lauding it as "our guiding light". Speaking in his monthly Mann ki Baat broadcast, Modi noted that the next Republic Day will mark the 75th anniversary of the implementation of the Constitution. "It is a matter of immense pride for all of us. The Constitution which its makers gave to us has stood every test of time. It is our guiding light, our guide," he said. Modi said he reached this position in life because of the country's guiding document. Modi also pointed out that the next Republic Day will mark the 75th anniversary of the implementation of the Constitution. He asked people to visit the website constitution75.Com which, he said, has been launched to link citizens with the constitutional heritage and legacy. They can read the Constitution in different languages, ask questions and upload their videos leading to its preamble, he said. His government, Modi said, has launched yearlong activities



since the Constitution Day on November 26. Opposition parties, especially the Congress, have accused his government of weakening the Constitution, a charge vehemently denied by the ruling BJP. Modi has constantly highlighted his government's efforts to strengthen constitutional values and spirit and has, in turn, accused the main opposition Congress of subverting the country's guiding document whenever it was in power. Speaking further in Mann ki Baat Modi described the upcoming 'Maha Kumbh' as the 'mahakumbh of unity' as he asked people to return from

the grand religious congregation with the resolve to banish hate and division from the society. "Mahakumbh's speciality lies not just in its vastness but also in its diversity," he said. It is a matter of pride for the countrymen, he said, and asserted that the Constitution has stood every test of time. "It is our guiding light," he said, adding that he reached this position in his life due to the Constitution. Modi also remembered four icons of Indian cinema Raj Kapoor, Mohammed Rafi, Akkineni Nageswara Rao and Tapan Sinha in their birth centenary year in his last Mann Ki Baat address of 2024.

PM Modi lauds Bastar Olympics, hails upcoming WAVES Summit

Prime Minister Narendra Modi lauded the recently concluded Bastar Olympics 2024, saying the event has given a platform for youngsters to hone their talent and build a new Bharat. The Bastar Olympics 2024, held in the eponymous district, was organised by the Chhattisgarh government last month. The multi-sport event was aimed at spotting local talents, integrating tribal youths of Naxal-hit Bastar into the mainstream and enhancing relations between people and administration. Referring to the Bastar Olympics in his monthly 'Mann ki Baat' broadcast, Modi said it was a unique event and a symbol that a change was taking place in the country. "Do you know that a unique Olympic has started in our Bastar! Yes, a new revolution is coming into being in Bastar through the first Bastar Olympics. Friends, the Bastar Olympics is not just a sports event. It is a platform where development and

sports are merging together, where our youth are honing their talent and building a new Bharat," he said. Modi said it was a matter of "great joy" for him that the dream of the Bastar Olympics had come true. The prime minister also referred to several individual prize winners in the sporting event. India will host the World Audio Visual Entertainment Summit (WAVES) for the first time in February next year which will be a global platform for its creative talents, fostering collaborations and showcasing the country's potential as a hub for world-class content creation. Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke extensively about the WAVES Summit in his monthly 'Mann ki Baat' Radio address on Sunday. Comparing the WAVES to global events like the World Economic Forum in Davos, Modi said the leaders from the media and entertainment industry as well as creative minds from across the globe will gather.

Home Ministry's 2024 highlights: New criminal laws, CAA rollout and violence reduction efforts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



Replacing the century-old Criminal laws with a new set of legislations for introducing a modern and technology-driven criminal justice system, rolling out the controversial Citizenship (Amendment) Act and fire-fighting to check unabated violence in Manipur kept the Union home ministry busy in 2024. Assisting the Election Commission in holding the assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir without major incidents and bringing down the violence in Naxal-affected states and northeastern region are the other key highlights of the country's crucial ministry. While the population enumeration exercise Census continues to be on hold for past four years as no decision has been taken by the ministry as to when it will be carried out, the ministry created five year districts in Ladakh and renamed Port Blair in Andaman and Nicobar Islands as Sri Vijaya Puram during the year. The three new criminal laws - Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam - replaced the colonial-era Indian Penal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Indian Evidence Act of 1872

respectively. The new laws came into effect from July 1. Home Minister Amit Shah, who piloted the legislations, said the new laws would give priority to providing justice, unlike the colonial-era laws that gave primacy to penal action. "These laws are made by Indians, for Indians and by an Indian Parliament and marks the end of colonial criminal justice laws," he said. Shah said the laws were not just about changing the nomenclature but bringing about a complete overhaul. "Soul, body and spirit of the new laws are Indian," he said. The new laws brought in a modern justice system, incorporating provisions such as Zero FIR, online registration of police complaints, summonses through electronic modes such as SMS and mandatory videography of crime scenes for all heinous crimes. According to home ministry officials, the new laws have

tried to address some of the current social realities and crimes and are going to provide a mechanism to effectively deal with these, keeping in view the ideals enshrined in the Constitution. The CAA, which was enacted in December 2019 for granting Indian nationality to persecuted Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist, Parsi and Christian migrants from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan who came to India on or before December 31, 2014, was rolled out in March and the first set of 14 people were granted Indian citizenship under the law in May. After the enactment in 2019, the CAA got the president's assent a few days later but the rules under which the Indian citizenship were supposed to be granted were issued only on March 11 after over a delay of four years. The passing of the CAA in 2019 sparked protests in different parts of the country with agitators terming it "discriminatory".

Tigress Zeenat eludes sedation in West Bengal's Bankura district, operation to resume

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Tigress Zeenat, who strayed from Odisha's Simlipal forest to Bankura in West Bengal, could not be sedated despite tranquilisers having been used on it early Sunday morning, and the operation will be resumed after veterinarians give the go ahead, an official said. Chief Wildlife Warden, West Bengal, Debal Roy said the tigress is at the same place as Saturday night in Bankura district's Gopalpur forest and has been encircled with double netting. The perimeter of the netting has been shortened with the tigress inside the netted area, he said. "The tigress was tranquilised at 1.20 am today, but it could not be sedated after repeated doses," Roy told PTI. He said that since there is an upper limit to the amount of



dosage to be applied on the animal in tranquiliser shots, the operation to sedate it was abandoned temporarily at 4.30 am. "The tigress is in a very excited state and that is why it is not getting sedated," he said. Roy said that Zeenat has been given some rest at present. Stating that there are three veterinarians present at the site, he said, "After the vets examine the situation, the tranquilisation efforts to

sedate the tigress will be resumed. Zeenat was brought to Odisha's Simlipal from Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) in Maharashtra last month with the goal of introducing a new gene pool to the tiger population. Zeenat, who strayed from Simlipal, travelled about 15 km to seek refuge in a forest in Manbazar block on December 27 from Bandwan where she

was holed up between December 24 and 26. She has been in West Bengal for nearly a week after crossing over from Jharkhand. The tigress has covered over 120 km, roaming the forests at the tri-junction of West Bengal, Jharkhand, and Odisha, in search of new territory after leaving Simlipal. She has shown no signs of heading back to Simlipal Tiger Reserve so far, senior Forest department officials said. The big cat has so far not touched the baits kept in trap-door cages but devoured domestic goats that strayed into the forests. She has been travelling shorter distances over the last few days, the officials said. Drones have been deployed to monitor her movements but heavy forests are affecting the surveillance, Forest department officials said.

Haryana scraps bonus marks based on socioeconomic status

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHANDIGARH

The Haryana Cabinet has approved amendments in the Common Eligibility Test policy to remove the grant of five per cent bonus marks to certain candidates based on socioeconomic criteria for government jobs in Group C and D posts. The government decision follows a May 31 order by the high court on the matter. The approval was given in a meeting chaired by Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Saturday, an official statement said. "As per the amendments, the 5 per cent weightage for social economic criteria provided for the bona fide residents of Haryana has been removed. The said

amendments have been done as per the directions of the Punjab and Haryana High Court," said the statement. The amended policy will be called Policy for Recruitment to Group C and D posts through Common Eligibility Test, (Amendment) Rule, 2024 shall apply to direct recruitment to Group C posts including the posts of police service, prisons and home guards etc, excluding the teaching posts, ex-Agniveer and Group D posts for which minimum educational qualification is below matriculation...," said the statement. "Furthermore, after the amendment, now the maximum number of eligible candidates to appear for the skill and/or written examination shall be ten times the total number of posts advertised by the Commission. Earlier, the

Commission against the Punjab and Haryana High Court's May 31 order. "The Policy for Recruitment to Group C and D posts through Common Eligibility Test, (Amendment) Rule, 2024 shall apply to direct recruitment to Group C posts including the posts of police service, prisons and home guards etc, excluding the teaching posts, ex-Agniveer and Group D posts for which minimum educational qualification is below matriculation...," said the statement. "Furthermore, after the amendment, now the maximum number of eligible candidates to appear for the skill and/or written examination shall be ten times the total number of posts advertised by the Commission. Earlier, the

candidates equal to four times the number of posts advertised were eligible to appear," the statement said. On May 5, 2022, the state government introduced Common Eligibility Test (CET) for Group C and D posts. In another decision, the cabinet approved the decision to bring an ordinance for further amending the Haryana Contractual Employees (Security of Service) Act, 2024. Under this amendment, the phrase "in a calendar year" will be replaced with "during a period of one year of contractual service." This amendment is being introduced to address request raised by contractual employees regarding the calculation of their service days, the statement said.

Over six Lakh apply for PM's internship scheme with 1.27 Lakh opportunities



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Sunday said about 6.21 lakh applications have been received for 1.27 lakh opportunities under the Prime Minister's Internship Scheme and the selection process is continuing. The scheme, announced in the 2024 Union Budget, aims to provide internship opportunities to 1 crore youth in top-500 companies over five years. A pilot project of the scheme, started on October 3, aims to provide 1.25 lakh internship opportunities during 2024-25. In a release on Sunday, the corporate affairs ministry said approximately 6.21 lakh applications have been received against 1.27 lakh internship opportunities on the internship scheme

portal. About 4.87 lakh individuals have completed their KYC and registered themselves on the portal, the release said. Under the scheme, interns will be provided a monthly financial assistance of Rs 5,000 for 12 months and a one-time grant of Rs 6,000. While mentioning about various initiatives taken this year, the ministry said the framework governing cost record and audit will be amended after considering stakeholders' comments and recommendations of the ministry-appointed committee. From financial year 2023-24, the ministry has issued regular advisories to companies on adhering to the prescribed timelines for filing cost audit reports. "This initiative has led to a 14 per cent increase in the timely submission of cost audit reports during 2023-24 compared to the previous year," the release added.

ISRO set to launch historic SpaDEx mission, demonstrating space docking capability

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

ISRO is set to launch two satellites on Monday night from the Sriharikota spaceport to demonstrate docking and undocking of spacecraft in orbit, which will make India the fourth country in the world to achieve the feat. The Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) warhorse rocket Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) will place the two satellites - SDX01 and SDX02 - in a 476-km circular orbit and attempt the Space Docking Experiment (SpaDEx) in the first week of January, the space agency officials said. "This mission will mark India's entry into the

exclusive league of nations capable of mastering space docking," Union Science and Technology Minister Jitendra Singh said. The SpaDEx mission is expected to be a stepping stone for India's future endeavours in space exploration which include getting rocks and soil from the moon on Earth, the proposed Bharatiya Antariksha Station and landing an astronaut on the lunar surface. Only the US, Russia and China have mastered space docking technologies. "The primary objective of the SpaDEx mission is to develop and demonstrate the technology needed for

rendezvous, docking, and undocking of two small spacecraft (SDX01, which is the Chaser, and SDX02, the Target) in a low-Earth circular orbit," an ISRO official said. The secondary objective of the mission includes demonstration of the transfer of electric power between the docked spacecraft, which is essential for future applications such as in-space robotics; composite spacecraft control and payload operations after undocking. "This capability is vital for India's lunar and interplanetary missions. Docking technology enables multi-launch missions and

supports future human spaceflight," Singh said. After the demonstration of docking and undocking experiments, the two satellites will continue to orbit the Earth for standalone missions for two years. The SDX01 satellite is equipped with a High Resolution Camera (HRC) and SDX02 has two payloads - Miniature Multispectral (MMX) payload and Radiation Monitor (RadMon). These payloads will provide high-resolution images, natural resource monitoring, vegetation studies and on-orbit radiation environment measurements which have numerous applications, ISRO said.

Jammu-Srinagar highway reopens after day-long closure

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

The 270-km Jammu-Srinagar highway was on Sunday reopened for vehicular traffic after a day-long closure due to heavy snowfall, allowing stranded vehicles to proceed to their respective destinations, officials said. However, several other important inter-district routes, including the Mughal Road, Sinthan Pass, Sonamarg-Kargil inter-UT road, and Baderwah-Chamba inter-state road, remained closed for vehicular traffic due to heavy snowfall. "The highway has been reopened today following the clearance of snow accumulated on various stretches of the road," a traffic official said. The stranded vehicles along the highway are being cleared, he added. "Passenger traffic is plying on the highway. Commuters are advised to follow lane discipline, as overtaking may cause congestion," J-K Traffic Police said in an advisory. It also advised commuters to drive cautiously, as the road is slippery between Banihal and Qazigund. The Mughal Road, which serves as an alternative link to the Kashmir Valley from Jammu region's Poonch district, remained shut due to snow accumulation, officials said. Similarly, the Sinthan Pass in Kishtwar has been closed for vehicular traffic due to heavy snowfall.

Astrophysicist Priyamvada Natarajan on the night sky's power to inspire curiosity

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The night sky stokes human curiosity, inspires awe, and gives you the permission to dream and explore what lies beyond, astrophysicist Priyamvada Natarajan, known for her groundbreaking work on black holes, said. Natarajan, a professor of astronomy and physics at Yale University, US, has published pioneering research on black holes and dark matter - considered the 'enigmas' of the universe. "The spirit of curiosity is fundamentally human, it's part of our DNA, to make sense of the cosmos and our place in it - to understand the regularity of cosmic events, such as what causes day and night, seasons - to go beyond the wonder and fascination, and seek an explanation. As human beings, we've always



been preoccupied with the cosmos and fascinated by it," Natarajan told PTI in an interview earlier this month at Ashoka University, Haryana. She was part of a team inaugurating the Ashoka-ZEISS Core Imaging Facility, equipped with microscopes of advanced resolution to view a cell and its internal

structure. She is also on the university's Science Advisory Council. "When you look at the night sky, you see something that's much bigger than yourself, there's an inevitable sense of awe - the sky is for everyone, and it gives us the permission to dream and soar," Natarajan said. A black hole is usually considered to form

in the 'dying' stage of a star's life. Made of highly compact matter, a black hole possesses a gravity so intense that even light cannot escape. However, in 2005-06, Natarajan proposed for the first time in theory that there must be another way for black holes to form, bypassing the formation of a star first, evidence in support of which she and her colleagues at Yale would go on to publish in Nature Astronomy and The Astrophysical Journal Letters in December 2023. In a 2017 paper, Natarajan's team predicted what the James Webb Space Telescope might detect, much before its launch in December 2021 by the US space agency NASA. Looking at images of the early universe, the team found a galaxy 'UHZ1' harbouring an overmassive

black hole at its centre, which possessed all the properties as predicted - it was a few million times the mass of the Sun, heavier than expected and firmly in its place already in the very young universe. "And so, if the first black hole is just a few times the mass of the Sun, and the only way to form these seeds was from the explosion of the first stars as per the traditional path very early in the universe, then there's very little time in the universe to grow to a billion solar masses. How can you grow that much, so fast? There has to be a resolution," Natarajan, recounting the time she came up with the idea, said. "That was what motivated us to ask, 'Ok, is there has to be another way to make a black hole whose birth mass, or the mass of a black hole when it's born, is not a few times the

mass of the Sun, but actually 10,000 or even 100,000 times the mass of the Sun, so that then you don't have to grow that much to account for what is seen already," she said. The idea is referred to as 'direct collapse.' The work brought Natarajan multiple accolades, including being featured on TIME's 100 Influential People of the Year list - "unusual" for a scientist. She was also elected a fellow to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. "A lot of the creative pursuits, such as poetry, music, astronomy, don't generate monetisable returns in the short-term, per se. But that does not make them any less valuable," she said. Natarajan is also noted for her philosophy on mapping dark matter in clusters of about a thousand galaxies, held together by gravity.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Shifting stance

Trump's support for H-1B visas marks a major shift, offering relief to US companies and Indian tech workers alike

Politicians seldom walk their talk and do not mind taking u-turns even if it means reversing their own previous positions. Donald Trump the US President elect is the latest example. Trump has expressed his support for the H-1B visa program, which facilitates the entry of skilled foreign workers into the United States. This development comes as a marked departure from his earlier stance during his first presidential term, where he labeled the program 'very bad' and 'unfair' to American workers. Trump's latest remarks not only align him with tech magnate Elon Musk but also have significant implications for Indian professionals and US companies. The controversy surrounding the H-1B program reignited when Musk took to social media to vociferously defend the program against criticisms from immigration hardliners. Musk's electric vehicle company, Tesla, alone secured 724 H-1B visas this year, underscoring his vested interest in maintaining the program. Trump echoed Musk's sentiments in an interview, stating, "I've always liked the visas. I have used it many times. It's a great program."



This admission not only signals a softening of his earlier rhetoric but also a pragmatic acknowledgment of the program's benefits to the US economy. Indian IT professionals stand to benefit immensely from Trump's change in stance. Historically, Indians have been the largest beneficiaries of the H-1B visa program, occupying a lion's share of the annual quota. Trump's endorsement could reassure prospective applicants and existing visa holders about the continuity of the program, which has often been a lifeline for skilled workers seeking opportunities in the United States. The move

also counters recent fears of stringent immigration policies that could hinder their aspirations. The US technology sector, which has long relied on the H-1B visa program to address skill shortages, is likely to welcome Trump's shift. Companies like Google, Microsoft, and Tesla have consistently advocated for the continuation of the program, citing a lack of homegrown talent to meet the industry's demands. Musk's pointed critique of American culture's celebration of mediocrity over excellence highlights the role of foreign talent in driving innovation and maintaining the US's competitive edge globally. Trump's stance, however, has drawn ire from far-right activists and prominent figures within his own party. Critics, including Steve Bannon and Nikki Haley, argue that prioritising foreign workers undermines American labour and exacerbates domestic unemployment. Trump's endorsement of the H-1B visa program reflects a pragmatic shift rather than an ideological reversal. Recognising the indispensable role of skilled immigrants in the US economy, his administration's move signals a commitment to fostering economic growth and maintaining technological leadership. For Indian professionals, it offers renewed hope, and for US tech companies, it ensures access to the global talent pool they rely on to innovate and thrive.

PICTALK



An elderly woman makes kites for the upcoming Makar Sankranti kite festival, in Hyderabad

The paradox of happiness: Why we fear what we seek



ASHA IYER KUMAR

As much as we strive for everlasting joy, we often find ourselves wary of its fleeting nature, hesitating to fully embrace it

If there is one thing that we relentlessly pursue in life—the only thing we put all our pennies on in this big worldly gamble—it is happiness. The ultimate goal that we all crave is everlasting bliss. What charades and circuses we play to attain the state of eternal joy! While this rigmarole governs our everyday thoughts and actions, another element sneaks in as soon as we reach our dream: Fear—the fear of losing the happiness that we know is ephemeral. Come to think of it, much as we covet it, happiness frightens us. It also makes us wary of revealing our joys, and we often hide good things to avoid getting jinxed. Why do we fear happiness? Why do we think every moment of joy comes at a price? The fear of happiness is a paradox embedded in the human psyche. It's almost as if we've been conditioned to believe that joy is too fragile to last, that it carries an expiry date we cannot predict. This belief turns happiness into a double-edged sword: on one side, it is the elation we strive for; on the other, it is the dread of its inevitable end.



Where does this fear originate? Perhaps it stems from a deep-seated awareness of life's impermanence. We've all seen moments of bliss snatched away by unexpected turns of fate. A child's innocent laughter may be followed by tears, a promotion at work may bring unforeseen stress, and a long-anticipated celebration may be marred by tragedy. These experiences condition us to approach happiness with caution, to brace ourselves for the fall even as we revel in the peak. This trepidation finds cultural expressions, too. Superstitions like "knock on wood" or "touch iron" are more than quaint habits; they are safeguards against the perceived fragility of joy. Similarly, the kaala teeka or talisman traditions reflect a universal belief that happiness attracts envy and, by extension,

misfortune. We place such conditions maybe because happiness, unlike sorrow, feels fleeting and illusory. Pain lingers and forces us to adapt, but happiness feels transient, like a butterfly—beautiful, delicate, and always ready to flit away. Is it fair to treat happiness as a precarious treasure? By fearing it, do we not dilute its essence and sabotage our ability to experience it fully? Modern life has made this paradox even more pronounced. With social media encouraging us to share our highs, celebrating joy has become a public event. On one hand, we feel validated by likes and comments; on the other, the exposure amplifies our unease. Will the digital applause somehow disrupt the balance of our good fortune? These questions linger, even as we hit the "share" button with a smile. But perhaps the greater fear is not external—it's internal. Happiness asks us to be present, to be vulnerable, and to believe that we deserve good things. For many, this is a daunting proposition. When shaped by struggles or conditioned to expect the worst, joy feels for-

eign, even undesired. The fear of losing it becomes a defence mechanism, a way of preparing ourselves for the inevitable end of happy times. It is important to recognise that happiness, like all emotions, is inherently fleeting. Accepting its impermanence allows us to savour it without clinging or dreading its end. Happiness deserves the same grace. Vulnerability is the price of true happiness, and the courage to embrace it, however briefly, is what makes life rich. Sharing our joy—whether with loved ones or the world—is not an invitation to misfortune but an act of trust in the abundance of good things. Let's challenge the belief that happiness comes at a cost. Life's highs and lows are inevitable, but they are not always sequential. A moment of joy does not necessitate a subsequent sorrow. Joy, in its purest form, deserves to be embraced—without caution, without apology, and most importantly, without fear. It's all easier said than done, I admit. (The author is a columnist and writing coach based in Dubai. Views are personal)

The statesman and a gentleman



V K BAHUGUNA

Dr Singh's journey from a humble student to a distinguished statesman is a testament to perseverance, intellect and humility

As the country mourns the death of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh who breathed his last on 26th December 2024 at the age of 92. The world leaders condone the death of a man who was a common man's Prime Minister and a golden boy of destiny. He ruled the nation for 10 years after having successfully dealt with the economic crisis of 1991 when the then Prime Minister Narsimha Rao appointed him Finance Minister and the rest is history of dismantling the license raj and ushering in economic liberalization of the economy and the nation is grateful to him and the Narsimha Rao for opening up the economy of caged lion that is India the benefits of which the nation is reaping today. I write this article when the country's politics is witnessing high conflicts and drama and the entire gamut of politicians coming from a background which is miles away from Dr Manmohan Singh's academic background as most of the time the politicians are jostling with each other in the quest for power, position and money. The fractured polity of India is the creation of politics of power and money which also seamlessly spreads across sectors of society and administration. Dr Manmohan Singh was born in Pakistan and came to India as a poor student but due to the sheer talent, perseverance and hard work obtained a scholarship and attained high educational qualifications as an economist from the University of Cambridge and Oxford. As an academician and economist, he served the nation with dignity and aplomb as an officer and bureaucrat in the Planning Commission, Chief Economic Advisor and Secretary in the Ministry of Environment, Governor of the Reserve Bank of India, Chairman of the University Grant Commission and finally as politician member of Rajya Sabha for more than 30 years and Prime Minister for 10 years. The luck favours the brave as the saying goes and he had plenty of it. No Prime Minister in the past nor the near distant future is going to have such a background



and rich profile as Dr Manmohan Singh has and with this, he has etched his name in the history of India. As such no academician or economist in India could hope to achieve the post of Prime Minister of India considering our varied polity and its nature. Most of the professionals end up on bureaucratic posts and some may occupy the constitutional position of President or Vice-President of India or Governors. Sonia Gandhi will also be remembered for choosing him as Prime Minister of India after she was elected as leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party in the year 2004 and refused to hold the post considering opposition to her foreign origin. The Indian masses specially educated elite and young brains aspiring to be great leaders in many fields including politics must take several lessons from the life of Dr Manmohan Singh. The first, he was talented and humble but more than that he had a very high emotional intelligence. These days lot of people in diverse fields end up failing even though they have high calibre, capability, knowledge and intelligence but lack emotional intelligence. It is the emotional intelligence that frames the mental makeup of individuals reflected in their demeanour while dealing with

“ THE LUCK FAVOURS THE BRAVE AS THE SAYING GOES AND HE HAD PLENTY OF IT. NO PRIME MINISTER IN THE PAST NOR THE NEAR DISTANT FUTURE IS GOING TO HAVE SUCH A BACKGROUND AND RICH PROFILE AS DR MANMOHAN SINGH HAS AND WITH THIS, HE HAS ETCHED HIS NAME IN THE HISTORY OF INDIA

people of diverse background and situations. Second, he had an uncanny talent for perceiving things with poise and confidence coming his way and organizing his capability most efficiently for the benefit of his organizations and ultimately for the country as Prime Minister of India and for his party. Many of our leaders in politics as also in bureaucracy lack poise and confidence and that results in making mistakes at crucial times. Third is how to handle provocative situations and when to be outspoken. This quality is essential while handling diversified issues with conflicting claims and counterclaims in both politics and administration. The fourth is to be silent like when Rahul Gandhi tore a proposed bill of his government publicly, and act firm like a solid rock and take a decision to its logical end without any compromise. The iron will he had shown when while signing the nuclear deal with America had shown his strong commitment and capability to carry his decision to its logical end even though the CPM withdrew support for his government. His government was, however, bailed out by the Samajwadi party but it has shown his strong personality as a national leader while dealing with international diplomacy. This attitude is the

hallmark of excellent leaders who can balance things considering what is best for the governance and the country. The fifth lesson which is most important for today's leaders is; that he was above favouritism, caste or religion and thus deftly handled his government with loyalty to his party leader and the country. However, sometimes the hangers-on in power especially in the bureaucracy do play mischief as observed by this writer nevertheless, such things always happen with all powerful posts and people. Though he was criticised by the opposition he maintained his poise and firmly remained loyal to his way of doing things and because of his scholarly eloquence and demeanours he was respected by all world leaders who mattered in international diplomacy. Dr Manmohan Singh, the academician par excellence, achieved dazzling heights. Such personas are born in politics once in a century or not born at all. I hope the current politicians of his party and the budding politicians/social and administrative aspirants imbibe these virtues to become effective leaders of tomorrow, which India needs today. (The writer is the former Director-General in the Ministry of Environment and Forest, Government of India; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE LEGACY OF MANMOHANOMICS

Madam — In the article Dr. Manmohan Singh's legacy as a pivotal figure in Indian politics and economics is thoughtfully and comprehensively evaluated. Through his tenure as prime minister for two consecutive terms and as finance minister in the 1990s, it recognizes his crucial contribution to the development of contemporary India. His strategic diplomatic engagements and economic liberalisation initiatives, such as the historic civil nuclear agreement between the United States and India, are rightfully hailed as turning points that have improved India's resilience and status in the world. Singh's lasting impact on India's socio-economic structure is also highlighted in the article, from social welfare reforms to Aadhaar-based delivery systems. Nonetheless, it is not afraid to criticize his administration, pointing out his difficulties with coalition politics, the impression of policy paralysis, and corruption scandals that damaged his administration's reputation. His personal integrity and his special status as a technocrat negotiating the turbulent waters of Indian politics are acknowledged in order to counterbalance these criticisms. What is noteworthy is the article's claim that, despite changes in administration, Singh's vision and policies continue to support India's advancement. It is convincing and evidence of Singh's enduring influence that "Manmohanomics" is being promoted as a "Make in India" paradigm for emerging countries. Overall, this article is a contemplative homage to a leader whose accomplishments merit a more lenient assessment from the past.

Janvi Rajwani | Ujjain

THE FALLING RUPEE

Madam— Apropos, "Rupee falls further 23 paise to hit fresh record low of 85.5 against US dollars," The Pioneer, Dec 28. Its a cause of concern that rupee has crossed the psychological barrier of 85

Memorial for Dr Singh



In a bid demand to allocate space for a memorial for the former Prime minister of India, Dr. Manmohan

Singh. The people of our country are simply unable to understand why govt of India could not find a location for his cremation and memorial that is befitting of his global stature, record of outstanding achievements, and exemplary service to the nation for decades.

Kharge also demanded that Singh's last rites be conducted at a place where a memorial can be built. When Kharge explained the demand and his communication with Modi to CWC, sources said a member of the Gandhi family even suggested that the cremation could be done at Shakti Sthal or Veer Bhumi - the resting places of former PMs Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi.

Dimple Wadhawan | Kanpur

against the dollar. It is an all-time low after a steady drop for some weeks, and the rupee is unlikely to rise soon. There are situations when a weaker currency does good to the economy and sometimes, conscious policy initiatives are taken towards that. But that is not the case with India now. Both global and domestic factors have contributed to the weakening of the rupee. India's economic growth has fallen to its lowest level in three quarters and merchandise trade deficits widened. The weaker rupee offers some opportunities. It provides an export advantage and could boost export-oriented industries like textiles. Incentives may be offered to such industries and suitable trade strategies can be formulated in their favour.

Meanwhile, domestic manufacturing and productivity should be improved and reliance on imports should be reduced as they will become costlier. But, a weaker rupee fuels inflation as imported goods and services become dearer. RBI interventions and other

measures will provide only temporary relief. The lasting solution to rupee depreciation and other global challenges is to strengthen the domestic economy by improving production and increasing exports.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

PROVIDE MEDICAL HELP TO DALLEWAL

Madam — Apropos to providing medical help to Dallewal. The Supreme Court has clarified in clear terms to provide medical help to the agitating farm leader to save his life and deal with the resisting crowd with iron hand if required. However the state government representatives have expressed their reservations of taking the risk of physical jostling with the resistance. The point to ponder is who is then going to do the needful if not the state authorities putting the credibility of the Supreme Court order in question.

R S Narula | Patiala

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FIRST COLUMN

THE CHALLENGES OF A NOBLE PROFESSION

Despite their vital role, educators remain undervalued and overstressed, leading to burnout



SAKSHI SETHI

The teaching profession, often referred to as one of the noblest vocations, faces significant challenges in today's world. As society evolves, so do the expectations placed upon educators. Despite their pivotal role in shaping future generations, teachers grapple with numerous issues ranging from inadequate compensation to increased workloads and shifting societal dynamics. Addressing these challenges is crucial towards ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of education systems worldwide.

Today, one of the most pressing issues for teachers is the sheer volume of work they manage. Beyond classroom teaching, educators are tasked with lesson planning, grading, administrative duties, and even participating in extracurricular activities. This workload which quite often extends beyond school hours, leaves little time for their family life or personal development. Even the pressure to meet standardized testing benchmarks and adaptiveness to diverse student needs adds to their stress levels, contributing to burnout and high attrition rates within the profession. Despite the critical importance of their role, many teachers feel undervalued and underpaid. In numerous countries, teacher salaries lag behind those of other professions requiring similar levels of education and expertise.

This financial disparity not only affects their quality of life but also discourages talented individuals from entering the profession. There is no denying that recognition for the hard work and dedication put up by a teacher is very limited which nowadays is diminishing their morale and job satisfaction. The integration of technology into education has trans-



formed teaching methodologies, requiring teachers to continually update their skills. While digital tools have enhanced learning experiences, they also demand significant effort from educators to adapt and implement effectively. The shift to online and hybrid learning models during the COVID-19 pandemic underscored this challenge, highlighting gaps in training and access to resources. Not only adaptations towards new learning models but another complexity that a teacher faces is classroom management.

With the advent of Gen Alpha, the role of a teacher has become increasingly complex as they now have to deal with a wide range of student behaviours and needs. Issues such as bullying, mental health challenges, and lack of discipline have increased enormously, and the abolishment of corporal punishments requires educators to act as counsellors and mediators in addition to their teaching roles. At the same time, rising parental expectations and involvement have also created added pressure, with some parents demanding individualized attention for their children. Despite so many challenges, there are multiple opportunities to improve the teaching profession and support educators. Increased investment in education systems, including better salaries and benefits, can help attract and retain talented teachers. It is extremely important to know that teaching is the only profession that creates other professions.

Promoting a culture of respect and appreciation for teachers, by recognizing their contributions through awards, public acknowledgement, and meaningful feedback can boost morale and reaffirm their value to society. The challenges faced by teachers today are multifaceted and require comprehensive solutions. By addressing issues such as workload, compensation, and training, society can ensure that educators are equipped and motivated to excel in their roles. Supporting teachers is not just an investment in their well-being but in the future of the students they inspire and educate. It is imperative to honour their dedication and create conditions that allow them to thrive, for the benefit of all.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Reaching for the stars, ruining the earth



NILANTHA LANGAMUWA

In 2024, a year of rising conflicts and environmental crises, the race for space supremacy highlights a paradox: we look to the stars while neglecting our planet

That was a harrowing near-miss. Trump endured an assassination attempt, and the ensuing spectacle was nothing short of fantastical. As he emerged, emboldened and defiant, a self-proclaimed martyr rallying Americans to "fight...fight...fight," the undercurrent of turmoil in the U.S. political sphere became irrefutable. Following the attack, responsibility was squarely placed on the Secret Service, prompting the resignation of its chief, Kimberly Cheatle. However, the pivotal question is not about security oversights but rather the significance of his survival.

The fact that Trump has now emerged from such an ordeal only solidifies his centrality in American political discourse. His rhetoric will escalate to unprecedented levels of provocation, further inflaming a deeply divided nation. As January 20 nears and he ascends to the presidency as the 47th leader, we must confront an uncomfortable truth: America is on the precipice of a more ominous epoch. This is not merely about one man's political endurance—it is about the disintegration of American society itself, driven to the brink by long-standing forces in motion. On the broader geopolitical stage, 2024 has been a year of unsettling reconfigurations.

In Asia, China's dominance over Taiwan is undeniable, with global consensus growing that Beijing's ambitions will not yield to Western opposition. For years, the U.S. has provoked China through military deployments and arms to Taiwan. Yet, China's psychological and economic warfare has shifted the global balance of power, eroding America's influence in the Pacific. Despite this, the U.S. persists, its foreign policy increasingly marked by desperation and entrenched arrogance. Meanwhile, the war in Ukraine, now in its third year, serves as a painful reminder of the West's misguided strategy of intervention. NATO's resolve is deteriorating, and support for Kyiv is dwindling in many Western capitals as the economic cost of the war becomes more pronounced. Public disillusionment with the conflict is palpable, yet the U.S. continues to allocate resources to a war with no clear resolution in sight.

The arms industry flourishes, and NATO's failure to pursue a diplomatic resolution leaves a bitter aftertaste, as Russia, empowered by internal European divisions, presses its advantage. In 2024 alone, the global arms trade reached a staggering \$632 billion, with much of that revenue enriching manufacturers who profit from relentless destruction. The grim reality is that war has evolved into a lucrative enterprise, sustaining the military-industrial complex while civilians bear the cost.

A similar dynamic is unfolding in West Asia, where Israel's military actions against Palestine and Lebanon have extended into Syria by year's end, driven by a voracious expansionist agenda, all under the protective mantle of U.S. support. The missile exchanges between Iran and Israel risk escalating into full-scale warfare, with no resolution in sight. Yet, the West remains obsessively focused on preserving its hegemonic power, blatantly disregarding the mounting humanitarian catastrophes. In parallel, the Arab world exposes its deep-seated fragmen-



INDIA IS POISED TO BECOME THE WORLD'S THIRD-LARGEST ECONOMY WITHIN FIVE YEARS, YET RISING TENSIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES PRESENT AN OPPORTUNITY TO REASSESS THE TRUE NATURE OF AMERICA'S 'ASIA PIVOT'

tation, driven by centuries-old dogmas and self-serving political agendas, all of which continue to wreak havoc on the lives of millions of Muslims.

The situation in South Asia mirrors this instability. With the reelection of Narendra Modi and the BJP, India is significantly expanding its global influence, even as internal crises—such as communal violence in the Northeast and Kashmir—continue to intensify, with the government blaming its negligence. India is poised to become the world's third-largest economy within five years, yet rising tensions with the United States present an opportunity to reassess the true nature of America's 'Asia Pivot.' As tensions escalate in Pakistan and neighbouring Afghanistan, the region teeters on the brink of broader conflict. Political instability in Bangladesh, exacerbated by alleged U.S.-sponsored people's protests that ousted Sheikh Hasina, and fragile politics in Nepal, which increasingly aligns with China, further fuel the growing unease.

Sri Lanka and the Maldives, after years of political turmoil, have found a degree of stability by year's end. Sri Lanka, in particular, has experienced a remarkable political shift, with a single party securing a supermajority in parliament, now populated by a wave of inexperienced young politicians.

While the Maldives continues to navigate its political challenges, South Asia—often dismissed as a 'dead regional idea'—remains a crucial player in global geopolitics. Meanwhile, in 2024, Africa boldly rejects colonial influence, with nations like Niger, Burkina Faso, Senegal, and Chad expelling French forces and reclaiming sovereignty. Yet, the continent's vast resources fuel a neocolonial

scramble, exposing deep-rooted corruption and divisive leadership. Despite efforts to break free, Africa remains trapped by external exploitation and the greed of its elites, hindering true autonomy and progress. At the same time, the relentless march of artificial intelligence in 2024 highlights a more subtle threat: the obliteration of labour.

Entire industries, from retail to finance, have been disrupted by automation, leaving millions of workers displaced. In the U.S., unemployment rates hovered around 4.5% in 2024, but these statistics scarcely reflect the many individuals who have been relegated to underemployment or excluded from the labour market entirely. Meanwhile, global projections suggest that job displacement due to automation will increase by up to 30% over the next decade. While the technocrats celebrate AI's progress, millions are left behind. Simultaneously, the integration of AI into military systems raises the frightening possibility of autonomous warfare, where human lives are subject to the whims of algorithms.

In 2024, climate change worsened, but leaders offered only empty words. The COP29 collapse highlighted the wealthiest nations' evasion of responsibility, leaving the vulnerable to suffer while the crisis, fueled by inequality and unchecked industrialisation, deepened. By 2024, over 700 million people worldwide were living in extreme poverty, with hunger rates climbing sharply due to both the economic pressures of conflict and climate-related calamities. For many, securing enough food to survive has become an increasingly insurmountable struggle. In space, the race for hegemony reached new heights, as the U.S.,

China, and private corporations competed for supremacy in the cosmos.

Yet, one must question: why are such vast resources being allocated to space exploration when the world's most pressing issues remain unaddressed? The billions being invested in Mars colonisation could be better used to address the problems on Earth, yet the Western obsession with space reflects a deeper sense of hubris.

Humanity looks to the stars but fails to confront the crises that are unfolding on its soil. The year 2024 will be remembered as one that exposed the profound contradictions of our age. The Western world is at war with itself, consumed by political divisions, economic inequality, and an incapacity to respond to the genuine challenges of our time. The rise of populism, authoritarianism, and unchecked technological advancement portends a future in which the divide between the rich and the poor widens, and the planet teeters on the brink of environmental collapse. In this environment, the struggle for survival will no longer be merely political—it will be existential.

We are increasingly forfeiting our collective responsibility, continuing to vie for better accommodations in a sinking vessel, fully aware that we are all doomed to submerge. As we enter 2025, may we dare to confront the tumult of our times with the audacity to question everything, forging a future that challenges the very forces seeking to dominate us. Wishing you a year of purpose and unity.

(The writer is a journalist and policy analyst. Views expressed are personal)

Veganism: A resolution for health, planet, and compassion

Beyond being a dietary choice, veganism offers transformative benefits for personal health, environmental sustainability, and animal welfare.

As the year winds down, it is natural to reflect on the resolutions that were made in January. While there would be some of us who could hold on to their resolutions and some others who could not. However, there is no reason to feel lost. Making a New Year's resolution itself is a combination of awareness about oneself and a conscious decision to do better. Even setting a goal is a step in the right direction; this is more than most people manage.

Being vegan once seen as a fringe lifestyle choice, appears to be occupying an increasingly bigger place not only in the West but also in India. Reports indicate that vegan diets create 75% fewer



PRASHANTH VISHWANATH

greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global warming, as well as much less water pollution and wildlife damage. Fruits and vegetables, legumes, and grains require less energy, land, and water to produce than animal-derived diets. While diet seems to be the biggest concern for those wanting to

make the switch fact is that veganism is not just about diet, it is a lifestyle that refrains people from any form of animal exploitation. **Veganuary- the global behaviour**

change organisation encouraging people to try vegan in January and beyond- understands the importance of building a supportive community. Prashanth Vishwanath, who heads the organisation in India says "We know it takes a whole ecosystem to form positive habits. That's why we work with brands, restaurants and retailers to make plant-based products more accessible. Our 11 celebrity ambassadors from India show how they're on top of their game while eating

vegan. And anyone trying vegan with us receives more than 10 free resources including daily support emails. The idea is to make the transition to eating more plant-based as fun and rewarding as possible." **Building the 'try vegan' ecosystem**

Collaborating with brands in January 2024, 140 Indian firms participated in the Veganuary movement, launching new goods, special deals, and menu items. More than 40 new goods were launched in India, ranging from vegan eggs to curry meal sets. Nature's Basket, Amazon Fresh, Hilton Hotels, Big Basket, and Hard Rock Cafe were among the firms that participated, and the cam-



paign anticipates that many more will join this year. **Celebrity support** Veganuary's Indian Ambassadors include film stars, professional athletes, and mountaineers, with Mallika Sherawat being the most recent addition. They are passionate about it and

they have literally helped show millions of people how enriching plant-based eating can be. They send a loud and obvious message: a plant-based diet is a huge advantage for looking good on screen, channelling inner creativity, and fueling world record

feats. Free resources Annual Veganuary campaigns that encourage people to try vegan for a month as the new year rolls in come with an impressive list of free goodies to make the transition enjoyable and hassle-free.

Participants gain access to a digital celebrity cookbook, with vegan recipes from Indian and global celebrities, a complete vegan starter kit, with comprehensive answers to any questions about adopting a plant-based diet and a lot more.

In India, embracing veganism is especially practical, thanks to the wide range of naturally vegan foods that are culturally familiar, and easy to prepare taking out the need for expensive or

exotic ingredients. It just needs a little bit of planning to ensure it meets all the necessary nutrients.

The list of vegan food varieties is expanding every day, offering plenty of options to not only nourish your body but also delight your taste buds.

So, whether it's for your health, the planet, or compassion for animals, embracing a plant-based lifestyle is more accessible than ever. With the right support and an abundance of options, choosing to eat better could be the most rewarding resolution you take on this year.

(The writer is Country Director for India, Veganuary; views are personal)

Quarrel turns violent, three men assault friend in South Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

A man got injured after a quarrel between a group of friends turned violent in south Delhi's Fatehpur Beri area. According to the police on Sunday, on the evening of December 26, 28 year old Sanju Tanwar was having alcohol with his friends. "Information regarding a quarrel was received at Fatehpur Beri police station from Fortis Hospital. The statement of the injured, Sanju Tanwar, resident of Fatehpur Beri, was recorded," Deputy Commissioner of Police (South) Ankit Chauhan said.

An argument broke out among Tanwar and his friends including Mohit Chikara, Preet Tanwar, and Manish Goyal which turned violent. The three men allegedly assaulted Tanwar, leaving him injured, the police said.

"During the altercation, his friends Mohit Chikara, Preet Tanwar, and Manish Goyal beat him near Bijli Ghar, Jhod, Fatehpur Beri, New Delhi," the DCP said.

He added that based on the contents of the statement, a case under section 126 (2) (Wrongful restraint), 115 (2) (Voluntarily causing hurt), 351 (2) (Criminal intimidation) and 3 (5) (joint liability) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) has been registered and investigation is underway.

Gurugram Police issues strong security advisory ahead of NYE

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

In a bid to ensure security during New Year's Eve, the Gurugram Police on Sunday issued an advisory to maintain law and order in the city ahead of New Year celebrations. As per an advisory, a number of 2,000 cops, along with additional police forces, have been deployed under the supervision of the concerned assistant commissioner of police (ACP) and deputy commissioner of police (DCP). The policemen will be equipped with necessary security equipment across the city.

As per the instructions of Vikas Arora IPS, Commissioner of Gurugram Police, Gurugram. The District Police have made strong security arrangements at various identified places, including all the venues to be organized to welcome the new

year 2025. To ensure safety across the district, an adequate number of police forces has been deployed at various identified places, including all the venues; apart from this, policemen have also been deployed in plain clothes to keep an eye on all types of activities. During this time, the duties of traffic police personnel have been assigned to keep the traffic movement smooth and organized during celebrations. Deputy Commissioners of Police (DCPs), Assistant Police Commissioners (APCs), station house officers (SHOs), all Crime Branch In-Charges and all Traffic Police In-Charges have also been posted. According to the police, New Year events will be organized at 22 places in Gurugram to celebrate the arrival of the New Year. "The Gurugram Police has made all the foolproof security arrange-

ments at all these venues and 10 parking spaces have been created for parking of vehicles. Interstate and inner Gurugram checkpoints have been set up by Gurugram Police for checking suspicious persons, criminals and undesirable persons," Vikas Arora, Commissioner of Gurugram Police said. 10 interstate checkpoints have been set up by the Police. Apart from this, a total of 68 special checkpoints have been set up including 32 checkpoints in the East Zone of Gurugram, 21 checkpoints in the West Zone, 08 checkpoints in the South Zone and 07 checkpoints in the Manesar Zone. An adequate number of the police force has been deployed," he added. About 1044 policemen will be deployed at the 22 main places to celebrate the New Year, with 10 parking places and police checkpoints. Apart from this, traffic police

personnel, police station teams in the respective police station area, counter-assault teams, disposal teams, ambulances, and special teams of the fire brigade will also be deployed. Meanwhile, the Gurugram Police has made parking arrangements at 10 places (Laser Valley Sector-29 parking, Laser Valley Sector-29 market parking, Laser Valley parking in front of Hotel Westin, Cyber Hub parking, parking in front of KOD and 02 parking at the back, parking in front of Uber office Sector-29, HUDA Gymkhana parking Sector-29, Machan parking, HUDA ground parking, Sector-29 taxi parking). "Gurugram Police will not ignore hooligans, anti-social elements and those who disrupt peace on New Year under any circumstances and strict action will be taken against them promptly as per the rules," Arora said.

BJP MLA joins Katra agitation, threatens hunger strike

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

The ongoing agitation in Katra against the proposed Ropeway project is entering its crucial phase as several organisations have extended their support to the members of the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Sangarsh Samiti. Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Choudhary also visited Katra and met with the agitating members along with a large number of local residents sitting on indefinite fast in the Sridhar Chowk on Sunday. Representatives of the Jammu Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Transporters Association also extended their support to the ongoing agitation.

Meanwhile, Katra township remained shut for the fifth consecutive day on Sunday. Local BJP MLA, Baldev Raj Sharma, who stayed away from the ongoing agitation has also joined the stir since Saturday. The bandh, which began on Wednesday, has disrupted normal life in the busy town of Katra, where thousands of pilgrims arrive daily to pay obeisance at the cave shrine of Vaishno Devi. Sharma, who joined the protesters on Sunday, warned the administration of a chain hunger strike if the detained samiti members are not released within 24 hours. "I will sit on a hunger strike with my people if the administration does not release those detained. The adminis-

tration should immediately release them," the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLA told the protesters. Meanwhile, posters of missing BJP MP Jugal Kishore Sharma also surfaced in Katra on Sunday. The members of the sangarsh samiti claimed their MP has totally ignored their demand and instead of raising their voice and standing behind them he has decided to ignore the protests and their genuine demands. The Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Sangharsh Samiti initially called for the shutdown on December 25. On Friday night, it extended the bandh by 72 hours to press its demands, including shelving the proposed ropeway project and releasing the detained protesters.

Anil Baluni proposes Auli as adventure hub

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Uttarakhand MP Anil Baluni on Sunday pitched for developing Auli, a popular ski resort destination in the state, as a world-class adventure tourist place. Baluni, who represents Garhwal in Lok Sabha, said in social media posts that suggestions he received from skiers, coaches and those connected with the occupation during his visit to



Auli have given him the belief that the Himalayan site can be developed as a major adventure sport hub. The BJP leader said he is making efforts to organise world-level competition in

Auli where skiers can also be provided training. Baluni said he also wants to develop infrastructure for night skiing. Tourists can also enjoy the sport and impressive sights, he added. He noted that Indian ski-lovers in large numbers head to Europe every year, and said a grand destination for them and tourists will be developed in Auli. The remarkable skiing slopes of the place will draw people from abroad as well, he added.

60% terrorists killed in J & K in 2024 were Pakistanis

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Dreaded foreign terrorists from Pakistan bore the maximum brunt of anti-terrorists operations across Jammu and Kashmir in 2024. According to a latest assessment of the security agencies, during 2024 around 60 percent of terrorists killed in anti-terrorist operations were Pakistani nationals. Majority of these foreign terrorists were well-trained for jungle warfare, well-equipped and battle-hardened combatants. These terrorists were pushed inside the Indian borders from non-conventional

infiltration routes due to heightened vigil along the line of control and the International border with Pakistan in the plain areas of Jammu region. The over ground workers provided logistics support to these terrorists at the behest of their handlers operating from Pakistani soil. These terrorists carried out well coordinated targeted strikes on army personnel and civilians across Jammu and Kashmir. During these operations 26 security personnel and 32 civilians also attained martyrdom during the same period.

Compared to 2023, the percentage of foreign terrorists eliminated in anti-terrorist operations have come down. In 2023, over 70 percent foreign terrorists were eliminated by the security forces across Jammu and Kashmir. According to the statistics, 75 terrorists were killed in 2024. Out of these 17 foreign terrorists were neutralized during infiltration attempts along the Line of Control (LoC) and International Border (IB), and 26 were killed in encounters in the hinterland. The majority of foreign terrorists were neutralised

across six districts of Jammu region namely Jammu, Udhampur, Kathua, Doda, Poonch and Rajouri. In the Kashmir Valley, security forces neutralised foreign terrorists in districts such as Baramulla, Bandipora, Kupwara, and Kulgam. Maximum number of 14 terrorists were killed across nine encounters in the Baramulla district. The numbers reportedly indicate a significant decline in the presence of local terrorists operating in Jammu and Kashmir, leaving mainly Pakistani terrorists active in the region.

Karnataka police registers case over alleged kill plot

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"The death note written by Panchal, a contractor from Bidar who committed suicide due to harassment by Minister @PriyankKharg's right-hand man, Raju, reveals alarming and serious information that he had given 'Supari' (contract killing) to kill our MLA Basavaraj Mattimadu, BJP leaders Chandu Patil, Manikantha Rathod and Andola Swami," the party's state president B Y Vijayendra said in a statement. Vijayendra and senior BJP functionaries have also decided to visit Panchal's house soon, party sources said.



Former prime minister Dr Manmohan Singh's ashes being immersed at the Asth Ghat, Majnu ka Tila in New Delhi. PTI

Def Min seeks army's sharp...

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Singh also complimented army and said he was impressed by the cleanliness at the Army establishments and cantonments across the country. "Your dedication to work inspires me. I can say that the most appealing thing is your devotion towards work and sense of responsibility. It is inspiring to all of us," Singh said. Earlier, Singh along with the Chief of Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi paid floral tributes at the memorial of Dr B R Ambedkar at Mhow. The memorial of Ambedkar, the chief architect of India's Constitution, has been built at his birthplace in the Kali Paltaan area of Mhow cantonment.

Forensic reports uncover new DNA evidence in RG Kar case

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Latest forensic reports provide a new twist to the RG Kar Medical College and Hospital rape and murder case. According to sources privy to the forensic laboratory reports the experts have found at least three additional DNA prints inside the body of the victim lady doctor who was brutally raped and murdered inside the hospital premises. In what could further buttress the claims of her fellow medics and family members, forensic experts have said that the victim's body samples (private parts) have shown the presence of DNAs of at least three other persons including that of a woman. According to sources analysis of her samples suggest presence of some foreign DNA type in the

D12S391 marker. The genotype of that "other woman" is 16/22" an expert said adding, "As we have no other samples to refer to we cannot for now conclude as to whose DNA are these." One thing is however clear that the DNA sample of the prime accused Sanjoy Roy -- a civic volunteer working with the Kolkata Police -- who is presently in CBI custody has matched with one strain of the DNA collected from the victim's body. "We are sure about that but we are intrigued about the other samples," one of the sources said. Incidentally the investigators had yet to collect the DNA samples of the other arrested persons like former RGMCH principal Sandip Ghosh or his personal security guard. The experts had earlier analysed at least 29 DNA types, sources said adding,

the DNA types found on the victim's breasts, vulva and other parts have given "anomalous indications," though it cannot be established immediately whether it was a gangrape or something else. Apart from the "anomalous indications" in the DNA sampling a parallel report too seems have provided a twist to the case. According to allegations made by the family members investigators -- in this case the Kolkata Police and the Central Bureau of Investigation -- have knowingly or negligently avoided inspecting the orthopaedic department which is adjunct to the seminar hall of Department of the Chest Medicine where the body of the victim was allegedly discovered. A recent report suggests that blood stains and some gloves were found inside the orthoscopic room of the

said department though the investigators had preferred to keep the room out of the purview of their investigation. "We have been suggesting a comprehensive investigation but it is strange as to who is trying to save whom ... why some rooms were not inspected ... why the mother of the victim was not examined as a witness ... all these things are really intriguing ... and now this DNA anomaly ... One wonders whether our colleague will ever get justice," said one of the doctors requesting anonymity. On whether the earlier "hush hush atmosphere" once again returned to haunt the Asia's oldest private medical college (now a government facility) he said the staff were still afraid as "the student leaders who had been transferred or suspended have reinstated."

Boy dies after 16-hour rescue from borewell...

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Rescuers worked through the night and dug a parallel pit to reach the boy via a passage between the pit and borewell, Raghogarh Congress MLA Jaivardhan Singh said over phone from the spot earlier in the morning. The boy was trapped at a depth of 39 feet in the borewell, which is around 140-feet deep, Guna Collector Satendra Singh said on Saturday. The borewell did not strike water, and hence no casing had been put on it, he said. The NDRF team reached there from Bhopal late Saturday evening and helped in the operation. The family members of the boy panicked on Saturday evening when they did not see him for a long time. A search was carried out and then they realised he had fallen into the borewell, a local person said.

Humpy makes...

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"Yeah, off the board, it was very difficult for me because of the time difference. I was lacking sleep. Literally, I haven't slept properly since coming here. So, it wasn't easy to play restlessly, but I'm happy that I managed to do it," she added. Humpy has always excelled in the Rapid worlds as she had won a bronze medal in the 2012 edition of the event held in Moscow, while finished with a silver last year at Samarkand, Uzbekistan. Humpy said her victory will now prompt other Indians to take up chess. "I think it's high time for India. We also have Gukesh as world champion and now I got the second world title in the rapid event. So, I think this will motivate a lot of youngsters to take up chess professionally," she concluded.

Cold wave, dense fog to hit North India for New Years eve

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In neighboring states, the mercury is expected to plunge even further. Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, and Rajasthan are forecast to see their minimum temperatures fall by three to four degrees in the next three days. Meanwhile, Uttar Pradesh will face a more significant drop, with the minimum temperature plunging by four to six degrees over the next five days. Similarly, central India will experience a three to five degree dip, while Maharashtra is set to see a two to four degree decline in temperatures by the end of the week. Isolated areas in Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan are likely to face severe cold wave conditions, and cold days have been

predicted for some areas in these regions starting December 30. Dense to very dense fog will accompany the freezing temperatures, especially during late night and early morning hours, creating hazardous conditions for travel. The IMD also warns that Uttar Pradesh will be engulfed in fog on December 30, with Himachal Pradesh expected to face similar conditions until January 1. In the northeast, fog will blanket regions such as Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, and Tripura through January 2, prompting authorities to advise residents and travelers to exercise caution. As the cold wave tightens its grip, North India is bracing for a challenging start to the New Year.

Plane crash in South Korea claims 179 lives

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showing thick plumes of black smoke billowing from the plane, which was engulfed in flames. Lee Jeong-hyeon, chief of the Muan fire station, told a televised briefing that the plane was completely destroyed, with only the tail assembly remaining recognisable among the wreckage. Lee said that workers were looking into various possibilities about what caused the crash, including whether the aircraft was struck by birds, Lee said. Transport Ministry officials later said their early assessment of communication records show the airport control tower issued a bird strike warning to the plane shortly before it intended to land and gave its pilot permission to land in a different area. The pilot sent out a distress signal shortly before the plane overshoot the end of the runway and skidded across a buffer zone before hitting the wall, the officials said. Senior Transport Ministry official Jo Jong-wan said workers have retrieved the flight data and cockpit voice recorders of the plane's black box, which will be examined by government experts

investigating the cause of the crash and fire. He said it may take months for investigators to complete their probe. The runway at the Muan airport will be closed until January 1, the ministry said. Thailand's prime minister, Paetongtarn Shinawatra, expressed deep condolences to the families of those affected by the accident in a post on social platform X. Paetongtarn said she ordered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to provide assistance immediately. Kerati Kijmanawat, the director of Airports of Thailand, confirmed in a statement that Jeju Air flight 7C 2216 departed from Suvarnabhumi Airport with no reports of abnormal conditions with the aircraft or on the runway. Jeju Air in a statement expressed its "deep apology" over the crash and said it will do its "utmost to manage the aftermath of the accident." In a televised news conference, Kim E-bae, Jeju Air's president, bowed deeply with other senior company officials as he apologized to bereaved families and said he feels "full responsibility" for the incident. Kim said the company hadn't identified any mechanical problems with the aircraft

following regular checkups and that he would wait for the results of government investigations into the cause of the incident. Family members wailed as officials announced the names of some victims at a lounge in the Muan airport. Boeing said in a statement on X it was in contact with Jeju Air and is ready to support the company in dealing with the crash. "We extend our deepest condolences to the families who lost loved ones, and our thoughts remain with the passengers and crew" Boeing said. The incident came as South Korea is embroiled into a huge political crisis triggered by President Yoon Suk Yeol's stunning imposition of martial law and ensuing impeachment. Last Friday, South Korean lawmakers impeached acting President Han Duck-soo and suspended his duties, leading Deputy Prime Minister Choi Sang-mok to take over. Choi, who traveled to the site in Muan, called for officials to employ all available resources to find the missing and identify the victims as soon as possible. The government declared Muan a special disaster zone to

provide assistance to the families of victims and designated a week-long national mourning period through Saturday. Yoon's office said his chief secretary, Chung Jin-suk, presided over an emergency meeting between senior presidential staff to discuss the crash and reported the details to Choi. Yoon expressed condolences to the victims in a Facebook posting. The Muan crash is one of the deadliest disasters in South Korea's aviation history. The last time South Korea suffered a large-scale air disaster was in 1997, when a Korean Airline plane crashed in Guam, killing 228 people on board. In 2013, an Asiana Airlines plane crashed in San Francisco, killing three and injuring approximately 200. Sunday's accident was also one of the worst landing mishaps since a July 2007 crash that killed all 187 people on board and 12 others on the ground when an Airbus A320 slid off a slick airstrip in Sao Paulo and collided with a nearby building, according to data compiled by the Flight Safety Foundation, a nonprofit group aimed at improving air safety.

Delhi Police deports illegal Bangladeshi immigrants

From page 1

During the verification drive, the team identified Jahangir and his family, who confessed to their Bangladeshi origins during questioning, the DCP said, adding that the deportation process was carried out in coordination with the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO). "In South district, the police traced illegal Bangladeshi migrants namely Mohd. Umor Faruk, Riyaj Miyan alias Remon Khan and five women in Fateh Pur Beri, who were deported as per procedure," DCP (South) Ankit Chauhan said.

He added that in pursuance of the orders of Delhi LG, our teams have been conducting random verification drives in certain areas like slums, labor camps, and unauthorized colonies where illegal migrants are likely to be present. "On Saturday, a specific input regarding the stay of illegal migrants was received. Immediately, the information was further developed and local enquiry of the area was conducted. A raid was conducted and seven illegal immigrants of Bangladesh were apprehended near Arjan Garh Metro Station in the jurisdiction of Fateh Pur Beri

police station," the DCP said. The officer said that all the illegal immigrants were produced at the office of FRRO, R.K. Puram and after completion of necessary documentation they were detained at the Centre at Inderlok. Earlier, on Friday, the Delhi Police deported an illegal Bangladeshi migrant who unlawfully stayed in different areas for the last six years. The 28-year-old woman stayed in Delhi and Mumbai in violation of the Foreigners Act, police had said. The city police launched a drive to identify illegal Bangladeshi immigrants

residing in the capital, after the LG Secretariat ordered a crackdown on such people this month. Teams from various police stations are visiting slums and the Kalindi Kunj, Shaheen Bagh, Hazrat Nizamuddin and Jamia Nagar areas to check voter IDs and Aadhaar cards for identifying suspected Bangladeshi immigrants. The LG Secretariat directed the Delhi chief secretary and police chief to launch a two-month special drive to identify and take strict action against illegal Bangladeshi immigrants residing in the city.

Bangladesh students' movement wants 'Mujibist' constitution buried To declare 'Proclamation of July Uprising'

PTI ■ DHAKA

The Anti-Discrimination Students Movement on Sunday announced to issue a belated Proclamation of July Uprising that seeks to "bury" Bangladesh's 1972 constitution calling it a "Mujibist" charter that had paved way for "India's aggression."

The interim government of Muhammad Yunus visibly distanced itself from the "Proclamation" while former prime minister Khaleda Zia's party said it was disappointed and added, if there is anything bad in the Constitution, it can be amended.

The platform's convener Hasnat Abdullah told a press conference here, "The Mujibist '72 constitution will be buried (in the new proclamation) in the very place where the one-point declaration was made during the July uprising."

He said the Proclamation would be made at Central Shaheed Minar premises on December 31 in the afternoon. Weeks of protests led by the students' movement over a controversial quota system in

government jobs had escalated into a nationwide campaign calling for the end of the 16-year regime of Sheikh Hasina, 77, resulting in her ouster on August 5.

"The Indian aggression was initiated through the principles of the 1972 Constitution (and) the proclamation will make it clear how the Mujibist Constitution destroyed the aspirations of the people and exactly how we want to replace it," Abdullah said.

The Constitution was framed a year after independent Bangladesh was born by the representatives elected in the 1970 election in line with their mandate as "constituent assembly" members. Awami League, under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, had gained an absolute majority, with the party winning 160 of the 162 general seats and all seven women's seats in what was then East Pakistan.

But Pakistan's then military under General Yahya Khan eventually launched a sudden army crackdown leading to the Liberation War of 1971 and birth of independent

Bangladesh.

Sunday's press conference was held along with the National Citizens' Committee will present the Proclamation, which is expected to declare "irrelevant" the deposed prime minister's "Nazi-like Awami League" in Bangladesh as well. Anti-Discrimination Students Movement leader and chief organiser of the National Citizens' Committee Sarjis Alam told the press conference that the "July uprising proclamation should have been declared earlier."

"Just as we believe all anti-fascists embraced our revolution, this proclamation will also contain everyone's hopes and aspirations. ... We have crossed only one stage of the revolution," Alam said.

The students' platform and different political groups, including former prime minister Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalists Party (BNP), often dub Hasina's ousted regime as "fascist."

Visibly distancing itself from the "Proclamation," the interim government of Muhammad

Yunus said it has nothing to do with it. Yunus' press secretary Shafiqul Alam said, "The government has nothing to do with it" and wants to see it (Proclamation) as a "private initiative."

Awami League, Hasina's party, is not seen in the public sphere since August 5 as many of its leaders are arrested or are on the run at home and abroad. Their activities are limited to social media platforms occasionally.

The BNP sharply reacted to the proposal with its highest policymaking standing committee member Mirza Abbas saying the constitution was written in 1972 at the cost of the blood of three million martyrs.

"As your seniors, we feel disappointed when you (Student Movement leaders) say the Constitution should be buried. If there is anything bad in the constitution, it can be amended," he told reporters.

"When you (student leaders) say things like this, it sounds 'fascist' as fascists used to say, 'we will bury them, kill them, and cut them off,'" Abbas said.

Musk causes uproar for backing Germany's far-right party

AP ■ BERLIN

Tech entrepreneur Elon Musk caused uproar after backing Germany's far-right party in a major newspaper ahead of key parliamentary elections in the Western European country, leading to the resignation of the paper's opinion editor in protest.

Germany is to vote in an early election on February 23 after Chancellor Olaf Scholz's three-party governing coalition collapsed last month in a dispute over how to revitalise the country's stagnant economy.

Musk's guest opinion piece for Welt am Sonntag — a sister publication of POLITICO owned by the Axel Springer Group — published in German over the weekend, was the second time this month he supported the Alternative for Germany, or AfD.

"The Alternative for Germany (AfD) is the last spark of hope for this country," Musk wrote in his translated commentary.

He went on to say the far-right party "can lead the country into a future where economic prosperity, cultural integrity and technological innovation are not just wishes, but reality."

The Tesla Motors CEO also wrote that his investment in Germany gave him the right to comment on the country's condition.

The AfD is polling strongly, but its candidate for the top job, Alice Weidel, has no realistic chance of becoming chancellor because other parties refuse to work with the far-right party.

An ally of US President-elect Donald Trump, the technology billionaire challenged in his opinion piece the party's public image.

"The portrayal of the AfD as right-wing extremist is clearly false, considering that Alice Weidel, the party's leader, has a same-sex partner from Sri Lanka! Does that sound like Hitler to you? Please!"

Musk's commentary has led to a debate in German media over the boundaries of free speech, with the paper's own opinion editor announcing her resignation, pointedly on Musk's social media platform, X.

Air Canada flight catches fire on landing, all passengers evacuated safely

PTI ■ OTTAWA

An Air Canada flight coming from St John's city on Newfoundland Island had a rough landing at the Halifax airport in Goffs in Nova Scotia province that saw the aircraft skid down the runway and part of it catching fire.

A statement issued by the airport said the incident involved Air Canada Flight 2259, which was operated by PAL Airlines, CBC News reported. The incident happened around 9:30 pm local time. The statement does not say how many people were on the plane.

The people on board were evacuated, and then taken to a hangar to be checked out by paramedics, CBC News said.

Due to the incident, the Halifax airport was

temporarily closed Saturday night.

A passenger told CBC News that one of the plane's tyres did not deploy properly upon landing. "The plane started to sit at about a 20-degree angle to the left and, as that happened, we heard a pretty loud — what almost sounded like a crash sound — as the wing of the plane started to skid along the pavement, along with what I presume was the engine," she said.

The passenger said the plane then skidded down the runway for a "decent" distance as the pilots worked to stop the plane.

"The plane shook quite a bit and we started seeing fire on the left side of the plane and smoke started coming in the windows," she said.

The airport said one of its runways has since reopened.

North Korea's Kim vows toughest anti-US policy before Trump takes office

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said he will implement the "toughest" anti-US policy, less than a month before Donald Trump takes office as US president, the country's state media reported Sunday.

Trump's return to the White House raises prospects for high-profile diplomacy with North Korea. During his first term, Trump met Kim three times for talks on the North's nuclear programme.

Many experts however say a quick resumption of Kim-Trump summitry is unlikely as Trump would first focus on conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East. North Korea's support for Russia's war against Ukraine also poses a challenge to efforts to revive diplomacy, experts say.

During a five-day plenary meeting of the ruling Workers' Party that ended Friday, Kim called the US "the most reactionary state that regards anti-communism as its invariable state policy."

Kim said that the US-South Korea-Japan security partnership is expanding into "a nuclear military bloc for aggression."

"This reality clearly shows to which direction we should advance and what we should do and how," Kim said, according to the official Korean Central News Agency.

It said Kim's speech "clarified the strategy for the toughest anti-US counteraction to be launched aggressively" by North Korea for its long-term national interests and security.

KCNA didn't elaborate on the anti-US strategy. But it said Kim set forth tasks to bolster military capability through defence technology advancements and stressed the need to improve the mental toughness of North Korean soldiers.

The previous meetings between Trump and Kim had not only put an end to their exchanges of fiery rhetoric and threats of destruction, but they developed personal connections. Trump once famously said he and Kim "fell in love." But their talks eventually collapsed in 2019, as they wrangled over US-led sanctions on the North.



North Korea has since sharply increased the pace of its weapons testing activities to build more reliable nuclear missiles targeting the US and its allies.

The US and South Korea have responded by expanding their military bilateral drills and also trilateral ones involving Japan, drawing strong rebukes from the North, which views such US-led exercises as invasion rehearsals.

Further complicating efforts to get North Korea to rid itself of nuclear weapons is its deepening military cooperation with Russia.

According to US, Ukrainian and South Korean assessments, North Korea has sent more than 10,000 troops and conventional weapons systems to support Moscow's war against Ukraine.

There are concerns that Russia could give North Korea advanced weapons technology in return, including help to build more powerful nuclear missiles.

Russia and China, locked in separate disputes with the US, have repeatedly blocked US-led pushes to levy more UN sanctions on North Korea despite its repeated missile tests in defiance of UN Security Council resolutions.

Last month, Kim said that his past negotiations with the United States only confirmed Washington's "unchangeable" hostility toward his country and described his nuclear buildup as the only way to counter external threats.



People stand at the grave of pilot in command Igor Kshnyakin during a funeral of the crew members of the Azerbaijan Airlines Embraer 190, killed in a deadly plane crash in Kazakhstan this week, at the II Alley of Honor in Baku, Azerbaijan on Sunday. AP/PTI

Azerbaijan's president says crashed jetliner was shot down by Russia unintentionally

AP ■ BAKU



Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev said Sunday that the Azerbaijani airliner that crashed last week was shot down by Russia, albeit unintentionally, and criticised Moscow for trying to "hush up" the issue for days.

"We can say with complete clarity that the plane was shot down by Russia. (...) We are not saying that it was done intentionally, but it was done," he told Azerbaijani state television.

Aliyev said that the airliner, which crashed Wednesday in Kazakhstan, was hit by fire from the ground over Russia and "rendered uncontrollable by electronic warfare," Aliyev accused Russia of trying to "hush up" the issue for several days, saying he was "upset and surprised" by versions of events put forward by Russian officials.

"Unfortunately, for the first three days we heard nothing from Russia except delirious

versions," he said.

The crash killed 38 of 67 people on board. The Kremlin said that air defence systems were firing near Grozny, the regional capital of the Russian republic of Chechnya, where the plane attempted to land, to deflect a Ukrainian drone strike. Aliyev said Azerbaijan made three demands to Russia in connection with the crash.

"First, the Russian side must apologise to Azerbaijan. Second, it must admit its guilt. Third, punish the guilty, bring them to criminal responsibility and pay compensation to the Azerbaijan state, the injured

passengers and crew members," he said.

Aliyev noted that the first demand was "already fulfilled" when Russian President Vladimir Putin apologized to him on Saturday. Putin called the crash a "tragic incident" though stopped short of acknowledging Moscow's responsibility.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Russian state media on Sunday that Putin had spoken to Aliyev over the phone again, but did not provide details of the conversation.

The Kremlin also said a joint investigation by Russia, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan has begun at the crash site near the city of Aktau in Kazakhstan. The plane was flying from Azerbaijan's capital, Baku, to Grozny when it turned toward Kazakhstan, hundreds of kilometers (miles) across the Caspian Sea from its intended destination, and crashed while making an attempt to land.

Passengers and crew who sur-

vived the crash told Azerbaijani media that they heard loud noises on the aircraft as it was circling over Grozny.

Dmitry Yadrov, head of Russia's civil aviation authority Rosaviatsia, said Friday that the plane was preparing to land in Grozny in deep fog. Ukrainian drones were targeting the city, prompting authorities to close the area to air traffic. The crash is the second deadly civil aviation accident linked to fighting in Ukraine.

Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 was downed with a Russian surface-to-air missile, killing all 298 people aboard, as it flew over the area in eastern Ukraine controlled by Moscow-backed separatists in 2014.

Russia has denied responsibility, but a Dutch court in 2022 convicted two Russians and a pro-Russia Ukrainian man for their role in downing the plane with an air defence system brought into Ukraine from a Russian military base.

Pak soldier killed, 11 wounded in firing by Afghan Taliban forces

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

A Pakistan paramilitary soldier has been killed and 11 others injured in firing by the Afghan Taliban forces at the border posts of Pakistan troops, days after strikes by Pakistan targeted the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban (TTP) militants.

According to defence sources, the Afghan troops resorted to "unprovoked fire on multiple Pakistani border posts" in the Upper Kurram district on Saturday morning.

They fired at posts in Ghozgarhi, Matha Sangar, Kot Ragma and Tari Mengal areas using both light and heavy weaponry, sources said. Pakistani forces retaliated, inflicting significant losses on the other side as seven to eight personnel of the Afghan forces were killed in the exchange of fire, sources added.

However, in the fire exchange, a "Frontier Constabulary (FC) soldier was killed and 11 others were injured". The incident of firing occurred days after Pakistan targeted terrorist positions in Pakitika province of Afghanistan to punish the banned TTP militants, allegedly using Afghan soil to train and attack Pakistan.

The Saturday attack came after militants made an infiltration attempt on Friday night, using the posts controlled by the Afghan Taliban to cross into Pakistani territory, but the attempt was thwarted.

"The firing was effectively responded to and there are confirmed reports of heavy losses on the Afghan side with over 15 militants killed and many others wounded," according to sources.

3 die off northern France coast in Channel crossing attempt

AP ■ PARIS

At least three migrants died early Sunday while attempting to cross the English Channel to Britain from northern France, authorities said. The deaths were confirmed after an early morning rescue operation involving French emergency services and the navy's "Dauphin" helicopter.

Around 50 people were stranded in the water and on the beach near Sangatte at around 6 am, according to the regional prefecture. Rescuers assisted 45 individuals, including four who were transported to hospitals.

Three unconscious people were pulled from the water but could not be revived, despite efforts by medical teams. An investigation has been opened by prosecutors in Boulogne-sur-Mer.

Jacques Billant, the prefect of Pas-de-Calais, said an overcrowded boat may have contributed to the tragedy.

"There were more people attempting to board than the boat could hold," he said during a press conference Sunday.

Sunday's tragedy comes during a spike in Channel crossing attempts as 2024 draws to a close. Officials have noted a significant increase in attempted

crossings over the past days.

"Since December 24, 23 maritime incidents have been thwarted by internal security forces, saving over 1,000 lives," said Billant. "But crossing attempts continue, despite extremely dangerous sea conditions. The water is icy, so survival time in the water is very short." This year has been one of the deadliest for migrants attempting the perilous journey between France and England, one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, with at least 76 deaths reported by officials. Billant blamed human traffickers for putting lives at risk. "These are low-quality boats put into the water solely for profit by these criminal networks, which have no regard for the lives of these children, women and men," he said.

In November, a French court convicted 18 people in a migrant-smuggling trial that shed light on the lucrative but often deadly clandestine business of transporting people across the English Channel. Despite French and British efforts to stop it, the route remains a major smuggling corridor for people fleeing conflict or poverty. Migrants favour the UK for reasons of language, family ties or perceived easier access to asylum and work.

Musk vows to 'go to war' to defend H-1B visa programme; Trump sides with him

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Elon Musk has received support from President-elect Donald Trump on his stance on H-1B visas, a day after the tech billionaire vowed to "go to war" to defend the programme used to bring skilled foreign workers to the US.

Musk, who along with Indian-American tech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy has been tapped by Trump to lead his Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), argued last week that foreign workers are needed for tech companies like Musk's SpaceX and Tesla.

Musk on Friday blasted a user on X who used a video of Musk discussing SpaceX processes to

go after the billionaire's stance on the visa programme.

"The reason I'm in America along with so many critical people who built SpaceX, Tesla and hundreds of other companies that made America strong is because of H1B," Musk wrote on X.

He also used a profane quote from Tom Cruise's character in the movie "Tropic Thunder" to attack his critics.

"Take a big step back and F— YOURSELF in the face," Musk said.

Trump on Saturday sided with Musk, saying he fully backs the programme opposed by some of his supporters.

"I've always liked the visas, I have always liked in favour of

the visas. That's why we have them," Trump told the New York Post newspaper.

"I have many H-1B visas on my properties. I've been a believer in H-1B. I have used it many times. It's a great programme," Trump said.

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

The tech industry has long called for more H-1B visas to attract highly skilled workers to the US. Trump's first adminis-

tration restricted the programme in 2020, arguing that it allows businesses to replace Americans with lower-paid foreign workers.

Musk, himself once on an H-1B visa and whose electric vehicle company Tesla has hired workers using the programme, defended the tech industry's need to bring in foreign workers.

"Anyone — of any race, creed or nationality — who came to America and worked like hell to contribute to this country will forever have my respect. America is the land of freedom and opportunity. Fight with every fiber of your being to keep it that way!" he wrote on X on Friday.



Musk also lashed out at those who prioritise personal gain over the well-being of the country.

"This is the right position for

those who want America to win. For those who want America to lose for their own personal gain, I have no respect. Zero," he said in a separate post.

Musk has been consistently posting on X in favour of the programme.

"There is a permanent shortage of excellent engineering talent. It is the fundamental limiting factor in Silicon Valley," Musk wrote on December 25 on X.

Several of Trump's supporters and immigration hardliners have been increasingly pushing for scrapping the H-1B visa programme amid debate over immigration.

The debate sparked when Laura Loomer, a right-wing

influencer, criticised Trump's selection of Indian-American entrepreneur Sriram Krishnan as an adviser on artificial intelligence policy in his coming administration. Krishnan favours the ability to bring more skilled immigrants into the US.

Loomer declared the stance to be "not America First policy" and said the tech executives who have aligned themselves with Trump were doing so to enrich themselves.

The debate intensified when Ramaswamy criticised American culture for promoting mediocrity instead of focusing on academic excellence and success on the basis of merit.

"Trump's election hopefully marks the beginning of a new golden era in America, but only if our culture fully wakes up. A culture that once again prioritises achievement over normalcy; excellence over mediocrity; nerdiness over conformity; hard work over laziness," Ramaswamy said on Thursday.

He faced backlash for the comment.

In response, Musk called for removing "contemptible fools" from the Republican Party who oppose his immigration agenda.

Musk later clarified that his statement was addressing the "hateful, unrepentant racists" he considers a threat to the Republican Party's future.

Simplification to be the focus for taxation in 2025

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Simplification of direct and indirect tax policies will be the main focus area for the government in the New Year after beginning the review of the six-decade-old income tax law and rationalisation of the GST rate in 2024.

With monthly gross GST collections stabilising at around Rs 1.8 lakh crore and gross direct tax collections steadily rising at 20 per cent rate, the effort to ease compliance burden for individuals as well as corporates will gain traction.

On the GST front, individuals are awaiting a tax cut in life and health insurance premiums, which will bring down the cost of insurance, while businesses are awaiting the operationalisation of the GST Tribunal for faster dispute resolution.

Also, the work on rationalising GST rates and slabs has been put in motion with a group of ministers (GoM) deliberating on the changes, but a final decision is expected only by the GST Council, comprising the Centre and state finance ministers.

Currently, GST is a four-tier tax structure with slabs at 5 per cent, 12 per cent, 18 per cent and 28 per cent. Under GST, essential items are either exempted or taxed at the lowest slab, while luxury and demerit items attract the highest slab. Luxury goods like cars, washing machines, and demerit goods like aerated water and tobacco products attract cess on top of the highest 28 per cent slab.

On the income tax front, the government has started a review of the Income Tax Act, 1961, to make it simple

and easier to understand. Amendments to the I-T law, removing the obsolete provisions and making it concise, is likely to be tabled in Parliament as early as the Budget session.

Besides, coordination between law enforcement agencies to curb tax evasion and strengthen anti-money laundering provisions over the years has earned India the highest rating from the global financial watchdog Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in 2024.

India has been placed in "regular follow-up" -- which is the highest rating category by FATF for India's efforts to implement measures to tackle illicit finance including money laundering and terror funding. UK, France and Italy are among the only G-20 countries which have been placed in this category apart



from India.

On the GST front, tax officers grappled with fake registration for the sole purpose of fraudulently claiming input tax credit (ITC) and defrauding the exchequer. As per information shared

with the Parliament, between April-October, 2024, GST officers detected cases of Input Tax Credit evasion of Rs 35,132 crore by 17,818 fake firms and arrested 69 persons. To check fake entities, the GST Council, comprising the

Centre and states, has already brought in biometric authentication for certain suspicious businesses, under which the person seeking GST registration will be asked to go to an Aadhaar centre to have his biometrics verified.

However, with trade and industry flagging challenges faced in getting registration, the GST Council in its meeting on December 21 decided to streamline the GST registration process and tasked the tax officers to work on its implementation.

Goods and Services Tax (GST) authorities have so far been using OTP-based Aadhaar authentication to establish the identity of the applicants, seeking registration.

AMRG & Associates Senior Partner Rajat Mohan said continued emphasis on rationalizing tax slabs, reducing

litigations through a centralized appellate Tribunal, and leveraging data analytics will be crucial.

The introduction of the Invoice Matching System (IMS) in 2025 will enhance transparency and accuracy in GST filings by automating invoice reconciliation and reducing fraudulent ITC claims.

"However, the transition may pose challenges for businesses, particularly small taxpayers, who could face increased compliance costs and technical difficulties," Mohan said.

Deloitte India, Partner and Leader, Indirect Tax, Mahesh Jaising said in 2025, anticipated reforms include GST rate rationalization, particularly for real estate and insurance sectors, as examined by GoMs, alongside the operationalization of the GST

appellate tribunal. "Technology upgrades, such as expanded B2C e-invoicing and implementation of the recently launched Invoice Management System, signal the government's commitment to fostering a simplified, industry-friendly, and growth-oriented tax ecosystem," Jaising said.

Nangia Andersen LLP, Executive Director- Indirect Tax, Sivakumar Ramjee said in 2025, the Government is expected to focus on improved GST collection through GST amnesty schemes, bring clearer rules to tax Cryptos and Virtual assets, operationalize the GST tribunals, bring changes in E-way bill procedures and streamline IMS & introduction of Multi-factor authentication for accessing GSTN portal as an additional layer of security.

Stock markets to end 2024 with positive returns despite roller coaster ride

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Dalal Street had a roller coaster ride in 2024 from shattering record after record to facing heavy correction off-late but equity markets still rewarded investors with positive returns, driven by a surge in domestic fund flows and a resilient macro landscape.

The first half of the year saw robust corporate earnings, a surge in domestic flows, and a resilient macro landscape, driving the Nifty to an all-time high of 26,277.35 in September 2024, according to Motilal Oswal Wealth Management.

"In the last two months, the market has corrected from its all-time high. This correction marked the third major decline since the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, with unprecedented selling by Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) due to a combination of domestic and global factors," it said in a note.

As of December 27, the BSE benchmark Sensex has gained 6,458.81 points or 8.94 per cent while the NSE Nifty climbed 2,082 points or 9.58 per cent. The year was marked by significant events, with the Indian general elections and the US Presidential polls taking centre stage.

Equity markets also grappled with two major geopolitical turmoil -- the Israel-Iran conflict and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war.



"2024, was a year of tug of war between the bulls & bears marked by volatility majorly driven by global macroeconomic data points followed by geopolitical tensions impacting markets. Despite all the uncertainties around the world, Indian markets sustained the pressure and delivered very decent returns.

"It was also a year of surge in valuation to the peak making Indian markets the most expensive in the world. While the excess liquidity in the market pushed valuations as high as possible surpassing fundamentals theories which eventually invited corrections in the markets from the top," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP Research, Research Analyst, Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

The BSE benchmark Sensex hit its record peak of 85,978.25 on September 27 this year, and the NSE Nifty also reached

the lifetime high of 26,277.35 on the same day.

"2024 marked the ninth consecutive year of gains for the Indian equity market. Despite a challenging final quarter, the market delivered strong returns for the year, with midcap and smallcap stocks outperforming and rewarding investors handsomely.

"However, benchmark indices like the Nifty and Sensex lagged behind their global counterparts, particularly the US markets. This underperformance was largely driven by persistent and aggressive selling by FIIs," Santosh Meena, Head of Research, Swastika Investmart Ltd, said.

From the all-time highs in September, the BSE benchmark is down 8.46 per cent while Nifty has lost 9.37 per cent from the record peak level. The challenges deepened in

the final quarter as disappointing corporate earnings and weaker-than-expected economic growth further dampened investor confidence, contributing to the subdued performance of the headline indices, Meena said.

Markets came under bear attack from October onwards amid concerns of foreign investors fleeing the domestic market and stretched valuations.

In October alone, the BSE benchmark slumped 4,910.72 points or 5.82 per cent, and the Nifty tumbled 1,605.5 points or 6.22 per cent.

So far in December, the benchmark gauge Sensex is down 1,103.72 points or 1.38 per cent. October saw an unprecedented foreign fund outflow of Rs 94,017 crore -- the largest monthly withdrawal on record -- amid increased allocations to China, muted corporate earnings, and high valuation of Indian stocks.

"On a positive note, the commencement of the rate cut cycle in the US provided a key tailwind for global equity markets. However, the Indian equity market faced headwinds due to record levels of aggressive selling by FIIs. Adding to the challenges, disappointing Q2 earnings by India Inc. And a slowdown in GDP growth further dampened investor sentiment," Meena said.

In 2023, the BSE benchmark jumped 11,399.52 points or

18.73 per cent, and the Nifty climbed 3,626.1 points or 20 per cent.

"This year, apart from the general elections in India, markets saw tight rate cycle by RBI to tackle inflation, unwinding of Yen carry trade, rate cut by the US FED, election in the US and Trump getting elected as the President of the US and stimulus by China, Manish Bhandari, CEO & Portfolio Manager, Vallum Capital Advisors, said.

The recent market correction has improved valuations, and the overall outlook for the Indian equity market remains robust, Meena said.

"On the global front, the trajectory of the world economy under Trump's leadership will play a significant role in shaping investor sentiment and market dynamics. Additionally, FII flows will remain a crucial factor in determining the performance and direction of largecap stocks, given their outsized influence on market sentiment," he added.

"Factors dependent for growth would again be similar to last year like geopolitical tussle, US Fed interest rate trajectory and Donald Trump's tariff policies along with revival of local corporate earnings followed by domestic government policies to support growth. High focus would be on the dynamic relationship between the US and China," Tapse of Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Homegrown Indian liquor makers are mulling approaching food & beverage regulator FSSAI for a separate standard for the Indian single malt whisky that is rapidly scaling with the ongoing trend of premiumisation and has won several prestigious international awards.

"This will help maintain the sanctity and reputation of Indian single malt whisky -- now exported to 60 countries -- and Indian producers are discussing the move, according to Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies (CIABC), the industry body of domestic AlcoBev manufacturers.

The Indian distillers are also taking steps to get a geographical indication tag for their single malt whisky that will enhance the brand's credibility and standards.

While the sale of Indian single malt whisky rising in high double digits in the country -- the world's largest whisky market -- the industry is also facing a challenge to keep a check on the emergence of smaller single malt whisky brands.

According to CIABC Director General Anant S Iyer, the definition of FSSAI is that it should be malt-based, but it does not define single malt. Single malt whisky means that it should come from single distillery and not multiple ones.



Those not following proper standards should be restrained from claiming themselves as Indian single malt whisky, Iyer said.

"We believe that FSSAI should amend its regulations to include a separate standard applicable to Indian single malt whisky. This way, producers who are not following the required standards can be restrained from calling it Indian single malt whisky. It will also help maintain the sanctity and reputation of Indian single malt whisky," Iyer told PTI.

In recent years, Indian single malt brands, including Amrut, Paul John, Radico Khaitan's Rampur, Indri from Picadilly Industries, Gianchand from Devansons, Crazy Cock from South Seas Distilleries, and Doaab (Globus), have broken into the segment which was shadowed by the imported Scotch whisky.

In 2023, Indian single malts accounted for nearly 53 per cent of total sales, scoring over

the global brands such as Glenlivet, Macallan, Lagavulin, Glenfiddich, and Talisker in the 'desi' market, where the ASP (average selling price) is going up.

CIABC has expressed concerns over misrepresentation of the Indian single malt category by some manufacturers, calling their produce as "single malt" despite it being sourced from different distilleries.

CIABC says it undermines efforts of Indian producers who have worked hard over the years in creating a niche for Indian single malt whiskies globally.

"Now a host of other Indian domestic players are setting up and maturing Indian malt spirit, using malted Indian Barley in Oak Barrels, which are mainly imported. They are in the process of launching their own Indian single malt whisky brands in the immediate to near future," said Iyer.

Indian whiskies are finding their play in the huge whisky category worldwide dominated by scotch, American, Irish, Japanese, and Canadian whiskies, he added.

Earlier this year, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) issued its definition of single-malt and single-grain whisky, which came into effect on March 1.

According to Iyer, the definition of FSSAI is that it should be malt-based, but they do not define single malt.

Indian economy to grow at 6.5-6.8 per cent in FY25 on higher domestic consumption: Deloitte

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian economy is likely to grow at 6.5-6.8 per cent this fiscal and slightly higher between 6.7-7.3 per cent in FY2026, boosted by domestic consumption, Deloitte said on Sunday.

Deloitte India Economist Rumki Majumdar said the growth in the first half of the fiscal year 2025 turned out to be slower than estimated as election uncertainties followed by disruptions in activity due to heavy rainfall and geopolitical events weighed on domestic demand and exports.

However, India continues to show resilience in certain pockets that are worth noting -- be it in consumption trends, services growth, the rising share of high-value manufacturing in exports, or the capital market. The government's continued focus on infrastructure development, digitisation, and attracting FDI will be the additional growth booster, enhancing overall efficiency.

"We remain cautiously optimistic and expect the growth rate to remain between 6.5 and 6.8 per cent this fiscal year and slightly higher between 6.7 and 7.3 per cent in FY2026," Majumdar told PTI.

Earlier this month, the Reserve Bank of India cut its growth forecast for the current fiscal to 6.6 per cent from 7.2 per cent projected in June. Deloitte said manufacturing exports in high-value segments like electronics, semiconductors, and chemicals reflect India's strengthening position in global value chains.

Meanwhile, capital markets have shown stability despite significant FII outflows over the



past two and a half months, thanks to rising participation from retail and domestic institutional investors. "We anticipate several of these trends to persist through 2025. We believe domestic consumption will remain the cornerstone of India's economic growth, with both rural and urban demand playing key roles.

"A myriad of factors, such as improved agricultural incomes, targeted subsidies, social welfare programmes, government employment initiatives, advancements in digitisation, and stronger services sector growth will help broad-base consumption spending," Majumdar said. India will have to ride out the rough patch, as several global headwinds pose challenges. Geopolitical tensions, trade disputes, supply chain disruptions, and the escalating impact of climate change could weigh heavily on growth and long-term economic stability, she added. Anticipated policy changes and trade restrictions in the US could impact export demand and capital flows into the country. Besides, central banks in the West may not go

for as many rate cuts next year if inflation starts moving north. Tighter global liquidity will likely limit the RBI's ability to manoeuvre monetary policy. Majumdar said over the next few years, India's growth will hinge on its ability to economically decouple from global uncertainties.

"The Indian economy has the opportunity to turn the lime into lemonade by focusing on three factors. The first would be to build on its own strengths. Harnessing the demographic dividend and growing middle-class wealth through investments in workforce development and employability will drive consumption, reduce skill gaps, boost the labour market, and strengthen capital markets," she said. The second would be the emphasis on building a self-reliant manufacturing sector that will not only meet India's rising domestic demand but also integrate with the global value chain. Also, by advancing digitally delivered services and targeting high-value segments of global value chains, India can capitalise on opportunities, even amid nearshoring and deglobalisation trends.

Foodgrain output set to scale new peak in 2025 as farm sector eyes 4 per cent growth

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India is poised to achieve new heights in foodgrain production in 2025, driven by favourable monsoon, though significant challenges persist in pulses and oilseeds production as the country's agricultural sector shows signs of robust recovery.

The Agriculture Ministry's initial projections paint an optimistic picture, with kharif (summer) foodgrain production estimated at a record 164.7 million tonnes for the 2024-25 crop year ending June 2025.

Winter crop planting has maintained steady progress, with wheat sown across 29.31 million hectares as of mid-December 2024, while total rabi (winter) crops cover 55.88 million hectares. "We had a good kharif crop because of normal rainfall," Agriculture Secretary Devesh Chaturvedi told PTI.

"Overall, the crop prospect for the whole year looks promising," he added, though cautioning against potential heat waves in February-March that could affect the winter wheat harvest.

The agricultural sector is projected to bounce back strongly, with growth projections of 3.5-4 per cent in 2024-25, up from 1.4 per cent in the previous fiscal year. Agri-economist S Mahendra Dev attributes this improvement to "good monsoon and rise in rural demand". This growth comes despite localised floods and droughts affecting crops in parts of Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan. Climate change-induced weather



anomalies have particularly impacted onion and tomato yields in certain regions.

However, the path ahead isn't without hurdles. To address the persistent challenge of self-sufficiency in pulses and oilseeds, the government will roll out the National Mission on Edible Oils - Oilseeds (NMEO-Oilseeds) in 2025, backed by a substantial budget of Rs 10,103 crore. The initiative aims to reduce import dependency through targeted interventions and increased support prices.

The horticulture sector has shown remarkable progress, with record production of fruits and vegetables. The success is attributed to improved farming practices and technology adoption under various government schemes. The sector is witnessing increased technological adoption, with drones and AI-driven tools gaining traction. "These innovations offer immense potential to enhance productivity," said Ashish Dobhal, CEO of UPL Sustainable AgriSolutions. The government's flagship PM-KISAN scheme continues

to provide crucial support, having disbursed over Rs 3.46 lakh crore to more than 11 crore farmers since its 2018 launch.

Seven new agricultural schemes announced in September 2024, with a combined outlay of Rs 13,966 crore, are set for full implementation in 2025. These initiatives span various aspects of agriculture, including digital transformation, crop science, livestock health, and natural resource management.

However, farmer unrest remains a concern, particularly in Punjab and Haryana, where demands for legal MSP guarantees and other reforms persist. A parliamentary committee has suggested doubling the PM-KISAN support to Rs 12,000 per beneficiary and implementing universal crop insurance for small farmers. While farmer-producer organisations (FPOs) have expanded with 9,204 registrations, they continue to face challenges, including limited market access and weak managerial capacity, potentially affecting their long-term sustainability.

Rupee tumbles 3 pc in 2024; turbulence to ebb in slow motion in next year

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Indian rupee tumbled 3 per cent in 2024 as concerns over slower economic growth and the green buck's global strength weighed, but it was among the least volatile currencies in the world and the headwinds may be less intense in the coming year. Rupee settled at new lows as the year closed as dollar's resurgence weighed on emerging-market currencies.

The action-packed 2024 continued to impact the rupee's exchange rate against major currencies throughout, with a series of geopolitical events ranging from the Russia-Ukraine war and crisis in the Middle East to trade disruptions in the Red Sea and elections across several major economies.

Global factors, including measures taken by major central banks, have hit not only the rupee-dollar dynamics but also disrupted the exchange rates of currencies across all emerging economies.

In fact, the rupee's fall with respect to the dollar has been less than its depreciation in terms of other currencies. And it has ended up with gains compared to euro and the Japanese yen.

Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) ex-governor Shaktikanta Das also said in the central bank's December bi-monthly monetary policy that the Indian rupee has remained less volatile compared to its peers in emerging markets.

Yet, the RBI has been more active in its efforts towards



stabilising the rupee-dollar rate, thanks to increased demand for the greenback due to India's dependence on oil imports and the widening trade deficit.

"RBI was also seen intervening actively in NDF (non-deliverable forward) markets to prevent sharp depreciation of the rupee," said Naveen Mathur, Director - Commodities & Currencies, Anand Rathi Shares and Stock Brokers.

This was evident in foreign exchange reserves, which declined from the record high of USD 704.89 billion in late September to USD to USD 644.39 billion as of December 20, 2024, the lowest level in nearly six months.

The foreign currency assets also include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.

India's external challenges intensified as China's GDP growth slowed to 4.8 per cent, reducing demand for Indian exports. Besides, supply chain disruptions due to tensions in the Middle East and escalated crisis in the Red Sea hit the trade balance of several countries, including India.



DESIGN IDEAS FOR HUMAN WELLNESS



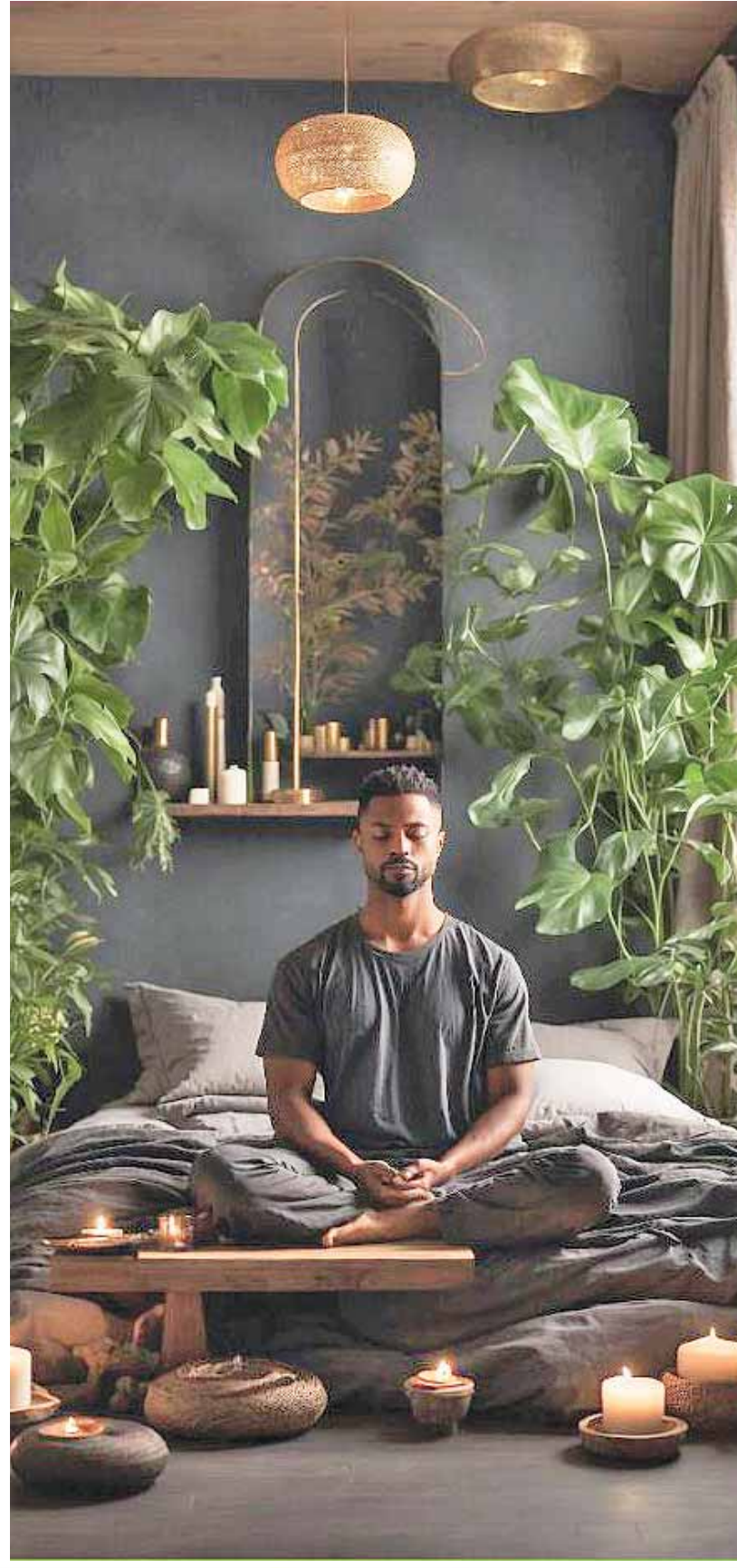
By ANURAAG BHARDWAJ

With the scaling up of urban landforms, it becomes very difficult for architects to prioritise wellness over price per square inch. We belong to the land that has rich cultural-centric heritage as well as postmodern rising towers and much diversified living environments and this takes a very new approach. This approach focuses towards more wellness centric designs that not only nurture their function or spatial needs but also has tangible effects on their physiological and emotional needs. A primary tool in this consideration is always a *biophilic design* that connects built and unbuilt environments together with methods of natural lighting, ventilation and greenery.

Traditional physical spaces showcase various features like courtyards and verandah that modern architecture can easily showcase as green roofs, vertical gardens, and open plan layouts that invite the same elements of traditional design like natural light, ventilation and greenery.

Smart Homes concepts are a great deal breakers today, by applying technology into wellness; we can greatly improve our living spaces. Simply matching the temperature of light to the function of that space greatly controls the mood and efficiency of the people using that space. Let's assume you are in your library, and you do not have ample space to place your book on that table, or there is not enough natural light available, you will always feel uncomfortable and might not use the space altogether.

The choice of material and their specifications is a challenging task in the modern competitive market, that is where the main role of an architect



jumps in, and we help you choose the best and most sustainable material non-toxic, eco-friendly materials that do not off-gas harmful chemicals enhances indoor air quality and supports a healthier environment. We tend to choose surfaces that are maintenance free, and require little to no maintenance which reduces the risk of illness.



Sustainability is deeply ingrained in traditional Indian architecture, which used locally sourced materials and passive cooling techniques to create eco-friendly structures. Reintroducing these principles in contemporary designs can reduce environmental impact while enhancing the well-being of occupants. For instance, rainwater harvesting systems, energy-efficient appliances, and solar panels not only contribute to sustainability but also ensure long-term savings and resilience. Ultimately, designing for wellness is not just about aesthetics, it is a holistic approach that combines functionality, culture, and sustainability to create spaces that nourish the mind, body, and soul.

In India, where the diversity of climates and traditions offers both challenges and opportunities, embracing wellness-focused design can transform living spaces into sanctuaries of health and happiness. As cities expand and lifestyles evolve, these principles will be pivotal in shaping a healthier, more harmonious future for all.

— The author is an architect, the founder of Anjaney Vastu and AB Architects



AYURVEDIC FOOD AND REMEDIES FOR FATTY LIVER

By MOOL MEENA

Fatty liver, a condition where excess fat accumulates in liver cells, is considered a growing health concern. Generally, poor dietary habits and a sedentary lifestyle, with excessive alcoholism, induce fatty liver disorder. Fortunately, Ayurveda-India's ancient holistic medicinal science that not only proposes natural but sustainable remedies can checkmate such ailments with their methodology to heal the body system, emphasising detoxification, maintaining an equilibrium of the human body, and good digestive health.

FATTY LIVER THROUGH AYURVEDA: Fatty liver, in Ayurveda, is caused by an imbalance of Pitta and Kapha doshas. While pitta controls metabolism and digestion, kapha deals with the stability and structure of the body. Disruption of these doshas, brought about by unhealthy diets, stress, or lack of exercise, leads to the accumulation of toxins (Ama) and fat in the liver. Ayurvedic treatments aim to detoxify the liver, stimulate the digestive fire (Agni), and restore harmony between the doshas to support liver health.

AYURVEDIC FOODS AND REMEDIES FOR LIVER HEALTH: Diet plays a central role in the approach of Ayurveda to the management of fatty liver. Incorporation of nutrient-rich foods, herbs, and spices into daily meals can significantly enhance liver function. Herbs like *Turmeric*, which contain

curcumin, are known to reduce fat accumulation in the liver due to its anti-inflammatory properties. Apart from that, *Kutki*, *Bhuiamla*, *Punarnava*, *Bhringraj*, *Triphala*, *Makoi* and *Kansi* help in fatty liver, as they detoxify the liver and improve digestion. Healing foods like *Amla* or *Indian Gooseberry* help to fortify liver cells with Vitamin C, accelerating natural detoxification. Bitter gourd and greens like spinach and fenugreek reduce oxidative stress, further helping the liver clean up. Whole grains, such as barley and millet, aid digestion, prevent spikes in blood sugar levels and ease the liver's workload. *Triphala tea*, a combination of three fruits, is highly effective in cleansing the liver and improving digestion. Liver detox water prepared with cumin, coriander, and fennel seeds help to flush out toxins and improve liver function.

THE ROLE OF LIFESTYLE IN AYURVEDIC LIVER CARE: Lifestyle plays a major role in the Ayurvedic care of the liver. Lifestyle activities, including physical exercise such as practicing *Bhujangasana* (Cobra Pose) and *Dhanurasana* (Bow Pose), stimulate liver function and increase blood flow. Dietary discipline is equally important. Processed and fried foods, excessive sugar, and alcohol must be avoided to not add more burden to the liver. Ayurveda advocates conscious eating home-cooked food, chewing food properly, and maintaining

regular meal timings to improve digestion.

AYURVEDIC HERBAL FORMULATIONS FOR FATTY LIVER: Besides dietetic and lifestyle measures specifically designed formulations for liver health in the form of Ayurvedic herbal drugs are gaining popularity. These often contain powerful herbs like *Turmeric*, *Guduchi*, and *Kalmegh* that help with detoxification and promoting liver health.

Such formulations provide a convenient way to incorporate Ayurveda into daily routines, providing a natural and effective solution for managing fatty liver. Consulting a qualified Ayurvedic practitioner before starting these remedies ensures their safe and proper use.

A HOLISTIC PATH TO RECOVERY: Ayurveda's approach to fatty liver focuses on the root cause of the condition rather than just its symptoms. Through detoxification of the liver, enhancement of bile production, and re-establishment of metabolic balance, Ayurveda brings about holistic health and well-being. Unlike conventional treatments that focus on medication alone, Ayurveda uses natural remedies with personalised dietary and lifestyle changes for sustainable health benefits. Ayurveda proves to be an excellent additional therapy for patients with liver conditions, helping them undergo a more comprehensive and efficient recovery process with the proper guidance of conventional medicine.

— The author is the COO of Sheopal's



Wanted to prove critics wrong for doubting my Test credentials: Reddy

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Nitish Reddy wanted to confute his critics and the naysayers who doubted his ability to excel in Test format, and the gritty century at the iconic MCG was his way of conveying that he belongs to highest level of cricket. A few former players, including a former chairman of selectors, were sceptical about Reddy's elevation as a Test player but with 293 runs in six innings and a batting average of 58-plus, he has answered them back in a befitting manner. Reddy's 114 formed the cornerstone of India's first Test innings score of 369 and attracted a lot of attention on the young batter. Did you ever feel that you will be highest scorer in this

team? "Some people doubted me, like a youngster who played IPL, can't perform in such a big series. I know a lot of people did talk like that," Reddy said, sharing his frustration after the end of fourth day's play. "I just want to make them feel wrong about what they have said about me and that's what I am doing, I want people to know that I am here to give my 100 percent for Indian team," the 21-year-old said and his plain speaking was as aggressive as his purposeful batting. Asked how he looks at the past one month during which his life changed, he was quick to reply: "I guess for you guys, it is like one or two months. For me, it's like, I can see my past two to three years. How hard I've been



working on my batting and bowling." A lot of people don't know that Reddy had hired side-arm throwdown experts before the start of 2024 IPL and practised against them with speed of deliveries cranking up to 145 clicks from around 18 yards. "After the first IPL season, I realised what I have to improve my batting and I came up with a plan. When I got the off-season, I worked a lot on my batting and that's what is giving results now. It's not about the one month and two months, I have done the work from last two-three years to be here." The sacrifices made by his family is well documented and the Australian media was also keen to know about the man behind the player and

the role of his father Mutyalu. "To be honest, my father had 25 years of service in central government and when I was a nobody, and hadn't played a state-level game, the first person who believed in me was my father," he was a touch emotional. "He believed in me and he resigned from his job for me. He would take me to the ground, gym, always he wanted to be with me. He made a lot of sacrifices. If I have to tell about him, time won't be sufficient but I am so grateful to have a father like him." "I helped my team in a difficult situation where we can fight back strongly. So that was a special century for me and for my father as well." Talk about Virat Kohli, the man he looked up to when he decided to pursue the game,

and he said it was a surreal moment to see his idol give him a standing ovation. "I have been watching Virat from my childhood. He is my idol and now finally I have played with him. When he scored a hundred in Perth, I was at the non-striker's end. I felt so happy. "Now, I scored a century, he appreciated me. He came to me and said that 'you really played well, you got the team back in the game'. I always dreamt about that moment and finally when he talked with me, that's the best moment for me," he said as his face beamed. Asked about the chase on the final day, Reddy said: "First we have to take their last wicket. We will come back strongly and rectify our mistakes from the first innings."

Naomi Osaka says she won't 'hang around' in tennis if the results don't come

AP ■ WELLINGTON

Four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka says she won't "hang around" in tennis if her results fail to match her high expectations. The 27-year-old Japanese player will play her first match since she suffered a back injury in the China Open in October at the ASB tennis classic in Auckland on Monday. Osaka told a pre-tournament news conference in Auckland on Sunday she was "humbled" by her form in 2024 in which she picked up her professional career after an almost 15 month break for the birth of her first child. She ended the season ranked 58. "I don't think I'm the type of player that would hang around," Osaka told reporters. "I have a lot of respect for all the players on tour, but the point of my life that I'm at right now, if I'm not above a certain ranking, I don't see myself playing for a while. "I'd rather spend time with my daughter if I'm not where I think I should be and where I feel like I can be." Osaka had a 22-17 win-loss singles record in 2024, reaching the quarterfinals at Doha and at s-Hertogenbosch in the Netherlands. "I think 2024 humbled me, but



I also feel like I grew a lot," she said. "I worked way harder than I've ever worked before. So in that, I guess it was very painful to not get the results I wanted, but I feel like I'm growing and learning and I am really excited for this year (2025). "I played really good matches. People still talk to me about my Iga (Swiatek) match at the French Open (lost 7-6 1-6 7-5). So I'm glad that I was able to give people memories as well. "Even though I got injured in Beijing, which was my last tournament, I feel pretty optimistic about how that match would have turned out (against Coco Gauff) and I am excited to play on hardcourt again." Osaka won the Australian

Open in 2019 and 2021 and the US Open in 2018 and 2020. She says she still has a deep love for tennis, despite recent injury setbacks. "I've been playing tennis since I was three, and a huge part of that I owe to my parents, but I never really saw my life doing anything else," she said. "Then, when I sat there and had the opportunity to do other things, I realized that I'd rather be playing tennis. "So it was kind of one of those realization moments where you feel like you thought you were forced to do something, but in actuality you very much truly loved it. Osaka will play Lina Glushko of Israel in the first round of the ASB Classic.

Djokovic says players have 'been kept in the dark' on Sinner, Swiatek doping breaches

AP ■ BRISBANE

On the eve of his return to the court, Novak Djokovic has weighed in on tennis' high-profile doping cases and criticised what he perceives as double standards in the sport. The former world No. 1, who is chasing a record 25th Grand Slam title at next month's Australian Open, expressed his frustration Sunday at being "kept in the dark" regarding top-ranked Jannik Sinner's doping case. Djokovic is the top seed in the Brisbane International this week, making his first appearance at the event since 2009. He will also team up with Australia's Nick Kyrgios in doubles, with the duo headlining Monday's action. Off the court, Djokovic lent his voice Sunday to Kyrgios's strong criticisms made a day earlier, speaking out at length about the ongoing doping case involving current world No. 1 Jannik Sinner. "I'm not questioning whether (Sinner) took the banned substance intentionally or not," Djokovic said at a press conference Sunday in Brisbane. "We've had plenty of players in the past and currently under suspension for not even testing positive to banned substances. "Some players with lower rankings waiting for their case to be



resolved for over a year. I've been really frustrated ... To see we've been kept in the dark for at least five months (on the Sinner case)." The International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) charged both Sinner and former women's world No. 1 Iga Swiatek with anti-doping breaches earlier in the year. Sinner tested positive twice for an anabolic steroid in March but avoided a ban after the ITIA ruled he was not at fault. The World Anti-Doping Agency has appealed the decision. Swiatek accepted a one-month suspension in November after testing positive for the banned substance trimetazidine. The Serbian further criticised the lack of transparency from tennis authorities regarding doping breaches. "The ATP hasn't really talked in depth about it. Why have they kept that case away from the

public? We see Simona Halep's case on the WTA Tour, now Iga Swiatek's case," Djokovic said. "It's not a good image for our sport. I'm just questioning the way the system works and why certain players aren't treated the same as others. Maybe some ranking reasons are behind it, or some players have more financial backing and stronger legal teams to tackle these cases." Despite his frustrations, Djokovic remains focused on the season ahead. After undergoing knee surgery earlier this year, he returned to reach the Wimbledon final but skipped the end-of-year ATP Finals, where Sinner capped a dominant season with his eighth title. Djokovic is looking to extend his legacy at Melbourne Park, where he has claimed 10 Australian Open titles, and has brought on former rival Andy Murray as his coach for the tournament. "It's strange for me to share all these kinds of insights about how I feel on the court, some of the secrets of what I'm going through, what I'm thinking about, how I see my game, with somebody who has been one of my top rivals," Djokovic said. "But I'm so glad and very thankful that he has accepted to work with me, and in Australia ... he's very meticulous, dedicated, and professional."

Ashi clinches maiden women's 3P national title

PTI ■ BHOPAL

Local shooter Ashi Chouksey overcame a strong field, that had the likes of Olympians Anjum Moudgil and Shriyanka Sadangi, to clinch her maiden national title in the 50m rifle 3-positions event here on Sunday. Ashi shot a superb 466.7, a full 3.1 points clear of two-time Olympian Anjum at her home range, the MP State Academy, during the 67th National Shooting Championship. Upcoming shooter Sakshi Sunil Padekar of Maharashtra won the bronze with an effort of 451.3. She then went on to win a silver medal in the junior women's 3P as well to round-off a successful day. Ashi, who has been in great form over the past two years and was also a part of the Paris Olympic Games trials, extended her run of good form with a solid 590 in qualifications, to get into the eight-woman match-up in third place. Bhakti Bhaskar Khamkar of Maharashtra topped the qualification field with a blazing 592, while Anjum qualified second, her effort of 590 containing more hits to the inner-10 ring than Ashi. Sakshi took the sixth spot,



while another Olympian Shriyanka Sadangi qualified seventh. In the final, however, Ashi was in a different league altogether opening up a 2.3 points gap over Anjum at the end of the first 'Kneeling' position round. She maintained the lead after the 15 shots in the second 'Prone' position also. The lead increased to 2.9 after 10-shots of the last 'Standing' position and despite a few high 9s after that, the result was never in doubt. In junior women's 3P, Karnataka's Anoushka H Thokur shot 460.5 in the final to upstage Sakshi, who settled for silver on 456.3. Haryana's Nishchal, an ISSF World Cup silver medalist last year, shot 443.9 to settle for bronze.

South Africa collapses to 116-8 against Pakistan

AP ■ CENTURION (SOUTH AFRICA)

South Africa collapsed to 116-8 against Pakistan as fast bowler Mohammad Abbas ran riot on Day 4 of the first Test with the tourists closing in on their first Test win in South Africa in 18 years on Sunday. Abbas grabbed 6-43 on his return to Test cricket after more than three years and South Africa still needed 32 runs at lunch to seal a place in next year's World Test Championship final. Tailenders Kagiso Rabada, unbeaten on 10, and Marco Jansen with 5 not out was fighting a grim battle for the home team against the relentless Abbas.



Captain Temba Bavuma's controversial dismissal punctuated a South Africa collapse as it lost four wickets for just three runs with Abbas grabbing three

off his six balls. Bavuma, who made 40, surprisingly didn't request a television review when replays suggested that Abbas' ball had brushed the

batter's pocket and didn't make contact with the inside edge of the bat but the South African skipper walked back to the dressing room. Abbas bowled an unchanged marathon spell of 13 overs, but had to wait until Aiden Markram (37) and Bavuma saw off the testing first hour. Resuming at a wobbly 27-3, with still 121 runs needed for victory, Bavuma and Markram showed plenty of patience against Abbas' probing line and length before the fast bowler finally got the breakthrough after the first drinks break. Abbas was rewarded for his brilliant seam bowling when he beat the outside edge of Markram's bat and knocked

back the off stump. Bavuma survived a couple of close chances when he successfully overturned an on-field lbw decision against him early in the day and Naseem Shah couldn't hold onto a sharp catch at fine leg as he overstepped the boundary cushion while grabbing the ball over his head. South Africa had controlled the game at 96-4 before Bavuma's dismissal saw Abbas finding the outside edges of David Bedingham (14) and Corbin Bosch's (0) bat off successive deliveries and in between Kyle Verreynne dragged Naseem Shah's delivery back onto his stumps to give Pakistan a chance for victory.

Women's coach Alexandersson announces 23-member squad for Maldives friendlies

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Indian women's football team coach Joakim Alexandersson said on Sunday selected a mix of senior and U20 players in the 23-member squad for the two international friendlies against Maldives here on December 30 and January 2. The matches will be played at the Padukone-Draavid Centre for Sports Excellence. "We have some senior women's players joining us in the Bengaluru camp so we'll have a mix of U20 and senior players for this match. We're going to try and implement



some things in tomorrow's game. "It's nice to see and train the best in the country," said the Swede, who was named chief

coach of India's women's U20 and U17 national teams earlier this month. The squad: Goalkeepers: Hempriya Seram, Maibam Linthoingambi Devi, Nandini. Defenders: Aruna Bag, Juhli Singh, Juli Kishan, Sangita Basfore, Sanju, Shivani Toppo, Sorokhaibam Ranjana Chanu, Toijam Thoibisana Chanu, Vikshit Bara. Midfielders: Grace Dangmei, Kajol Dsouza, Neha, Nongmeikapam Sibani Devi, Nitu Linda, Rimpa Haldar. Forwards: Lhingdeikim, Lynda Kom Serto, Pooja, Pyari Xaxa, Simran Gurung.

Roar by MCG crowd after Reddy's hundred is something I never heard: CA CEO Hockley

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

The collective roar of Indian fans after Nitish Kumar Reddy's maiden hundred is something that he has never heard at the MCG, and Cricket Australia's outgoing CEO Nick Hockley said on Sunday that it validated the decision to add a Test to the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. The CA's decision to increase the number of Tests for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy from four to five has proved to be a masterstroke as crowd attendance and viewership records are set to surpass the hallowed Ashes. "I want to say thank you to everyone who turned up, the atmosphere last night when Nitish Kumar Reddy scored his hundred, the roar of the crowd was something that I have ever heard," Hockley

told PTI in an exclusive interaction. The record total attendance (over five days) for a Boxing Day Test till date is 271,865 against England back in 2013 and the fourth Test involving India has already witnessed a footfall of 255,462 spectators. With two more days left, CA is expecting the attendance to go well past 300,000. Hockley couldn't be more thrilled. "Absolutely thrilled with the number of fans that have come round from all over India. It's been an absolutely incredible atmosphere as we got over a quarter million people over the gates and that's too on days one, two and three," Hockley said. "This Border-Gavaskar Trophy has had the biggest Boxing Day crowd ever pass-



ing the Ashes and the series is so delicately poised now, it is living up to every hype." Hockley, who has had a good working relationship with the BCCI, said it was a no-brainer that the four-Test series between India and Australia transformed into a five-match rubber, considering its massive following. "I think it speaks about the relations between India and Australia and fans are always excited to see these two teams. The five-Test series is what the fans deserve, players deserve. This series is likely to be alive going into Sydney. "We haven't had a full fifth day as we have had some unfinished business. I thank and am very grateful to the BCCI to have agreed to play a five-Test series. Hope it continues for the rest of the time."

Days 1, 2 and 3 in Sydney all but sold out. There is forecast of rain during the New Year's Test in Sydney but even then the Indian diaspora will throng to the grounds with very limited tickets still left for the first three days. "Sydney will be very, very full. I think there are only very few tickets left for days one, two and three. We encourage people to quickly get their tickets if they want to come on Day 4. "There is a wonderful community from India in Sydney and we expect a similar atmosphere like MCG," he noted. Excited about prospects of cricket's inclusion in Brisbane 2032, Los Angeles Olympics 2028 will witness the re-introduction of cricket at the quadrennial extravaganza and Hockley along with current

ICC chairman Jay Shah are also in talks with Local Organising Committee (LOC) of Brisbane 2032 for keeping the sport in the Games' roster. "I am super excited for cricket being in Los Angeles, 2028. It is going to be amazing. It will be an opportunity to showcase cricket to a global audience and we are very excited to host the Olympics in Brisbane in 2032. We are hopeful and excited about the prospects of cricket being part of Brisbane 2032." "It is exciting times for cricket and the Olympics. We want more people who get to see our great game. T20 cricket for men and women is incredible entertainment and it has been the starting point of our discussion as to how we can help to grow the game globally," Hockley concluded.

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