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INSIDE

WORLD 9
SOUTH KOREA TO INSPECT ITS BOEING FLEET AS IT STRUGGLES TO FIND CAUSE OF PLANE CRASH

LUCKNOW, TUESDAY DECEMBER 31, 2024; PAGES 12 & 3

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PUNJAB JAMS NORTH INDIA



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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
CHANDIGARH / NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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COLD WORSENS THE FREEZE

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

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

WEATHER

LUCKNOW
MAX 15.2°C(-5.9)
MIN 13.3°C(+5.9)

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

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THE FINAL COUNTDOWN



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

AAP in Election Mode

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

Security upgrade for New Year's eve

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

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

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

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Falling Sensex, Rising Rupee: Where is India headed?

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

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

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

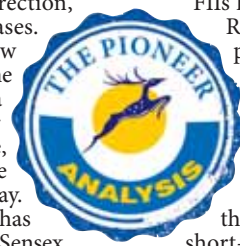
macroeconomic fundamentals remain strong with high potential bank lending, 13-year low gross non-performing assets (GNPA) at 2.5 per cent as of September 2024, expected inflation easing, and robust private spending. This correction, while concerning, does not signal a structural problem. Now, let's address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

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

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

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

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PROF. GOURAV VALLABH

Blackmailed by stalker, minor girl hangs self

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A Class VIII student ended her life on Sunday afternoon, allegedly due to blackmail by a stalker in Thakurganj here, police said on Monday. The 15-year-old girl was found hanging in her home in the Baba Hazara Bagh area of Thakurganj. Her mother discovered her and raised an alarm, but despite being rushed to the hospital, she was declared dead on arrival. The family has accused a neighbourhood youth of harassment and blackmail. According to reports, the girl hanged herself with a dupatta on the second floor of the house around 3:30 pm. Her brother stated that she had eaten lunch with their mother just 10-15 minutes before the incident. After finishing lunch, the girl went to her room. When her mother checked on her shortly after, she found her hanging from the ceiling. Horrified, she screamed for help, and neighbours rushed to her rescue. The girl was brought down and taken to hospital, where doctors declared her dead. The deceased's brother alleged that a youth named Danish, who lives in the neighbourhood, had been harassing and blackmailing his sister. "Danish used to talk to my sister about marriage after she becomes an adult. I confronted

him and scolded him, forbidding any further contact between them," he said. "However, Danish continued to force her to talk to him. When she refused, he threatened to leak morphed obscene photos and messages of her," he added. The family has demanded action against the accused, and police are investigating the matter. Meanwhile, a 28-year-old man from Bakshi Ka Talab area ended his life late on Sunday night, leaving behind a WhatsApp message for his girlfriend: "The end is the beginning, and I am leaving for that world. Take care of yourself." The youth, identified as Pawan Kumar Pandey, was reportedly distressed following a breakup and his girlfriend's recent marriage. Pawan, who was originally from Ayodhya and worked as a senior accountant at a dairy factory, hanged himself in his room. Before taking this step, he spoke to his girlfriend on a 37-second video call and uploaded a video to his social media account. The girl, a resident of Nagpur, Maharashtra, and Pawan had met through a gaming app and had developed a romantic relationship. The two had reportedly planned to marry, but her family arranged her marriage to another man on December 14, leaving Pawan devastated.

Pawan left a suicide note, typed and printed from his laptop, in which he did not hold anyone responsible for his death. In the note, he mentioned leaving his money and property to his parents. Bakshi Ka Talab police station in-charge Sanjay Kumar Singh stated that Pawan had deleted some chats from his mobile phone before his death. "The suicide note reflects his emotional turmoil, but there was no mention of blame," the officer added. In another incident, police arrested a man for fatally stabbing his own brother following a dispute over a house in Bijon district, officials said on Monday. ASP Ram Araj said that at around 9 pm on Sunday, Dinesh Saini stabbed his brother Mohit (25) to death at Dhaulagarh village under the Noorpur police station limits following a quarrel over a newly-constructed house. Meanwhile, two people travelling in an autorickshaw were killed and four others were injured when it collided with a speeding tractor in Hardoi district. Bilgram CO Ravi Prakash Singh said the collision took place on the Shahpur turn of Hardoi-Kannauj road near Parsola village on Sunday evening. Afsar (40), and Rambaksh (33), who were in the autorickshaw, died in the incident.

Row over mortgaged anklet led to attack on jeweller, say police

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A day after a jeweller was allegedly attacked and looted at his shop in Bazaarkhala, police on Monday detained an accused, stating that the attack was the result of a dispute over retrieving a mortgaged pair of anklets. The police denied any robbery took place, presenting CCTV footage that showed the suspect fleeing the scene empty-handed. The incident occurred at Triveni Jewellers under the Bazarakhala police station, where jeweller Suresh Prasad Agarwal was allegedly assaulted and robbed on Sunday. "Based on CCTV footage and interrogation, a person named Wasim has been detained," the police said. Wasim, a resident of Moti Jheel in Bazarakhala told the police that he had mortgaged his wife's anklets at the shop three months ago. On the day of the incident, he went to pay the interest on the money he had borrowed, but the shop owner

informed him that the amount he was offering was insufficient. Wasim then went home to fetch the additional money from his wife, who asked him to pay the full amount and retrieve her anklet. Upon returning to the shop, Wasim, in an inebriated state, got into an altercation with the shop owner. When Suresh Prasad Agarwal refused to return the anklet, Wasim, in a fit of rage, struck him on the head with a plier before fleeing the scene. The CCTV footage shows Wasim entering and exiting the shop without anything in his hands. "Prima facie, this incident does not appear to be a case of robbery but rather a dispute and assault over a mortgaged anklet. The accused, Wasim, is in custody, and the pliers used in the attack have been seized by the police," they added. A police spokesman confirmed that further legal proceedings in the case are being handled by the Bazarakhala police.

CM holds review meeting on construction of 3 universities

LUCKNOW (PTI): Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Monday held a review meeting to discuss progress in the construction of three universities in the state and directed for the appointment of employees for as soon as possible.



Adityanath also asked the vice chancellors of the three new universities — Maa Pateshwari University Balrampur, Maa Vindhya Vasini University Mirzapur and Guru Jambheshwar University Moradabad — about the status of the construction work, the UP government said in a statement. He told the VCs that the construction of these universities should be completed on time. He also directed that the construction work should be done in a phased manner. The chief minister said that a committee of the university administration, the implementing agency and the local administration should be formed and the construction work should be reviewed from time to time. The VCs should ensure that the

construction work is of good quality, the statement said. Adityanath said that the Higher Education Department should monitor the projects every 15 days, and in case of any hindrance in the work, the VCs should communicate with the respective district magistrate. The chief minister also directed the officials of the department to appoint regular employees in the universities under construction as soon as possible, so that other works can also be carried out smoothly. He said that the logo, motto and anthem of these universi-

ties should be prepared. For this, competitions should also be organised. He also directed that the help of scholars should be taken in the creation of 'Kulgeet' (university anthem) for these under-construction varsities. It should be prepared keeping in mind the heritage of the concerned district, according to the statement. Higher Education Minister Yogendra Upadhyay, Minister of State Rajni Tiwari and VCs of some universities were also present in the meeting, it added.

CLASSIFIEDS

NOTICE

The original sale deed dated 02.08.2003 Serial no 3321 and trust deed dated 18.06.2002 Serial no 342 related to Mauja Katri Khyora Kanpur Nagar situated at my Araji number 2151 and 2152 have been lost, the use of which by others would be illegal. Raghavendra Pratap Singh S/o Hawaldar Singh. R/o 158 Lakhanpur, Kanpur

CHANGE NAME

Avinash kashodhan appeared ICSE (2020) and ISC (2022). My parents name were incorrectly printed as Pushpendra Kumar kashodhan and Archana kashodhan. The correct name are Puspendra kumar vaish and Archana vaish. Address 78/99 Punjabi Mohalla New Ganeshganj Lucknow

सूचना

संबन्धित हो कि मेरा शुद्ध नाम ATUL CHANDRA PRAKASH PANDEY है, परन्तु कुछ शैक्षिक अभिलेखों में त्रुटिपूर्ण PANDEY ATUL KUMAR CHANDRAPRAKASH हो गया है। अतः आज के बाद मुझे मेरा शुद्ध नाम ATUL CHANDRA PRAKASH PANDEY के नाम से पढ़ा लिखा एवं सम्झा जाए। ATUL CHANDRAPRAKASH PANDEY S/o CHANDRA PRAKASH PANDEY-Add-1 Built on part of plot No-14 and 15 Shaheed Bhagat Singh Marg Takrohi Lucknow

NOTICE

I Dr. Kirti Agarwal, owner of Shop No. 0221, Shopping Square -I, Sector D, Sushant golf city, Sultanpur Road, Lucknow. U.P. would like to inform that the allotment letter for the above mentioned shop has been lost.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from MANOJ KUMAR BHARGAVA TO MANOJ BHARGAVA S/o KAILASH NATH BHARGAVA R/o -E 39 Moti Vihar Ganga 117/K/13 Sarvodaya Nagar KANPUR for future purpose

NOTICE

I, No. 6944925X, L/Nk Giresh Kumar, resident of Belabhela, Uttarpara, Raebareilly, 229402, hereby inform that the names of my parents recorded in my service record as Ashok Kumar and Mithlesh are incorrect. The correct names are Ashok Kumar Tiwari and Mithlesh Tiwari.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from MOHAMMAD ANUS SAMIM TO MOHAMMAD ANAS SHAMEEM S/o SAMIM AHMAD R/O 27, Qila UNNAO for future purpose

NOTICE

I have Changed my name from Mohd Intiyaz to Mohd Intiyaz for all future purpose. Mohd Intiyaz S/O Mohd Yunus R/O 11/188-A, Maqbara Gwaltoli Kanpur Nagar

NOTICE

My Previous Name Markush Jarj S/o Jarj Janson This name is Aadhar card after marriage my name Aman Singh. At this time publically Aman Singh S/o Jarj Janson, All Government's record Aman Singh S/o Jarj Janson, Aman Singh S/o Jarj Janson R/o 24, Cantt Kanpur Nagar

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Trapiti Gupta to Trapti Gupta in future I shall be known Trapti Gupta w/o Gopal Gupta R/o 28/11, first floor, Pheelkhana Kanpur Nagar

NOTICE

PUBLIC NOTICE
Be inform that my client Aditya Birla Finance Ltd intends to provide a finance to one of its clients M/s. 12 Jyotirlingam & Hotel Lawn, Ashutosh Singh & Pallvi Singh against their property being Office space with land admeasuring 400 sq. fts. built over plot No. 7/1, being part of Khasra No. 828, situated at Para, Ward-1, Alamnagar, Lucknow and in chain of title of said property being original sale-deed dated 10.06.2005 (document No. 4226) favoring the ex-owner Maa Shagwati Vidya Mandir Public School, through its manager Smt. Renu Saha Singh, is allegedly lost and misplaced. If any person has any right, title or interest over the said property, he may approach to the undersigned within seven days in writing along with the evidence of his such right, title or interest and if no such objection will be received within the said period it will be presumed that the property in question is free from all encumbrances and any claim in respect thereof against owner shall be void and ineffective. (Tarak Prakash Srivastava) Advocate, Mob.: 9335914262 Office: Room No. 111, City Hotel, 24, B.N. Road, Lalbagh, Lucknow.

NOTICE

I have Changed my name from Sunil Kumar Tiwari to Sunil Tiwari S/o Late Shiv Mangal Prasad Tiwari R/o- 128/90 D-Block, Kidwai Nagar, Kanpur Nagar. Now I should be known by this name only.

NOTICE

I, KUMARI BIMALA W/O OMPRAKASH SACHDEV RESIDING AT FLAT NO-102, 1st FLOOR, MURLI DHAAM APARTMENT, GOVIND NAGAR, KANPUR NAGAR-208006 HAVE CHANGED MY NAME FROM KUMARI BIMALA TO BIMLA SACHDEV VIDE AFFIDAVIT NO-86AE-403344 DATED 12/12/2024 AT KANPUR NAGAR.

Two killed in separate road mishaps

Lucknow (PNS): A labourer and a woman lost their lives after being hit by high-speed vehicles in two separate incidents here on Monday. Police have sent both bodies for post-mortem. According to the police, Raja alias Pappu Kashyap (48) resided with his wife, Chanda Devi, in Bani village, Banthra. He worked as a labourer at a dhaba near the Amazon office in the area. At around 10 am on Monday, Pappu was cycling to work when a speeding pickup truck struck him near the Dhaba, leaving him severely injured. The police reached the scene and transported the injured man to the Sarojinagar Community Health Centre by an ambulance. However, he succumbed to injuries during treatment. Pappu is survived by wife, Chanda Devi, and two married daughters, Ritu and Radha. After the accident, the pickup driver fled the scene. In a separate incident, Maya Devi (50), a woman from Asoha in Unnao district, was killed in a road accident. She was travelling with her son, Vikas, to Lucknow for medical treatment on Monday morning. At around 9:30 am, near Ummed Kheda village in Banthra, a speeding dumper collided with their bike from behind. Maya Devi was injured in the crash and was rushed to KGMU Trauma Centre where she died. After the incident, the dumper driver abandoned the vehicle and fled the scene.

STF busts gang making fake documents for railway, Army exam candidates

PTI ■ BALLIA

The Special Task Force (STF) of Uttar Pradesh Police has busted an interstate organised gang that illegally got the youngsters enrolled in the railway and Army competitive examinations in West Bengal and the northeastern states by preparing fake residence certificates and Aadhaar cards. Police sources on Monday said the Varanasi unit of the STF raided Jamui village of Ballia city police station on Sunday and arrested a fraudster named Shashi Bhushan Upadhyay. A case has been registered in Ballia city police station on the complaint of STF Inspector Puneet Parihar. Citing the FIR, they said the Varanasi unit of the STF had received information that candidates residing in UP from the areas around Ballia district are using fake residence certificates of West Bengal, especially Kolkata, to appear in competitive examinations. An

organised gang is working on this, they added. Sources said during the investigation it was revealed that a person named Shashi Bhushan Upadhyay gets fake residence certificates made for people to help them appear in Army, railway and other government job examinations. He said on Sunday, based on information, the STF arrested Upadhyay, a resident of Chandpur village of Bansdih police station area of Ballia district, and recovered a large number of fake residence certificates from him. According to the FIR, Upadhyay told to police during interrogation that he gets fake residence certificates of West Bengal, especially Kolkata, made for the youth of Ballia and surrounding areas. On the basis of this, they appear in Army and railway recruitment examinations in West Bengal and northeastern states. He used to charge up to Rs 3 lakh for making one certificate. According to sources,

Upadhyay gets fake residence certificates and Aadhaar cards made with the help of people named Mithun Karmakar, Manoj Kumar Singh and Rajan Singh, who are residents of West Bengal. Upadhyay also revealed during interrogation that he has got more than 1,000 fake residence certificates made so far. He himself joined the Army in 2000 on the basis of fake documents. Fearing that he would be caught during the certificate verification, he left the training midway and fled, the FIR said.

DRUG SMUGGLER GIVES POLICE THE SLIP
Barabanki: A drug smuggler who was arrested with morphine here escaped from police custody following which two policemen including a sub-inspector were suspended and a case was lodged against a home guard jawan, officials said on Monday. Superintendent of Police Dinesh Kumar Singh said

Asgar Ali from Mohammadpur village of Subeha area, was arrested near Ratauli underpass late Saturday. Police seized 252 grams of morphine worth Rs 25 lakh from him, Singh said and added that he was brought to the police station and was put in a lock-up. On Sunday afternoon when the accused got himself out of the lock-up on the pretext of using the toilet, he pushed Home Guard Constable Vinod Pathak and escaped with handcuffs on the officer said. He said that several police teams have been formed to nab the accused. The SP said Inspector Shobhit Shukla and constable Faheem Ahmed who were on the night duty were suspended and a case has been registered against Home Guards Constable Vinod Pathak in the matter. Singh said SWAT and surveillance teams of the crime branch of police have been formed to apprehend the absconding smuggler.

Man found dead, kin allege murder

Lucknow (PNS): A man was found dead under mysterious circumstances in Thakurganj on Monday. His filed a complaint with police, suspecting foul play.

The police reached the scene of the incident, conducted an investigation, and sent the body for postmortem. The victim, Shatrughan Rathore (50), a resident of New Haiderganj Colony, was discovered in his house on Monday morning. Neighbours alerted both the police and the family about the incident. His family believes that he was murdered. The police team, which arrived after receiving the information, investigated the scene. The family members, devastated by the loss, were inconsolable. Shatrughan's wife told the police that when they first found him, blood was coming from his ear. DCP (West) Vishwajeet Srivastava, in a video statement, said that Shatrughan's wife reported hearing a commotion, followed by the discovery of her husband lying on the bed with blood flowing from his ear and his shirt soaked in blood. Srivastava said that the police were exploring all possible angles. The deceased's wife also mentioned that she called her brother and neighbours, who rushed him to KGMU Trauma Centre, where he was declared dead by doctors. It was revealed that the door to the room, where Shatrughan's wife and children were resting, was locked from the outside. The victim's nephew, Ankit, stated that his sister had called them, saying there was a commotion in the father's room. The victim's brother-in-law, Ramu Rathore, also called for an investigation to determine who locked the door, preventing entry to the room and possibly hindering the victim's wife from intervening. Further investigation is underway.

Groom, father booked for dowry demand

Bhadohi (PTI): A man, his father and elder brother have been booked for allegedly demanding a dowry of Rs 10 lakh, following a court order, police said on Monday. The accused have been identified as — Brijesh Kumar Mishra, his father Om Prakash Mishra (57) and elder brother Akhilesh — residents of Kanwal village, officials said. They allegedly refused to proceed with the wedding procession unless the dowry demand was met, leaving the bride's family distressed, the police said. According to police Brijesh was set to marry the bride, Pragya Dubey, daughter of Ravi Kant Dubey (51) from

Matiyari village in Mirzapur district on April 18, 2024. However, shortly before the wedding the groom's family allegedly demanded an additional Rs 10 lakh in dowry, threatening to cancel the marriage if their demand was not fulfilled, a police officer said. The bride's father filed a petition in court on March 7, 2024, after attempts to resolve the matter with local police yielded no results, he said. On December 29, the court of Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate (Women Harassment) Harkiran Kaur directed the registration of a case under the Dowry Prohibition Act against the accused, he added.

Station House Officer (SHO) Arun Kumar Dubey said that a case has been registered following the court's order. The wedding was arranged with mutual consent and the ceremonial rituals were completed on December 15, 2023, with the participation from both families, the SHO said. The situation escalated as the wedding day approached and the groom's family allegedly made the dowry demand, he said. The cannabis was concealed in four sacks and kept in the rear seat and the trunk of the accused's car, the police said. The recovered ganja is worth Rs 50 lakh, they said. During interrogation, Singh disclosed that he along with his other associates, used to bring ganja from Odisha and Bihar and supply it to various places in the nearby districts. A case has been registered against the accused and he has been sent to jail, they said.

gler and recovered ganja worth Rs 50 lakh from him, police said on Monday. Prabhat Singh alias Veeru Singh, a resident of Kachhwa area, was held with 100 kg of ganja. The cannabis was concealed in four sacks and kept in the rear seat and the trunk of the accused's car, the police said. The recovered ganja is worth Rs 50 lakh, they said. During interrogation, Singh disclosed that he along with his other associates, used to bring ganja from Odisha and Bihar and supply it to various places in the nearby districts. A case has been registered against the accused and he has been sent to jail, they said.

Agreement on transition to solar power likely by second week next year

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A meeting was held by the Lucknow Development Authority (LDA) on Monday to discuss the strategy for a complete transition to solar energy. The meeting was chaired by Divisional Commissioner Roshan Jacob. An agreement for this changeover is expected to be signed by the second week of January next year. Interestingly, the LDA had been planning a major switch to solar energy for the past five years, but the initiative had failed to materialise for unknown reasons. The proposal to transition had been revisited every two to three years, with several meetings held between LDA officials and representatives of solar energy companies. However, the discussions eventually faded away over time. This meeting, however, holds more promise for the proposal's success due to the direct involvement of the divisional commissioner, who also serves as the ex-officio chairperson of the LDA. The plan this time includes the introduction of solar energy in parks managed by the LDA for illumination and other purposes. LDA Vice-Chairman Prathmesh Kumar stated that the shift to solar energy is part of their economic strategy to reduce the mounting power bills, which have become a significant financial burden on the state exchequer. Given the LDA's ongoing financial challenges, the accounts department has urged a reduction in overall expenditure, particularly in power consumption. The VC highlighted that cutting energy costs through solar power would offer substantial savings for the LDA.

Two held for vandalising statue of ex-minister

Ballia (PTI): Police on Monday arrested two men for allegedly vandalising a statue of former Uttar Pradesh minister Shardanand Anchal in this district's Chitbaragaon area, a senior officer said. Superintendent of Police Omvir Singh told reporters that Vishal Yadav and Vicky were arrested from near the river culvert of Chitbaragaon on Monday. Fragments of the statue were also seized from them, Singh added. The life-size statue, installed by former Rampur Chit village head Krishna Yadav in 2013, was vandalised and its head severed on December 25. Anchal was a Samajwadi Party leader and had served as a minister in a Mulayam Singh Yadav government. Acting on Krishna Yadav's complaint, a case was registered against unidentified people under Section 298 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita on December 26.



People wrapped in woollens during a cold winter day in Lucknow on Monday

Yogi to inaugurate Bio-CNG plant in Prayagraj today

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath will visit Prayagraj on Tuesday to review the preparations for Maha Kumbh, marking his fifth visit to the city this month. During his visit, he will inaugurate the Bio-CNG plant in Naini, a significant project for the region. The chief minister will also inspect the steel bridge constructed parallel to the Ganga Setu, along with Sangam Airavat Ghat and Sangam Nose Ghat. He is expected to spend approximately four hours in Prayagraj, during which he will hold a review meeting at the ICCC auditorium and conduct a ground inspection of various routes. Earlier this month, the chief minister visited Prayagraj on December 7, 12, 13, and 23. On Tuesday, CM Yogi is scheduled to arrive at the DPS Prayagraj helipad at around 11:55 am. From there, he will head directly to the Naini Bio-CNG plant to inaugurate the project. He will then visit Sangam Airavat Ghat and Sangam Nose Ghat for inspections.

Subsequently, from 1:20 pm to 2:20 pm, he will review the progress of Maha Kumbh preparations at the ICCC auditorium, set up by the Prayagraj Mela Authority. Following this, he will inspect the steel bridge parallel to the Ganga Setu and conduct a ground survey of various routes before departing for Lucknow from the Police Line helipad. The Bio-CNG plant will produce 21.5 tonnes of bio-CNG and 209 tonnes of organic fertiliser daily. It will utilise 200 tonnes of wet waste generated daily in Prayagraj from households, hotels, restaurants, and temples. This initiative is aimed not only at addressing waste management but also at generating an annual revenue of Rs 53 lakh for the Prayagraj Municipal Corporation. Vegetables, fruits, flowers, and leftover food that were previously discarded will now be transformed into 21,500 kg of bio-CNG and 209 tonnes of organic manure every day. The plant, with a total capacity of 343 tonnes per day, will produce 21.5 tonnes of bio-CNG, 109 tonnes of solid

organic manure, and 100 tonnes of liquid organic manure daily. In its first phase, the processing of urban waste with a capacity of 200 tonnes has been completed. Work on utilising an additional 143 tonnes of paddy straw and cow dung for gas production is currently underway. Built on a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model, the plant is located on 12.49 acres of land provided by the Prayagraj Municipal Corporation near Arail Ghat in Jahangirabad, Naini. It is being operated by EverEnviro Resource Management Private Limited under a 25-year agreement with the Municipal Corporation. Following this period, the plant's operations will be handed over to the municipal corporation. The plant will consume approximately 1,250 units of electricity daily for its operation. The Bio-CNG plant in Naini, by converting organic waste into energy, will significantly contribute to environmental sustainability by reduc-

ing approximately 56,700 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions annually. This initiative not only diverts waste from landfills but also mitigates greenhouse gas emissions. Built at a cost of Rs 125 crore, the plant will supply Bio-CNG to industrial and retail customers across Uttar Pradesh, including Prayagraj. The project is expected to generate employment for around 200 people, providing direct employment to 25 personnel and creating indirect job opportunities for over 100 individuals. Additionally, it will contribute to the local economy by fostering economic activities around waste management and renewable energy production. According to Prayagraj Municipal Corporation Commissioner Chandra Mohan Garg, the establishment of this plant will generate revenue for the corporation while managing the disposal of 200 tonnes of wet waste daily. The plant is set to become a milestone in enhancing air quality and advancing sustainable development in the region.

160,000 tents, 150,000 toilets, 1,250-km pipeline — UP readies for Maha Kumbh

Mahakumbh Nagar (PTI): As 2024 draws to a close, the entire state machinery in Uttar Pradesh has converged upon Sangam, the sacred confluence of Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati river in Prayagraj, racing against time to finalise the preparations for the Maha Kumbh beginning January 13. For the past two months, an army of workers has been diligently channeling the rivers, widening roads, and leveling the ghats to transform the region in anticipation of one of the largest religious events in the world. Speaking during his monthly 'Mann ki Baat' programme on Sunday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi described the mega event as the "Maha Kumbh of unity", as he urged people to return from the grand congregation with the resolve to banish hate and division from the society. "Maha Kumbh ka sandesh, ek ho pura desh (Message from Maha Kumbh — entire country should unite), the prime minister said, adding that Maha Kumbh's speciality lies not just in its vastness, but also in its diversity. Held every 12 years, the Maha Kumbh will begin on 'Paush

Poornima' on January 13, and conclude on 'Maha Shivratri' after 45 days on February 26. The event draws millions of pilgrims to the banks of Ganga at Sangam, and this year, the state government is expecting a staggering 40 crore devotees to take the holy dip and make the Maha Kumbh the largest religious gathering in the world. The monumental task of preparing for such an event includes meticulous planning and extensive logistics. The authorities are overseeing the installation of 160,000 tents, 150,000 toilets to be serviced by 15,000 sanitation workers, 1,250-km of pipeline, 67,000 LED lights, 2,000 solar lights, and 300,000 plants to give the area a complete makeover. In addition, nine paved ghats, seven riverfront roads, and 12 km of temporary ghats are under construction. Seven bus stands are also being built, while over 1.5 million square feet of murals and street paintings have been commissioned to adorn the area. However, the monumental task comes with its challenges. Erosions have eaten away Ganga's banks, pushing the river away from its original course and reducing the land

available for the Maha Kumbh. In addition, five years of river encroachment swallowed up 3,200 hectares of land used for the 2019 Kumbh. However, officials have risen to the challenge, reclaiming the 3,200 hectares and adding an additional 800 hectares to ensure that the event's scale remains as grand as ever. The 4,000 hectares of land now being prepared is a feat in itself. When asked if the preparations would be completed by January 10, a senior official likened the work to the preparations for a grand Indian wedding, saying, "Even if you begin preparations six months in advance for a wedding, work continues until the moment the 'baraat' arrives." The official, however, reassured that everything will be ready as per schedule. The work to prepare the area began in earnest in October, when experts from the irrigation department, in consultation with the Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati, started channeling the rivers to create additional ghats for the influx of pilgrims. Due to erosions at Sangam, land along the banks had been drastically reduced, with Ganga shifting anywhere from 200 to

500 metres. Mela Adhikari (fair-in-charge) Vijay Kiran Anand said, "Between 2019 and 2024, Ganga has moved significantly, decreasing the available land for the Kumbh." With just a fortnight remaining until Makar Sankranti — when the first auspicious dip, or 'Rajasi Snaan', will take place — the pace of work has intensified. Driving into the Sangam area, one is immediately greeted by groups of workers constructing barricades, shelters, and temporary restrooms, while artists paint vibrant murals and messages of welcome on the walls. The event is not just another religious festival; for the Uttar Pradesh government, it is a matter of prestige. The preparations are receiving the same level of attention as the Ram Temple consecration in Ayodhya earlier this year. The government is also aiming higher this time around. In 2019, around 24 crore people attended the Kumbh, but this year, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has stated that over 40 crore pilgrims are expected to attend the Maha Kumbh. To accommodate this unprecedented influx, the 4,000-hectare Kumbh ground has been divided into 25 sectors on both sides of the river.



Devotees gather to take a holy dip in the River Ganga ahead of Maha Kumbh, at Sangam in Prayagraj on Monday

Of digital innovation and transparent land allocation!

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is turning Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a 'Digital Maha Kumbh' into reality with comprehensive civic amenities in record time. For the first time, the Maha Kumbh fair is being organised digitally. Through the 'Mahakumbh Land and Facility Allocation' portal, land and facilities can be accessed with a single click, officials said here. The Prayagraj Mela Authority is ensuring complete transparency and departmental accountability in land allocation and basic services for the fair. Applicants can submit online applications and track the status of their allocated land and provided facilities at any time, they added. In Kumbh 2019, the details and allocations of over 5,500 insti-

First baby girl born in Mahakumbh Nagar

Mahakumbh Nagar (PNS): The Central Hospital in Mahakumbh Nagar has started providing critical healthcare services ahead of the official commencement of the grand event. On Monday, the hospital facilitated the delivery of a baby girl, marking the second consecutive day of deliveries. This newborn holds special significance as the first female infant born at the hospital during Maha Kumbh. With the consent of both the hospital and the family, the baby has been named 'Ganga', symbolising purity and the sacred essence of the festival. The delivery was carried out by a team of doctors led by

Dr Gaurav Dubey. Notably, on Sunday, Dr Dubey's team also oversaw the delivery of the first baby boy born during Maha Kumbh, who was named 'Kumbh'. Dr Gaurav Dubey, representing the Central Hospital, shared that the baby girl was born at 12:08 pm on Monday through the efforts of a skilled medical team comprising Dr Pramila and Dr Panshi. The parents, Shivkumari and Rajel, residents of Banda district, consider the birth of their daughter in Maha Kumbh a blessing from Mother Ganga, inspiring her name.

tutions were digitised. This time, land is being allocated to over 10,000 institutions, including government, emergency, social, and religious organisations. This transparent system ensures that saints and institutions can complete their work easily and promptly without standing in long queues, officials said. Maha Kumbh is a grand event of Sanatan Dharma. In this 'Amrit Mahotsav Mahakumbh' of the Amrit Kaal era, more than 40 crore devotees are expected to visit Prayagraj to take a holy dip in faith. Additionally, lakhs of people will observe Kalpavas during the Maha Kumbh, they added. According to Additional Mela Officer Vivek Chaturvedi, a GIS-based map has been utilised to design the layout of the Kumbh Mela, spanning 4,000 hectares across 25 sectors. Pre- and post-monsoon drone surveys were conducted to create precise topographic maps of

the land. These surveys resulted in the preparation of high-resolution maps, GIS-based layers, and geo-referenced CAD files with an accuracy of 0.5 cm. Key public utilities and emergency service locations, including police stations, checkpoints, command and control centres, hospitals, parking areas, food courts, vending zones, toilets, pontoon bridges, and roads, have been made accessible to devotees via Google Maps for ease and convenience. To ensure transparency and equal opportunities, the Prayagraj Mela Authority has accepted applications even from institutions that participated in Kumbh 2019. For this, the authority conducted extensive publicity through local and national newspapers and invited applications on its portal from October 29 to November 12.

Dedicated entry and exit routes at all stations

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The Prayagraj Railway Division is nearing completion of its preparations for Maha Kumbh 2025, aiming to provide a seamless experience for the millions of devotees travelling to the festival by train. As part of the preparations, the division has announced dedicated entry and exit routes at all stations to handle the surge of pilgrims during key bathing festivals like Makar Sankranti, Mauni Amavasya, Vasant Panchami, and Maghi Purnima. To avoid chaos, separate pathways will be used for entry and exit, safeguarding the

flow of devotees. With an estimated 45 crore devotees attending the Maha Kumbh, around 10 crore are expected to travel to Prayagraj by train, officials said here. In response, the Prayagraj Railway Division has planned to run approximately 13,000 trains, including 3,000 special fair trains, as part of efforts by the double-engine government to ensure the success of the event. Public Relations Officer Amit Singh outlined the entry and exit plan for Prayagraj Railway Division stations during the main bathing festivals of Maha Kumbh. "At Prayagraj Junction, entry will be allowed only from the

city side via platform No. 1, while exit will be restricted to the Civil Lines side," he stated. Besides, unreserved passengers will be guided to the appropriate train and platform through designated passenger shelter areas, organised direction-wise according to their destination station, he informed. For reserved or pre-reserved passengers, a separate entry point has been designated at gate number 5 on the city side of Prayagraj Junction. Similarly, at Naini Junction, entry will be permitted only from Station Road, with exit limited to the second entrance towards the warehouse (maalgodam).

At Prayagraj Chheoki station, entry will be via the COD road connecting the Prayagraj-Mirzapur highway, while exit will be through GEC Naini Road. On the days of bathing festivals, entry to Subedarganj station will be permitted only from Jhalwa, Kaushambi Road, while exit will be allowed exclusively from GT Road. At Prayagraj Junction, entry will be through Chatham Line at Platform No. 1, and exit via Rampriya Road at Platform No. 4. However, passengers, whether reserved or unreserved, will be granted entry only through the second entrance on Sahason Road.

At Phaphamau station, entry will be restricted to the second entrance at Platform No. 4, and exit will be from Phaphamau Market. For Prayagraj Rambagh station, entry will be allowed only from the main entrance at Hanuman Mandir Chauraha, with exit restricted to Louder Road. Meanwhile, Prayagraj Sangam and Daraganj stations will remain closed during the main bathing festivals as they are situated within the fair area. To accommodate devotees arriving for Maha Kumbh, passenger shelters have been set up at all Prayagraj stations, capable of housing 3,000 to 4,000 passengers.

SP delegation gives ₹5 lakh each to families of Sambhal violence victims

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A Samajwadi Party (SP) delegation on Monday visited Sambhal and distributed cheques of Rs 5 lakh each to the families of those killed in the November 24 violence in the district during a court-ordered survey of a mosque. The cheques were distributed by Leader of Opposition Mata Prasad Pandey, who led the SP delegation, at the Public Works Department guest house. He also interacted with the victims' families. Speaking to reporters, Pandey alleged that police are harassing Muslims and that the government has no sympathy for them. "They only know (underworld don) Dawood Ibrahim, they do not know Abdul Hamid or Brigadier Usman who sacrificed their lives for the security of the country's borders," he said. "They do not have goodwill in their hearts, they are creating tension between Hindus and Muslims," the SP leader said. Pandey further accused the BJP of creating bitterness among people for its benefit.



"Police have said that those killed in the violence were not shot by them. Whenever illegal weapons are seized, they keep them in a storehouse and when needed, they take them out and claim that the deceased were not killed by police bullets," he said. Four people were killed and more than 25, including security personnel, injured in violence that broke out in the Kot Garvi area here on November 24 when some locals clashed with police following a court-ordered survey of the Shahi Jama Masjid over a petition which claimed that a Harihar temple previously stood at the site. After the violence, the entry of outsiders into the district was banned. A delegation of SP MPs that had gone to visit Sambhal was stopped by police.

CPI (ML) flays 'barbaric attack' on Dalit man

Lucknow (PNS): The Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) on Monday condemned the recent incident in Fatehpur district, where a 47-year-old Dalit man was paraded after his head was shaved and he was beaten. Describing the act as barbaric, the party called for an impartial investigation, the arrest of the perpetrators, and strict punishment. CPI (ML) state secretary Sudhakar Yadav, in a statement issued on Monday, highlighted the rising morale of "Manuwadi feudal elements with an anti-Dalit mindset under the current Yogi Adityanath-led government". The incident occurred on December 27 in Behlopur Alai village, where a Dalit man named Shivbadan was attacked by the accused, who alleged that he was pressuring people to convert to Christianity. The attackers beat his entire family, including his wife and children, and dragged Shivbadan to a temple where they shaved his head, beat him with shoes, paraded him to another temple, forced him

to recite Hanuman Chalisa, and then beat him again. According to the victim, the accused were upper-caste individuals and members of the Bajrang Dal. Yadav stated that the police initially refused to register an FIR, but after pressure, they registered the FIR from the victim and also filed a counter-FIR on behalf of the accused. He further demanded that the Human Rights Commission take note of this shameful incident, which, he argued, violated the principles of humanity and the Constitution. Criticising the government's claims of promoting a "developed India", Yadav emphasised that such incidents were still occurring in the state. He also condemned Home Minister Amit Shah for allegedly insulting Dr BR Ambedkar's legacy and the Constitution. Yadav questioned "whether the BJP's vision of a developed India was based on Manusmriti, the ancient text that enforces caste-based discrimination".

ARYAVART BANK **आर्यावर्त बैंक**

(A Joint Undertaking of Govt. of India, U.P. Govt. & Bank of India) (भारत सरकार, उत्तर प्रदेश सरकार एवं बैंक ऑफ इण्डिया का संयुक्त उपक्रम)

Regional Office: Lucknow Aryavart Bhawan 569/20/K/1 Sneh Nagar VIP Road Opp Awadh Hospital Alambagh Lucknow

Possession Notice Under Rule-8(1) (for Imovable Properties)

Whereas, the undersigned being the Authorized officer of ARYAVART BANK, under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Securities Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with rule 3 of the securities Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a Demand notice in the account mentioned hereunder on the dates mentioned before the names calling upon the borrower and guarantor to repay the amount mentioned in the notices along with interest within 60 days from the date of receipt said notices. The borrower/legal heirs of borrower and guarantor having failed to repay the amount, notices are hereby given to the Borrower/legal Heirs of borrower and guarantor in particular and the public in general that the undersigned has taken the possession of the properties described here below in exercise of power of conferred on him under sub-section 13(4) of the Act read with Rule 8 of the said Rules on the dates mentioned against each property. The borrower/legal Heirs of borrower in particular and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the property. Any dealing with the under noted property will be subject to the charge of ARYAVART BANK for the amount with interest and other charges etc. thereon. **The Borrower's/Guarantors attention is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of Section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets**

Details of Properties whose possession has been taken are as follows:-

Name & Address of the Borrowers/Guarantors/Branch	Description of the properties	Amt. due as per Demand Notice Date of Possession
(1). Smt. Saroj Kumari W/o Shri Sudhir Kumar (Mortgagor & Guarantor), Rana ka Purwa, Rasoolpur, Tikaniyama, Gauriya kala Pargana & Tehsil-Mohanlalganj Lucknow-227125	Residential Property: Property at Khata No. 127, Gata No. 270, Sarai Karora, Tehsil-Mohanlalganj, District Lucknow, TITLE HOLDER- Smt. Saroj Kumari W/o Shri Sudhir Kumar, Details of Property As Per Sale Deed Dated 13.07.2017, Boundaries: East: Part Portion Gata No. 270, West: Rasta 24' Wide, North: Part Portion Gata No. 270, South: Plot Madhuvan Gupta Area: 52.04 Sqm.	Rs. 13,17,352/- and interest thereon 25.10.2024 30.12.2024
(2). M/s Sudhir Readymade Garments & Saree Center (Borrower), Prop: Shri Sudhir Kumar S/o Shri Ram Narayan, Rana ka purwa, Rasoolpur, Tikaniyama, Gauriya kala Pargana & Tehsil-Mohanlalganj, Lucknow-227125	Residential Property: Property at Khata No. 127, Gata No. 270, Sarai Karora, Tehsil-Mohanlalganj, District Lucknow, TITLE HOLDER- Smt. Saroj Kumari W/o Shri Sudhir Kumar, Details of Property As Per Sale Deed Dated 13.07.2017, Boundaries: East: Part Portion Gata No. 270, West: Rasta 24' Wide, North: Part Portion Gata No. 270, South: Plot Madhuvan Gupta Area: 52.04 Sqm.	Rs. 13,17,352/- and interest thereon 25.10.2024 30.12.2024
(3). Shri Mahesh Chandra S/o Shri Jangali (Guarantor), Village - Ranikhera, Sadarpur Karora, Gosaiganj, Lucknow-227105	Residential Property: Property at Khata No. 127, Gata No. 270, Sarai Karora, Tehsil-Mohanlalganj, District Lucknow, TITLE HOLDER- Smt. Saroj Kumari W/o Shri Sudhir Kumar, Details of Property As Per Sale Deed Dated 13.07.2017, Boundaries: East: Part Portion Gata No. 270, West: Rasta 24' Wide, North: Part Portion Gata No. 270, South: Plot Madhuvan Gupta Area: 52.04 Sqm.	Rs. 13,17,352/- and interest thereon 25.10.2024 30.12.2024
(4). Shri Mukesh Kumar S/o Shri Amarnath Tiwari (Guarantor), Chand Saray, Bus Stop, Gosaiganj, Lucknow-226501 Branch: Gosaiganj	Residential Property: Property at Khata No. 127, Gata No. 270, Sarai Karora, Tehsil-Mohanlalganj, District Lucknow, TITLE HOLDER- Smt. Saroj Kumari W/o Shri Sudhir Kumar, Details of Property As Per Sale Deed Dated 13.07.2017, Boundaries: East: Part Portion Gata No. 270, West: Rasta 24' Wide, North: Part Portion Gata No. 270, South: Plot Madhuvan Gupta Area: 52.04 Sqm.	Rs. 13,17,352/- and interest thereon 25.10.2024 30.12.2024
(1). Shri. Anwarul Haq S/o Shri Jalaluddin (Mortgagor & Guarantor), House No. 22/235, Sector-22 Indira Nagar Lucknow-226016	Residential Property: House No. 22/235, Sector-22, Indira Nagar, District-Lucknow, TITLE HOLDER- Shri. Anwarul Haq S/o Shri Jalaluddin, Details of Property As Per Sale Deed Dated 06.04.1999, Boundaries: East: House No. 22/260, West: 6 Mtr. Wide Road, North: House No. 22/234, South: House No. 22/236 Area: 29.75 Sq.mt.	Rs. 15,47,101.12 and interest thereon 04.10.2024 30.12.2024
(2). M/s Hastag Enterprises (Borrower), Prop: Shri Arif Anwar S/o Shri Anwarul Haq, House No. 22/235, Sector-22 Indira Nagar Lucknow-226016	Residential Property: House No. 22/235, Sector-22, Indira Nagar, District-Lucknow, TITLE HOLDER- Shri. Anwarul Haq S/o Shri Jalaluddin, Details of Property As Per Sale Deed Dated 06.04.1999, Boundaries: East: House No. 22/260, West: 6 Mtr. Wide Road, North: House No. 22/234, South: House No. 22/236 Area: 29.75 Sq.mt.	Rs. 15,47,101.12 and interest thereon 04.10.2024 30.12.2024
(3). Shri Anuj Kumar Jaiswal S/o Shri Ramesh Chandra Jaiswal (Guarantor), House No. 537 Bha/523, Bharat Nagar, Sitapur Road Lucknow-226024 Branch: Vikas Nagar	Residential Property: Part of Land Gata No. 608, Village- Sorokpur, Pargama & Tehsil-Haidergarh, District-Barabanki, TITLE HOLDER- Shri Sajjan Kumar S/o Late Damodar Prasad Mishra, Details of Property As Per Sale Deed Dated 08.11.2013, Boundaries: East: Banjar, West: Khet of Sajjan Kumar etc., North: Khet of Shyam Lal etc., South: Khet of Gheesa etc. Area: 630 Sq.mt.	Rs. 17,04,932.48 and interest thereon 18.10.2024 30.12.2024
(1). Shri Sajjan Kumar S/o Shri Damodar Prasad Mishra (Mortgagor & Guarantor), Village- Etmadpur, Majre-Sonikpur, Post-Trivediganj, Tahseel-Haidergarh, Barabanki-225126	Residential Property: Part of Land Gata No. 608, Village- Sorokpur, Pargama & Tehsil-Haidergarh, District-Barabanki, TITLE HOLDER- Shri Sajjan Kumar S/o Late Damodar Prasad Mishra, Details of Property As Per Sale Deed Dated 08.11.2013, Boundaries: East: Banjar, West: Khet of Sajjan Kumar etc., North: Khet of Shyam Lal etc., South: Khet of Gheesa etc. Area: 630 Sq.mt.	Rs. 17,04,932.48 and interest thereon 18.10.2024 30.12.2024
(2). M/s Veerendra Kumar Mishra S/o Shri Damodar Prasad Mishra (Borrower), Village- Etmadpur, Majre-Sonikpur, Post-Trivediganj, Tahseel- Haidergarh, Barabanki-225126	Residential Property: Part of Land Gata No. 608, Village- Sorokpur, Pargama & Tehsil-Haidergarh, District-Barabanki, TITLE HOLDER- Shri Sajjan Kumar S/o Late Damodar Prasad Mishra, Details of Property As Per Sale Deed Dated 08.11.2013, Boundaries: East: Banjar, West: Khet of Sajjan Kumar etc., North: Khet of Shyam Lal etc., South: Khet of Gheesa etc. Area: 630 Sq.mt.	Rs. 17,04,932.48 and interest thereon 18.10.2024 30.12.2024
(3). Shri Anil Kumar Singh S/o Shri Vijay Shah Singh (Guarantor), Village- Etmadpur, Majre-Sonikpur Post-Trivediganj, Tahseel-Haidergarh, Barabanki-225126 Branch: Trivediganj	Residential Property: Part of Land Gata No. 608, Village- Sorokpur, Pargama & Tehsil-Haidergarh, District-Barabanki, TITLE HOLDER- Shri Sajjan Kumar S/o Late Damodar Prasad Mishra, Details of Property As Per Sale Deed Dated 08.11.2013, Boundaries: East: Banjar, West: Khet of Sajjan Kumar etc., North: Khet of Shyam Lal etc., South: Khet of Gheesa etc. Area: 630 Sq.mt.	Rs. 17,04,932.48 and interest thereon 18.10.2024 30.12.2024
(1). Smt. Meeta Gupta W/o Shri Ram Kishan Gupta (Mortgagor & Guarantor), 532 Kha/136, Banarasi Tola, Aliganj Lucknow-226021	Residential Property: Shop No. 01, L.G.F. 532 Kha/136, Mehandi Tola, Kursi Road, Aliganj, District-Lucknow, TITLE HOLDER- Smt. Meera Gupta W/o Shri Ram Kishan Gupta, Details of Property As Per Sale Deed Dated 13.01.2011, Boundaries: East: Shamlati Wall after Shop No.-02, West: Half Shutter there after Shop Seller & gallery 4, Wide, North: Shuttered Shop there after gallery 7, Wide, South: Wall of shop there after property deegar Area: 13.88 Sq.mt.	Rs. 1,91,184.54 and interest thereon 19.09.2024 30.12.2024
(2). M/s Anuj General Store (Borrower), Prop: Shri Anuj Kumar Gupta S/o Shri Ram Kishan Gupta, Shop No. 01, L.G.F., Vidhya Palace, Mehandi Tola Lucknow-226021	Residential Property: Shop No. 01, L.G.F. 532 Kha/136, Mehandi Tola, Kursi Road, Aliganj, District-Lucknow, TITLE HOLDER- Smt. Meera Gupta W/o Shri Ram Kishan Gupta, Details of Property As Per Sale Deed Dated 13.01.2011, Boundaries: East: Shamlati Wall after Shop No.-02, West: Half Shutter there after Shop Seller & gallery 4, Wide, North: Shuttered Shop there after gallery 7, Wide, South: Wall of shop there after property deegar Area: 13.88 Sq.mt.	Rs. 1,91,184.54 and interest thereon 19.09.2024 30.12.2024
(3). Smt. Ragini Gupta W/o Shri Anuj Kumar Gupta (Guarantor), 532 Kha/136, Banarasi Tola, Aliganj, Lucknow-226021 Branch: Aliganj	Residential Property: Shop No. 01, L.G.F. 532 Kha/136, Mehandi Tola, Kursi Road, Aliganj, District-Lucknow, TITLE HOLDER- Smt. Meera Gupta W/o Shri Ram Kishan Gupta, Details of Property As Per Sale Deed Dated 13.01.2011, Boundaries: East: Shamlati Wall after Shop No.-02, West: Half Shutter there after Shop Seller & gallery 4, Wide, North: Shuttered Shop there after gallery 7, Wide, South: Wall of shop there after property deegar Area: 13.88 Sq.mt.	Rs. 1,91,184.54 and interest thereon 19.09.2024 30.12.2024

Date : 31.12.2024 Place : Lucknow Authorised Officer

MAHA KUMBH-2025

NCR GM: Over 13,000 trains will be run to facilitate travel for devotees

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAVAGRAJ

General Manager, North Central Railway (NCR) Upendra Chandra Joshi while talking to mediapersons during a press meet on Monday said more than 13,000 trains will be run for the convenience of devotees during Maha Kumbh - 2025.

More than 10,000 regular trains and more than 3,000 special trains will be operated. Out of these, 1,800 trains will be for short distance, 700 for long distance and 560 others will be run on ring rail.

The press conference was organised in the auditorium of Prayagraj divisional office under the chairmanship of GM Upendra Chandra Joshi to inform about the preparations for Mahakumbh Mela-2025.

Railways has issued a toll-free number 1800 4199 139 from November 1, 2024. From January 1, 2025, it will be operated by four operators per shift round the clock and will provide information in languages like Odia, Tamil / Telugu, Marathi and Bengali during the Mela period. Multilingual announcement system is being introduced for the convenience of passengers. Through the multilingual announcement system, travel related information will be announced to the devotees during Maha Kumbh in 12 lan-



guages — Hindi, English, Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam, Bengali, Odia, Punjabi and Assamese.

A total of 560 ticketing points, including UTS, ATVM, MUTS, enquiry and PRS are being made available at a total of nine railway stations, including Prayagraj Junction, Subedarganj, Naini, Prayagraj Chheoki, Prayagraj Junction, Phaphamau, Prayagraj Rambagh, Prayagraj Sangam and Jhansi as well as in the Mela area. About 10 lakh tickets will be distributed daily from these counters. In view of Kumbh Mela, Railways has now started the facility of booking advance railway tickets 15 days in advance.

To give an unforgettable experience to the devotees in Maha Kumbh-2025, large scale work has been done on the infrastructure in Prayagraj and surrounding areas. Ganga bridge

between Prayagraj-Rambagh, Phaphamau-Janghai doubling, new signal system at Prayagraj Junction, number of platforms at nine stations of Prayagraj has been increased from 40 to 48. The number of passenger shelters has been increased from 11 to 28, the capacity of these shelters has increased to 130,000. Waiting room, including washing line, waiting hall, sleeping pod, retiring room, executive lounge, battery operated car, wheel chair, catering facility, first aid, passenger convenience center, tourist booth, Pradhan Mantri Jan Aushadhi Kendra and cloakroom facilities have been upgraded at the stations. Besides 21 road over bridges and road under bridges have been constructed in Prayagraj area at a cost of ₹438 crore. In view of the estimated crowd of Maha Kumbh-2025, more than 18,000 personnel of Railway Protection Force (RPF) and Government

Railway Police (GRP) are being brought to Prayagraj on duty from all parts of Indian Railways. It will be ensured that there is no possibility of cross movement at any station and only unidirectional movement of passengers will be ensured. During this time, there will be a system of entry from the city side and exit from the civil line side at Prayagraj Junction.

First aid booths are being set up at all stations to deal with any emergency situation and rapid action teams have also been formed. Ambulances will also be deployed at all stations to provide transport related medical assistance. A six-bed observation room has been built at Prayagraj Junction, which has been provided with all types of equipment in adequate quantity to provide medical aid to the passengers, such as oxygen cylinders, concentrators, ECG machines, glucometers, nebulisers, stretchers, etc. To improve security preparations, RPF dog squad teams will be deployed to detect suspicious persons/objects and search operations at stations. For the safety of passengers, 1,186 CCTV cameras with live footage will be available in CCTV control rooms. Out of these, AI-based face recognition system has been provided in about 116 cameras to identify anti-social elements.

Ring rail service: Unreserved special trains to run from Jan 10 to Feb 28

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

As per the promise of Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and keeping in mind the extra crowd of devotees during the Maha Kumbh Mela to be held in Prayagraj, the Railway administration has decided to operate two pairs of unreserved special trains from January 10 to February 28 under the unreserved ring rail service, except the period of Mauni Amavasya bathing on January 28, 29 and 30. In these trains, 12 coaches of MEMU rake will be installed, Public Relations Officer (PRO) of North Eastern Railway (NER), Varanasi division, Ashok Kumar said.

The 04111 Prayagraj Jn - Prayagraj Rambagh-Banaras-Janghai-Zafarabad-Ayodhya Dham-Prayag- Prayagraj Jn Ring Rail Unreserved Kumbh Mela special train will depart from Prayagraj Jn at 6 am, reach Prayagraj Rambagh at 6.12 am, Jhansi at 6.30 am, Handia Khas at 6.52 am,

Gyanpur Road at 7.17 am, Madhosingh at 7.35 am, Banaras at 8.20 am, Bhadohi at 9.15 am, Janghai at 9.57 am, Madiyanhu at 10.35 am, Jaffrabad at 11.02 am, Jaunpur at 11.20 am, Shahganj at 11.57 am, Akbarpur at 12.50 pm, Goshainganj at 1.17 pm, Ayodhya Dham at 2.15 pm, Ayodhya Cantt at 14.32 pm, Maa Belhadevi Dham Pratapgarh Jn at 4.32 pm, Mau Aima at 5.17 pm, Phaphamau at 6.02 pm and reach Prayagraj Jn at 6.50 pm. In the return journey, 04112 Ring Rail Unreserved Kumbh Mela special train will depart from Prayagraj Jn at 6.30 am and reach Prayag at 6.45 am, Phaphamau at 6.57 am, Mau Aima at 7.42 am, Maa Belhadevi Dham Pratapgarh Jn at 8.27 am, Sultanpur at 9.25 am, Ayodhya Cantt at 10.32 am, Ayodhya Dham at 11.05 am, Goshainganj at 11.52 am, Akbarpur at 12.20 pm, Shahganj at 1.12 pm, Jaunpur at 1.55 pm, Zafarabad at 2.10

pm, Madiyanhu at 2.37 pm, Janghai at 3.32 pm, Bhadohi at 4.15 pm, Banaras at 5.10 pm, Madhosingh at 6.17 pm, Gyanpur Road at 6.50 pm, Handia Khas at 7.50 pm, Jhansi at 8.17 pm, Prayagraj Rambagh at 8.32 pm and reach Prayagraj Jn at 9 pm. Similarly, 04113 Ring Rail Unreserved Kumbh Mela special train will depart from Prayagraj Jn 5.30 pm and after stopping at Prayagraj Rambagh, Jhansi, Handia Khas, Gyanpur Road, Madhosingh arrive in Banaras at 7.50 pm and then passing through Bhadohi, Janghai, Madiyanhu, Jaffrabad, Jaunpur, Shahganj Akbarpur, Goshainganj reach at Ayodhya Dham at 2.15 am next day and then after stopping at Ayodhya Cantt, Sultanpur, Maa Belhadevi Dham Pratapgarh Jn, Mau Aima, Phaphamau and Prayag reach Prayagraj Jn at 7.45 am. In the return journey 04114 Ring Rail Unreserved Kumbh Mela Special Train will depart from Prayagraj Jn at 5.45 pm

and after stopping at Prayag, Phaphamau, Mau Aima, Maa Belhadevi Dham Pratapgarh Jn, Shahganj, Sultanpur and Ayodhya Cantt, reach Ayodhya Dham at 10.20 pm and then passing through Gosaiganj, Akbarpur, Shahganj, Jaunpur, Zafarabad, Madiyanhu, Janghai, Bhadohi arrive at Banaras at 4.25 am next day and then through Madhosingh, Gyanpur Road, Handia Khas, Jhansi and Prayagraj Rambagh will reach Prayagraj Jn at 8 am.

MEMORANDUM: The Auto Rickshaw Drivers' Union president Bhagwan Singh submitted a memorandum addressed to the railway minister through the ADRM (NR), Varanasi Cantt, Lalji Chaudhary here on Monday. In it four main demands raised by the union regarding prepaid stand were prominently mentioned. The ADRM accepted the memorandum and said that he will send it to the railway minister so that the problems can be resolved.

Ajay Rai's concern over sale, use of drugs

Varanasi (PNS): State Congress president Ajay Rai has expressed serious concern over the open sale and increasing use of drugs and rural areas of the state. In a letter sent to Chief Minister Yogi

Adityanath on Monday, Rai termed it as an administrative failure and negligence of the police system. The Congress leader said the youth and poor section of the state are putting their and the state's future in danger by getting trapped in the trap

of this drug. "The sale of intoxicants is taking place even in the streets of cities and villages and though this information is known to the general public, but not to the police administration. This makes it clear that all this is happening with the

knowledge of the police or the administration has deliberately ignored it," state Congress chief alleged. Rai demanded the state government should take immediate strict steps so that in future the youth can be saved from the clutches of drugs.

Woman killed as car overturns

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A woman died and three others were injured when an uncontrolled car overturned on the roadside near Tenapur village turn on Kanpur-Sagar highway under Ghatampur police station area late on

the roadside killing Geeta Gupta on the spot. Jainarain, dumper cleaner Pradhan (32) of Kishangarh (Rajasthan) and Picup driver Pawan Bajpai of Shiv Nagar, Chakeri, were injured in the incident. Dumper driver escaped from the spot after the incident.



The damaged vehicles after road mishap in Ghatampur late on Sunday night.

Sunday night. The incident took place when a pickup collided head on with a dumper in a bid to overtake a DCM truck. Meanwhile, the driver of the car following the pickup suddenly applied brakes due to which it overturned on the roadside killing the woman and injuring three others. After the incident, there was a massive jam up for about five km on both the sides of the highway prevailed. According to reports, Jainarain (50) of Hanspuram, Kanpur, along with wife Geeta Gupta (45) was returning from Ghatampur by car. The pickup collided head on with a dumper while trying to overtake the DCM near Tenapur village turn in Ghatampur. When Jainarain following the pickup applied brakes to his car, it overturned

Police sent the injured to Patar CHC from where after the first aid, they were referred to LLR (Hallet) Hospital. Police restored the traffic by getting the damaged vehicles removed from the highway. Station House Officer (SHO) Dhananjay Kumar Pandey said the body had been sent for autopsy. On receipt of complaint, further action will be initiated in the matter, he said.

In another incident, an elderly woman was killed in a road mishap near Raipur village under Sachendi police station area on Monday morning. Kin took the injured woman to LLR Hospital where she was declared dead by the doctors. Police sent the body for an autopsy. Police did not receive any complaint in the matter so

far. The family of Jainarain (65) of Kanpur Dehat comprises sons Chandra Kishore, Jai Kishore, Mangal and three daughters — Soni, Shikha and Monika. Kin said her maternal place is situated in Duwari village of Sachendi. One of her relatives died there early on Monday morning. On hearing about the demise, she left for the spot and reached Raipur village turn around 9.30 am by tempo. When she was crossing the road, a private bus hit her due to which she was seriously injured. At the LLR Hospital, doctors declared her as brought dead. Inspector Sachendi said no complaint has been received from the kin of the deceased so far. It was told that the bus belonged to a private dairy company. On receipt of complaint, further action will be initiated in the matter, he said.

MYSTERIOUS DEATH: Saroj Devi (35), married to Sandeep of Barasagar police area of Unnao in May 2021, died under mysterious circumstances on Monday. Her parents alleged her killing by in-laws due to unmet dowry demand. Police sent the body for an autopsy and started probe in the matter. She had an 18-month-old daughter Payal. Her parents alleged that Saroj had been unwell for the past several months but her in-laws did not pay attention to her illness and proper treatment. When she died under mysterious circumstances, her parents informed the police which rushed to the spot and carried out a probe. The SHO said after sending the body for an autopsy, the matter is being investigated. On the basis of autopsy report, further action will be initiated in the matter, he said.

Shopowner stabbed to death

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A betel shopowner was stabbed to death over a petty dispute in Ahirwa under Chakeri police station area late on Sunday night. Police took him to Kashiram Hospital. From there, he was sent to LLR (Hallet) Hospital where he succumbed to his injury during treatment. The body was sent for autopsy. Reports said that Harsh Sharma (20) of Yadav Nagar, Ahirwa, Chakeri,

used to support his family by running a betel shop near Airport. His family comprises mother Shanti and elder sister Poonam. According to Vikas, cousin of the deceased, Ishu Yadav of Mavaiya Turn reached Harsh's shop and got involved in an altercation with him over some petty issue. When the matter escalated, Irate Ishu attacked Harsh's throat with a piece of glass lying there and fled leaving him in a pool of blood. Police

rushed to the spot and immediately took Harsh to Kashiram Hospital from where due to his serious condition, doctors referred him to LLR (Hallet) Hospital. During treatment, Harsh succumbed to his injury early on Monday morning. Station House Officer (SHO) Ashok Kumar Dubey said on the complaint of Vikas, an FIR been lodged against Ishu Yadav for murder and raids are being conducted to arrest him.

Rojgar Mela: Officials inspect proposed site

Varanasi (PNS): Chief Development Officer (CDO) Himanshu Nagpal and ADM (City) Alok Kumar Verma inspected the proposed Rojgar Mela site Government ITI, Karaundi here on Sunday along with the officers of employment and other related departments and gave necessary guidelines to the officers concerned. Inspired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the district administration is organising Kashi Sansad Rojgar Mela-2025 on a large scale there on January 4 and 5. The aim of the proposed employment fair is to provide jobs to the unemployed youth of the district. The CDO emphasised that such arrangements should be ensured at the fair site that the candidates participating in it and the company people do not face any kind of problem. He directed the officers to ensure that the candidates participating in the Rojgar Mela do not face problem. The CDO asked the unemployed candidates that they can take advantage of the fair by registering in maximum numbers on register.kashisansadrojgarmela.com. He said that so far, more than 17,000 unemployed candidates have registered on this portal. For any kind of information, one can contact the Regional Employment Office, Chowkaghath. According to the CDO, more than 300 highly reputed companies from different regions of the country will participate in this employment fair. The companies recruit on annual packages ranging from ₹1.8 lakh to ₹6 lakh and there is also a provision to provide jobs to Divyangjans and women in the job fair.

Mishap victim succumbs

Prayagraj (PNS): A 40-year-old woman who was injured in a road accident died while undergoing treatment here on Monday. According to a report, Seema Bajpai was going with on a scooter her husband when a sand-laden dumper hit the scooter near Kareli police station. As the wheel of the dumper ran over her leg Seema was seriously injured and it had to be amputated. She was admitted to Swaroop Rani Nehru Hospital in a critical condition and died during treatment on Monday. The dumper driver fled after the accident. Seema was posted as an assistant teacher in Geenj Jasra primary school Samaliya Pratham. Kareli police registered a case against the dumper driver in this connection and he is being searched. In another incident, goons beat up some people due to old enmity at Masadi Kathara Crossing in Sarai Mamare police station area on Monday. The condition of four persons from one side remains critical. The injured are being treated in a private hospital. The victim party has given a complaint at the police station and demanded action. SHO Saraimumre Sanjay Prasad Gupta said an FIR has been lodged against more than a dozen persons, including five named persons, and investigation is underway. **CAUGHT:** A fake sub-inspector (S-I) was caught in the Sarai Inayat police station area. Arun Yadav of Mohammadabad, Ghazipur, used to extort money posing as an S-I. He used to have breakfast in hotels, dhabas etc. of Andawa, Hanumanganj, Sarainayat Jhansi etc free of cost. He also extorted money from many people by threatening them.

Workshop participants gain deep understanding of experimental techniques

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The Training and Placement Cell (T&P Cell) of Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Banaras Hindu University (MMV-BHU) is actively working to provide skill development opportunities to its girl students in their respective fields. In this direction, the T&P Cell organised a three-day workshop on "Experimental Techniques in

between the wavelength of electromagnetic waves and the ability to see minute details. Prof Srivastava explained through simple examples why electron waves are used as these can be easily controlled and focused by electromagnets to obtain clear images. He also discussed in detail the various parts and detectors of the SEM instrument, which gave the students a comprehensive



Physical and Chemical Sciences" recently. The participants gained a deep understanding about the experimental techniques useful in advanced research and technological development in physical and chemical sciences. On the last day, a special session on "Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM) Technique" was organised in this workshop in which Prof Anchal Srivastava, Department of Physics, Institute of Science, BHU, briefed the girl students about this technique. Prof Srivastava started the session with the human eye and its resolving power and then explained the need for high resolving power in scientific instruments. She also explained that there is a deep relationship

understanding of the technique. After the theoretical session, the students were taken to the Central Discovery Centre of BHU, where Prof Srivastava demonstrated the actual use of the SEM instrument. He showed the students how vacuum is generated and the sample is placed in the machine. Thereafter, the students were also shown images of various objects taken by SEM. The workshop was highly appreciated by the participants, who felt highly motivated by watching Prof Srivastava's session and live demonstration of the functioning of the SEM instrument. Many of the students reported that the session motivated them to pursue higher education in science and make careers in scientific fields.

Pal: Awakening interest in sports among youth important step towards society's bright future

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A race competition was successfully organised at Mahamana Malviya Inter College, Bachhav under Mahamana Mahotsav-2024 being organised by Sevagya Sansthanam here on Monday. About 900-1,000 students participated in this competition for 100 m, 200 m and 800 m races. The participants had enthusiastic participation of students of classes 9-10 and 11-12. The competition was inaugurated by international player Rabi Pal. The guests included Dr Harendra Rai (Member, Education Selection Commission Uttar Pradesh) and Dr Chandramani Singh (Principal Mahamana Malviya Inter College). The programme was graced by the presence of

other dignitaries including Santosh Tiwari. On the occasion chief guest Rabi Pal said, "Awakening interest in sports among the youth is an important step towards the bright future of the society. Events like Mahamana Mahotsav provide a wonderful platform to teach confidence, teamwork and discipline to the students." Dr Harendra Rai, while quoting the words of Mahamana Malviya in front of the students, said that drink milk, do exercise, always chant Hari's name, do work with patience, all the work will be completed. He also said, "Inspired by the teachings of Mahamana Malviya, this festival inspires the students not only for physical health but also for mental development."

Dr Chandramani Singh said, "Our school is proud to be a part of this festival. Such events work to encourage students and hone their talent." Under Mahamana Mahotsav-2024, a science exhibition will be organised at BTS Secondary School, Kamchha, on Tuesday, in which scientific models and projects prepared by the students will be displayed. The programme will conclude on January 4 at Swatantrata Bhawan, Banaras Hindu University, in which all the winners will be rewarded and honoured. Certificates will also be provided to all the participants. Sevagya Sansthan will continue to make continuous efforts to advance the students in the field of education, culture and sports through this festival.

Carnival brings school community together, leaves memories

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Sir Padampat Singhania Education Centre (SPSEC) celebrated the spirit of Christmas with an enchanting and vibrant event, 'Christmas Alley 2024 - The New Dawn Carnival'. The event was a delightful showcase of ecstacy, camaraderie and generosity, exhibiting the talent and enthusiasm of the students. The school ground was filled with ecstacy, laughter and festive cheer as students, parents and teachers came together to celebrate the much-anticipated Christmas Alley making it a magical Christmas wonderland and creating an unforgettable experience for everyone present. The school campus was transformed into a festive wonderland, adorned with an array of decorations, including bells, streamers, twinkling lights and



SPSEC Chairperson Manorama Govind Hari Singhania cutting the cake to mark the Christmas celebrations.

an elaborately adorned Christmas tree. The creative flair of both students and staff was evident in the exquisite arrangements at the Christmas Alley, spotlighting the artistic

display of ribbons, wreaths, stockings, pinecones, stars, bells, lights, endearing Christmas cut-outs and many more. Notably, the bamboo alley highlighted a celebration

of nature, fostering environmental consciousness among attendees. The overall effect was a warm and joyful scene, full of holiday cheer. The pinnacle of the jamboree was the captivating performances by the school's extraordinarily dexterous young singers and orchestra team. The heart-rending performances of Christmas Carols, synchronised by a lively rendition of "Jingle Bells," had the audience joining in with sheer delight, exhibiting the students' artistic prowess. The arrival of Santa Claus was a moment of pure magic, extending joy and happiness among the children by doling out sweets and generating a memorable jubilant welkin. The Talent Hunt segment provided a platform for students to exhibit their exceptional calibre while the mouthwatering food stalls catered appetising treats that

filled the atmosphere with tantalising aromas. Chairperson of the school Manorama Govind Hari Singhania, Vice-Chairman Abhishek Singhania and Vice-Chairperson Varsha Singhania graced the event, blessing the students and actively participating in the festivities. Their compassionate engagement with the tiny tots, enveloped in warmth, hope and love, was a charismatic sight for both children and parents. Principal Bhawna Gupta extended warm Christmas greetings to all present, infusing the celebration with heartfelt wishes. The management congratulated the team for the thunderous success of the Christmas Alley. "Christmas Alley 2024" was an enthralling carnival that brought together the school community, spreading festive joy and leaving resonating memories.

BJP attacks Rahul Gandhi for New Year trip, Congress Responds

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

Defence Exports Hit ₹ 21,000 Crore: Defence Minister

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

Film industry praises PM Modi's WAVES summit 2025 initiative

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

event which was reposted by many celebrities on the microblogging platform. In his address, Modi compared WAVES to global events like the World Economic Forum in Davos, adding the leaders from the media and entertainment industry as well as creative minds from across the globe will gather in Delhi for the Summit. He also urged all stakeholders in the entertainment and creative industries to actively participate in the WAVES. Actor Akshay Kumar termed WAVES Summit 2025 as a "wonderful idea". "Now this is PM @narendramodi ji's vision towards promoting the Media & Entertainment sector... Waves 2025 summit will hopefully be a fabulous global forum to have the entire entertainment industry

come and grow together," he wrote. Anil Kapoor said Modi's visionary leadership continues to inspire. "The #WAVES2025 summit is a groundbreaking step towards making India the global hub for film and entertainment. Looking forward to seeing the world come together to celebrate creativity and collaboration #MannKiBaat," the actor added. "Excited to witness India become a global hub for film and entertainment. Looking forward to contributing to this landmark initiative," said producer Ekta Kapoor. Praseon Joshi, CBFC head and lyricist-writer, said WAVES Summit 2025 will put the "spotlight on India's content industry & its vast potential".

Farmers' bandh in Punjab cripples commuter traffic; rail, bus services suspended

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Life was hit across Punjab due to a 'bandh' imposed by farmers who have been agitating against the Centre for a legal guarantee of a minimum support price for their crops. Rail and road traffic was crippled and commercial establishments remained shut in several places of the state. Farmers staged 'dharnas' on several roads and highways including in Patiala, Jalandhar, Amritsar, Ferozpur, Bathinda, and Pathankot as part of their bandh call from 7 am to 4 pm, throwing commuter traffic out of gear. A call for a statewide shutdown was given over a week ago by Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha over the Centre not acting on the farmers' demand for a legal guarantee for the MSP. The bandh was also enforced to express solidarity with farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal who has been on a fast for the last 35 days at Khanauri border protest site of farmers. Farmers observed a sit-in at Dhareeri Jattan Toll Plaza which affected vehicular movement

on the Patiala-Chandigarh National Highway. At Amritsar's Golden Gate, scores of farmers staged a dharna near the city's entry point. Police there assisted some stranded foreign tourists by arranging auto rickshaws for them to reach the Golden Temple. Farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher told reporters in Amritsar that emergency and other essential services were allowed to operate. He said anyone travelling to the airport to catch a flight anyone going to attend a job interview, or anyone needing to attend a wedding, was being allowed to go. In some places, commuters were seen arguing with the protesting farmers blocking the roads. "All establishments are closed. Punjabis have shown their unity today and they are extending full support," Pandher, however, claimed. "We are seeing a successful bandh. Train services are also completely suspended and no train is entering Punjab," he said. Pandher also claimed their strike has received strong support from transporters, employee unions, traders and

religious bodies. Farmers squatted on tracks at many places, forcing the railways to cancel several trains passing through the state and short-terminated or short-originated some trains. In Ferozpur, Jalandhar, Ludhiana, and Bathinda, passengers were seen stranded at stations. A cancer patient from Gujarat was stranded at a train station in Ferozpur. His wife said they had to go to Himachal Pradesh to get some medicines for him, but with train services hit, they were left in a lurch. In Phagwara, farmers staged a dharna near the Sugarmill Crossing on NH-44, blocking the roads leading from Phagwara towards Nakodar, Hoshiarpur, and Nawanshahr. A dharna was also staged at Behram toll plaza on Phagwara-Banga road. Grain markets were shut in several places across the state. In the Mohali district, farmers staged a dharna at a few points throwing normal movement of vehicular traffic out of gear. Public transport remained off roads at several places, while most private bus operators suspended services abiding by the bandh call.

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

KUMAR CHELLAPAN ■ KOCHI

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

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

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

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

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

AIIMS joins AI hype, to invest ₹300 Crore

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

TN leads in third gender voters, but low participation

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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



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

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

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



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Country shamed

The victim blaming and procedural lapses in the Anna University rape case underscores the urgent need for reform

The recent sexual assault case involving a 19-year-old student at Anna University has once again brought shame upon the nation, highlighting the pervasive nature of gender-based violence and the systemic failures in addressing it. The horrifying incident, compounded by the insensitivity of law enforcement, has triggered widespread outrage and calls for accountability. On December 23, Gnanasekaran allegedly raped the student on the university campus after threatening to release videos of her. The accused confined the survivor for over an hour and recorded the assault. While the Chennai Police Commissioner, A Arun, claimed swift action by apprehending the accused within 24 hours, the Madras High Court highlighted glaring lapses in the police's handling of the case. Particularly damning was the revelation that the First Information Report (FIR) published on the police website disclosed the victim's details, leading to further victim shaming and mental agony. The High Court's rebuke of the police was scathing. A Bench of Justices SM Subramaniam and V Lakshminarayan criticised the language used in the FIR, terming it misogynistic and reflective of victim-blaming attitudes. Such lapses, the Court noted, breach the victim's fundamental rights under Article 21 of the Constitution, which guarantees dignity.



To address these lapses, the Court ordered the formation of a Special Investigation Team (SIT) comprising senior IPS officers to probe the case. It also directed the Tamil Nadu government to provide interim compensation of Rs 25 lakh to the victim and ensure her protection. The Court has rightly underscored the necessity of sensitising police personnel to handle such

cases with empathy and professionalism. This case is not an isolated incident but a grim reminder of the larger problem of sexual violence that plagues India. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality and dignity, women continue to face systemic discrimination and violence. The societal tendency to blame victims, coupled with institutional apathy, exacerbates their trauma. The High Court's poignant questions — "Why can't a woman walk freely, dress as she wishes, or speak to a man without being judged?" — resonate deeply in a society still grappling with entrenched patriarchy. The Court rightly emphasised that the onus is on the State and society to protect women without perpetuating stigma or blame. The incident also exposed lapses in campus security at Anna University. The university, which allows unrestricted access to outsiders, failed to prevent the accused from entering the premises. The police's approach also came under scrutiny for prematurely ruling out the involvement of additional suspects. The Court directed the State to examine whether rules were violated during these proceedings. This tragic case underscores the urgent need for systemic reforms. Law enforcement must be trained to handle cases of sexual violence with sensitivity. The media, too, must exercise restraint in reporting such cases to avoid amplifying the victim's trauma.

PICTALK



Tourists enjoy after fresh snowfall, at Patnitop hill station in Udhampur

India's forest cover grows, but grim realities linger



KOTA SRIRAJ

While India's State of Forests Report highlights an increase in forest cover, it also raises concerns about troubling trends such as increase in forest fires and allegations of inflated data

India's State of Forests Report (ISFR) 2023, a biennial report published by the Forest Survey of India (FSI) under the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change is finally out after a delay of almost one year. The report is being hailed as a harbinger of good news as it announced an increase in India's forest and tree cover by 1,289 sq.km. since 2021 reaching 25.17 per cent of the total geographical area in 2023, which puts India's forest cover at 7,15,342.61 sq.km. But the report also highlights some grim aspects of India's state of forests. In the recent past, the incidence of forest fires has disturbingly gone up, especially in the hill states. These fires have destroyed many hectares of dense forests thereby ruining fragile ecosystems and irreplaceable Himalayan biodiversity.

The ISF report echoes the same and observes a sharp spike in forest fires especially in the mountain states of Himachal, Uttarakhand, and Jammu and Kashmir. The data collected using the Visible Infrared Imaging Radiometer Suite (VIIRS) presented in the report, showed that Himachal Pradesh witnessed an increase of forest fires by a stunning 1,339 per cent, while Jammu & Kashmir saw a rise in forest fire by a staggering 2,822 while Uttarakhand was relatively better off with 293 per cent rise in forest fire incidents. What the government was doing as the pristine forests turned to ashes, is a burning question. On the other hand, the report also highlighted the rapidly dwindling forest cover. Between 2003 and 2023, more than 24,000 sq km of dense forests — half the size of Punjab — have disappeared. More concerning is the fact that the loss has occurred in ecologically fragile zones such as the Western Ghats and The Nilgiris over the past decade. The Western Ghats recognised as UNESCO World Heritage Biodiversity Hotspot suffered an overall loss of 58.22 sq km in forest cover. On the other hand, the Nilgiris reported the steepest decline of 123 sq km. The report also showed a decrease of 327.30 sq km in forest cover in the northeastern region. This irre-



placeable loss of dense forests sadly was not seen as a wake-up call for the authorities even though the forest cover in the hill districts is just 40 per cent of their geographical area against the Forest Policy mandated 66.6 per cent. This is very alarming as the increased number of landslides and floods can be traced to the loss of forest cover in the hills. < The maintenance of the soil health, ecological stability, and ability to counter landslides and floods depend on adequate forest cover in the hills. The biennial ISF report has since its inception in 1991 served as a reference point for the nation to assess its forest wealth and understand the problems plaguing India's afforestation efforts. But this year's report has been criticised by experts who have pointed out discrepancies and have labelled the data as "inflated." Several experts for instance have criticised the inclusion of bamboo plantations, coconut groves, and orchards among others as part of the forest cover, as these are agroforestry-related and make no meaningful contribution towards the environment. The experts opine that the inclusion of agroforest plantations such as rubber, eucalyptus, acacia and mango, coconut, areca nut and shade trees in tea and coffee plantations has led to the inflation in



FOREST LANDS DIVERTED FOR DAMS, ROADS, RAILWAYS AND OTHER SUCH PERMANENT CONSTRUCTIONS OVER TIME ARE LOST FOREVER BUT ARE NOT DELETED FROM RECORDS, THUS INFLATING THE FIGURES. INDIA LOST 30,808 SQ KM OF OPEN AND SCRUB FORESTS ALONGSIDE 14,073 SQ KM OF MODERATELY DENSE FORESTS

the tree canopy to 1,289 sq.km. But the reality is that these categories of trees are grown for commercial purposes and are harvested in time therefore not providing any ecological value for biodiversity, wildlife conservation or acting as effective carbon sinks. Moreover, the fact that the report does not establish a correlation between forest areas or areas designated as forests in government records and forest cover also adds to the problem. Additionally, the experts also observed that the report failed to comply with the Supreme Court order in the Lafarge case which called for digitisation of forest maps, geo-referencing of Recorded Forest Areas (RFA), and documentation of diverted forest lands. The absence of these elements weakens the report's credibility. Forest lands diverted for dams, roads, railways and other such permanent constructions over time are lost forever but are not deleted from records, thus inflating the figures. India lost 30,808 sq km of open and scrub forests alongside 14,073 sq km of moderately dense forests and 1,816 sq km of dense forests to 'non-forest' uses. By the looks of it, the ISF report 2023 seems to be in a hurry to increase forest cover in India. At least on paper, This could be to do with India's target of increasing its forest and

tree cover which can absorb an additional amount of 2.5 billion to 3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent by 2030. The government could have done well to ensure the presentation of accurate data that was based on actual tree census and not plantations, groves, and orchards. The government should have also removed those forest lands from its database that have been permanently diverted for non-forest purposes. The ISF report has immense significance for India as it is widely used as a primary information source by the central and state governments. Additionally, forestry professionals of State Forest Departments rely on the report for the effective discharge of their responsibilities. The inputs and data provided by this report regarding forest resources of India help in the evaluation and formulation of forest-related policies, programmes, and legislation. Given the crucial role played by the ISF report, the government must revisit the recent report and ensure that the questions and doubts raised by experts are effectively addressed. The onus is on the government to keep the trust intact by releasing reports based on robust and accurate data. (The author is a policy analyst. The views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RELIEF FOR MIDDLE-CLASS

Madam — As the new year approaches, salaried employees are likely to face significant tax deductions from their salaries for the financial year 2024-2025. While taxes are deducted throughout the year, the months leading up to March 2025 will see an increased burden, further aggravating the financial challenges of India's middle class. Reduced take-home pay diminishes purchasing power, leading to decreased spending by the salaried class, which, in turn, impacts the economy.

Considering these challenges, the government is reportedly exploring measures to boost consumer spending. One such measure under consideration for the financial year 2025-2026 budget is making personal income up to Rs 15 lakh per annum tax-free. Speculations suggest that the government is actively working in this direction, and the decision on tax cuts in the upcoming budget appears almost certain. Taxation is currently governed by two systems: the old tax regime (OTR) and the new tax regime (NTR). A reduction in tax liability would particularly benefit salaried employees, increasing their disposable income. This would lead to higher consumer spending, ultimately helping the economy recover from its slowdown. For the financial stability and development of middle-class families, the central government's decision to make personal income up to Rs 15 lakh per annum tax-free in the 2025-2026 budget is crucial. This move would play a vital role in ensuring better financial planning and stability for the middle class.

Dattaprasad Shirodkar | Ponda

PROFIT OVER HUMANITY

Madam — The article on caring for the stars and being careless to earth (December 30) presents worth considering arguments. The basic problem lies in the economic order in vogue in most parts of the world. The essence of the order is commodifying everything and chasing profit in every activity. In the process, small players are being gulped by the big

Koneru wins World Rapid Chess Champion



Indian Chess Champions has marvelled the entire world, be that the moment of India becoming the FIDE Chess Olympiad 2024 winner in Budapest, D Gukesh becoming the World Chess champion at the age of 18 in Singapore, and now Ms Koneru Humpy clinching her second FIDE World Rapid Crown in New York. This year in 2024 particularly, India spent a considerably wonderful time at the podium top stairs, enjoying many titles and trophies.

The recent chess title victory by Koneru Humpy as World Rapid Chess Champion is another feather in India's Chess success. We all know that the year 2024 has been a marvellous year for India, particularly as we successfully managed to lift so many titles in the sport of Chess. The grit and brilliance of

The chess prowess of Indians need no introduction today, thanks to our chess masters and grandmasters. Especially the young chess players deserve the epitome of appreciation for their wonderful game spirit, patience and sincere grit behind every move of check and mates.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

INDIA'S LIBERALISATION ARCHITECT

Madam — From being an economist of great repute to RBI Governor, Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, Finance Minister and then becoming Prime Minister of India, not many can walk in his shoes. When the economy was stuttering and license raj was the order of the day and there was a suffocating environment for industrialists, Dr. Manmohan Singh became the architect of liberalisation in 1991 along with late PV Narsimha Rao, who allowed our country to take a great leap forward. The Victor Hugo moment of our 1991 budget was doctored by him, which led to India emerging as an economic powerhouse. He may have been called an accidental Prime Minister but during those 10 years at the helm he did his job with aplomb under the given circumstances of compulsions of coalition politics.

Bal Govind | Noida

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

The teachers who shaped my life: Lessons beyond the classroom

For me, the journey of learning began in classrooms with inspiring teachers and extended into workplaces with exceptional bosses

We meet several people in our lives. While we learn something from each person, many teach us invaluable lessons that help us navigate the rough and tumble of the daily grind. These are the teachers who shape our lives. The earliest I remember are two school teachers from my classes 5 to 7. Miss Kumar taught us English; Miss Singh was the Arithmetic teacher.



SANJAY CHANDRA

It is no wonder that I developed a liking for the unlikely combination of English and Maths. Another was my mathematics teacher from classes 10 to 11. I was a favourite student, probably because I could discuss with him complex problems on the move while cycling to and from school. My love for communication and thinking on my feet were firmly entrenched in my psyche by him. In later years, I could not have navigated my professional journey but for the few outstanding bosses, I worked with. I joined my first job in a leading government manufacturing company. I stayed there for a year, only for the

training. It seemed like an extension of college except that we were now paid a salary and were expected to lead a structured office life. I opted to spend the last few months of the training in the computer department. I surprised myself. This was one of the two subjects in college in which I had secured a poor 'D' grade. I developed a computer-based inventory management system for the plant, the first in the organization. I worked diligently, probably also committing a few mistakes, confident of the support of my Bengali boss. I joined the railway services. It was an entirely different ball game. I was the head of a

maintenance shed with 1000+ staff working under me. My boss went to the shed with me for the first week. The next week, he threw me, not in the swimming pool, but in the ocean. It was training by fire. Yet, he was always there to guide and support me whenever I needed his help. The innumerable management lessons I learned in my first year were to hold me in good stead during my remaining professional journey of almost three decades. After 20 years of service with the railways, I decided to opt for retirement and join a government company. My boss was a soft-spoken Sikh gentleman. He also shared a common trait with my first railway boss. It was a complete freedom to operate. He taught me everything that he knew about a new subject. His only demands were integrity and honesty. I had no problems with that. He would fight fiercely for me with his seniors if the situation demanded. I never regretted my decision to leave the railways. I quit the government to join the pri-

ivate sector. It was a new jungle for me. The boardroom politics, criticism of a subordinate by those sitting at the head of the table in stage-managed whispers loud enough to be heard by the intended victim, and smirks by colleagues at the snub by a senior, were only a few of the goings-on I had not witnessed in the government sector. I had no hesitation in mentioning to a packed audience when asked about the reasons for the success of the government sector, 'Good bosses, who value others and mentor each individual like a teacher.' I hope that someone else remembers me as fondly. These words by an unknown author resonate with me, "I wasn't born to just teach, I was born to inspire others, to change people, and to never give up; even when faced with challenges that seem impossible." (The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

OVERCOMING THE GRIP OF FEARFUL THOUGHTS

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



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

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

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

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



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

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

Assessing efficacy and challenges of compensatory afforestation

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Indian agriculture and climate change: Challenges and strategies

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

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



PRAVESH SHARMA

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

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

nificant soil erosion and exacerbates the length of dry spells. Deviations in the hydrological cycle are contributing to extreme events, such as floods caused by intense rainfall or droughts triggered by prolonged dry spells, impacting different parts of the country. 2. **Temperature Rise:** Rising temperatures pose a greater threat to tropical countries like India, which already operate near the higher end of the temperature spectrum. Elevated temperatures influence various climatic factors, adversely impacting crop production. For instance, extreme heat reduces fruit setting in citrus crops and increases transpiration losses in vegetables. 3. **Livestock and Poultry Impact:** Climate variability also affects animal production

and reproduction. Increased temperatures and higher temperature-humidity index levels lead to reduced feed intake, lower milk yields, and decreased meat and egg quality. Poultry, in particular, suffers from heat stress, resulting in thinner eggshells and increased egg breakage. 4. **Pests and Diseases:** Climate change influences the population, survival, and geographic distribution of pests and diseases. Rising temperatures and humidity levels create favorable conditions for pest proliferation, making control measures more challenging and unpredictable. Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies

Adaptation to climate change involves anticipating adverse impacts and taking proactive



measures to minimize damage or leverage emerging opportunities. Given that most Indian farmers are smallholders with limited coping capacity, building resilience is key. 1. **Water Resource Management:** Enhancing rainwater productivity through scientific rainwater harvesting, recycling, and precision water use is essential. Improved irrigation techniques and water budgeting can mitigate the impact of erratic rainfall.

2. **Integrated Farming Systems:** Combining crop cultivation with livestock, fisheries, and plantations offers diverse income streams and reduces climate vulnerability. Contingency planning for alternate crops and activities based on agro-climatic conditions further strengthens resilience. 3. **Technology and Innovation:** Developing stress-tolerant crop varieties, conserving agro-biodiversity, and promoting resource-efficient technologies are critical. Pest forecasting models, weather-based advisories, and agricultural risk management systems should be expanded to aid farmers in decision-making. 4. **Community Involvement and Education:** Engaging

local communities in production system management and raising awareness about climate-resilient practices is vital. Farmers, consumers, and markets must be educated to embrace sustainable agriculture practices that align with cultural and social contexts. Government Initiatives to Address Climate Change The Government of India has taken several steps to combat climate change. National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC): Guided by the Prime Minister's Council on Climate Change, the NAPCC includes the National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA), focusing on resource conservation, soil health, integrated farming, and water-use efficiency.

National Innovations on Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA): This initiative provides scientific and technical guidance for sustainable agricultural development. Key Program Interventions: Policies like the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana, National Food Security Mission, and Soil Health Card Scheme aim to enhance soil health, water efficiency, and farm productivity. District Agricultural Contingency Plans: These plans provide integrated solutions for crop, livestock, and fishery challenges arising from weather anomalies, supporting farmers during extreme conditions. (The writer is a retired IAS officer; the views expressed are personal)

IT Department denies reports linking DigiYatra to tax data

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

LG Urges AAP to increase ASHA worker stipends

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

An official from Raj Niwas said that the Delhi LG advised the AAP government to

enhance the stipend being paid to ASHA Workers in Delhi from the existing Rs 3,000 per month to Rs 9,000, given the fact that their last enhancement had been done in 2018, despite provision being there for such revisions to take place every three years.

He has also asked for the salaries of Aangwadi supervisors to be released at the earliest.

"This missive from the LG comes after, Saxena interacted with a delegation of ASHA and Aangwadi Workers, who met the LG today at Raj Niwas and brought to his

notice that their stipends had not been revised since 2018 and that the salaries of Aangwadi Supervisors had not been paid for the past seven months. They also brought to the fore various difficulties being faced by them in terms of livelihood and requested the LG for help/intervention," a statement said.

It added that accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) Workers, who act as non-medical health workers in the community under the National Health Mission (NHM), have been complaining of being under

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

Jimmy Carter statesman of great vision: PM Modi

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"Today, America and the world lost an extraordinary leader, statesman and humanitarian," President Joe Biden said in a statement, according to PTI from Washington.

Carter is survived by his children, Jack, Chip, Jeff, and Amy; 11 grandchildren; and 14 great-grandchildren. He was predeceased by his wife Rosalynn and one grandchild. "My father was a hero, not only to me but to everyone who believes in peace, human rights, and unselfish love," Chip Carter said.

Carter, a Democrat who served a single term from 1977 to 1981, had been in home hospice care since February 2023 after a series of short hospital stays.

In his statement, Biden said over six decades, with his compassion and moral clarity, Carter worked to eradicate disease, forge peace, advance civil rights and human rights, promote free and fair elections, house the homeless, and always advocate for the least among the people. He saved, lifted, and changed the lives of people all across the globe.

"He was a man of great character and courage, hope and optimism," said Biden and First Lady Dr Jill Biden. President-elect Donald Trump said while he "strongly disagreed" with

Carter "philosophically and politically", he also realised that he truly loved and respected "our country, and all it stands for".

"He worked hard to make America a better place, and for that, I give him my highest respect. He was a truly good man and, of course, will be greatly missed. He was also very consequential, far more than most Presidents, after he left the Oval Office," Trump said. Carter was considered a friend of India. He was the first American president to visit India after the removal of the Emergency and victory of the Janata Party in 1977. In his address to the Indian parliament, Carter spoke against authoritarian rule.

"India's difficulties, which we often experience ourselves and which are typical of the problems faced in the developing world, remind us of the tasks that lie ahead. Not the Authoritarian Way," Carter said on January 2, 1978. "But India's successes are just as important because they decisively refute the theory that in order to achieve economic and social progress, a developing country must accept an authoritarian or totalitarian government and all the damage to the health of the human spirit which that kind of rule brings with it," he told Members of Parliament.

According to the Carter Centre, on January 3, 1978, Carter and then First Lady Rosalynn Carter travelled to the village of Daulatpur Nasirabad, an hour southwest of New Delhi. He was the third American president to visit India and the only one with a personal connection to the country, his mother, Lillian, had worked there as a health volunteer with the Peace Corps during the late 1960s. "The visit was so successful that shortly after, village residents renamed the area 'Carterpuri' and remained in contact with the White House for the rest of President Carter's tenure," the Carter Centre, a nongovernmental, nonprofit organisation founded by Carter, said.

"The trip made a lasting impression: Festivities abounded in the village when President Carter won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002, and January 3 remains a holiday in Carterpuri," the centre said, adding that the visit laid the groundwork for an enduring partnership that has greatly benefited both countries.

The son of a farmer and a nurse, Carter's career in public service began in 1943 as a cadet at the United States Naval Academy and then served in both the Atlantic and Pacific fleets. He was later selected to join the elite nuclear submarine

programme. He was elected State Senator in 1962 and Georgia's 76th Governor in 1970.

Carter launched his campaign for the presidency in 1974 when America was still reeling from the Watergate scandal involving the administration of President Richard Nixon. The scandal led to Nixon's resignation in 1974.

During his time in office, Carter helped to broker a historic peace agreement between Egypt and Israel in 1979. He established a diplomatic relationship with China and put human rights at the centre of US foreign policy.

He struggled to manage the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iran hostage crisis when revolutionary students held dozens of Americans in Tehran. He was defeated by Republican Ronald Reagan in the 1980 election.

After leaving the White House, Carter became a tireless worker for peace, the environment and human rights, for which he was recognised with a Nobel Peace Prize.

He undertook a peace mission to North Korea on behalf of the US government. The mission ultimately resulted in the Agreed Framework, an early effort to reach an accord on dismantling its nuclear arsenal.

Delhi Police nab six in Voter ID forgery cases

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police arrested six people involved in two separate cases of voter ID fraud following the Election Commission's complaint of suspicious cases in southeast Delhi's Shaheen Bagh.

The Deputy Commissioner of Police (Southeast) Ravi Kumar Singh said, "The accused were found to have forged critical documents such as Aadhaar cards and electricity bills to create or modify voter ID cards." He added that in two separate cases on December 25 and 29, Vinod Kumar, Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) of Assembly Constituency-54 (Okhla) lodged a complaint at Shaheen Bagh police station alleging therein that a total of eight individuals have applied

for voter ID cards/change of address using forged documents.

Two cases under relevant section of BNS was registered. "After dedicated and thorough efforts, the addresses of the alleged persons were traced and following six accused persons were arrested in both the cases," he added. The accused include 32 year old Mohd. Naim has applied for a change of address in his voter ID using a forged electricity bill. He is an electrician by profession. 30 year old Rizwan Ul Haq, owner of a cyber café in Shaheen Bagh, forged the electricity bill for Mohd. Naim using Photoshop was also arrested. A 37 year old housewife Sabana Khatoun, was arrested for applying for a change of address using a forged electricity bill.

Naidu richest CM in India with assets over ₹931 Crore

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

Cold wave, dense fog to persist in North India

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The weather department anticipated that foggy conditions would continue late at night and early in the morning across regions such as Odisha, Assam, Meghalaya, and other northeastern states until December 31. These conditions were expected to persist in Punjab, Haryana, and Chandigarh until January 1.

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

than 18 degree Celsius a day earlier. The Met office has forecast similar cold day conditions in the next few days.

The minimum temperature of 10.3 degree Celsius was three degrees above normal. It was 13 degree Celsius a day earlier. The narrowing gap between the maximum and minimum temperature and icy northwesterly wind leading to cold wave conditions in Delhi and its neighbouring states. Palam recorded 8.3 degree Celsius, coldest in the national capital. Delhi experienced overcast skies and winds while the humidity level fluctuated between 81 and 87 per cent, the weather office said. The Met Department said the minimum was likely to dip by another 2-3 degree Celsius in and hover around 7 degree Celsius on Tuesday. The IMD has forecast the maximum to

remain below normal till December 31, hovering around the 18°C mark, as nights become colder again.

"For the past two days, maximum temperatures were recorded in the cold day category but the minimum temperatures remained above 10 degrees Celsius. Today (Monday), cold day to severe cold day conditions were observed over Delhi," a Met official said. The Met office has predicted mainly clear skies with cold day conditions at isolated places for Tuesday. The surface wind is predominantly likely to blow from the northwest at a speed of less than 6 kilometres per hour during the morning and will be accompanied by smog or shallow fog at most places and moderate fog in isolated areas. Wind speeds are expected to increase to 10 to 12 kilometres per hour in the

afternoon before decreasing to less than 8 kilometres per hour in the evening and the night.

An average Air Quality Index of 173 (moderate) was recorded at 4 pm on Monday compared to 225 (poor) at 4pm on Sunday as northwesterly winds returned on Sunday due to a western disturbance that brought rain across the northwestern plains on Friday and Saturday. The shallow fog reduced visibility to 600 metres at Safdarjung, which is representative of Delhi's weather, at 5:30am. According to data from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), December marked Delhi's cleanest first half ever, with only one 'very poor' air day recorded between December 1 and December 15. The lowest AQI of this month was recorded on

December 28, at 139, marking the cleanest December day on record. The average AQI during this period stood at 238, significantly lower than the usual AQI of over 300 for this time of year.

In comparison, Delhi's average AQI was 348 last December, 319 in 2022, and 336 in 2021. The previous lowest December AQI was 300, recorded in 2015. Additionally, the month is set to conclude with at least 53.5 mm of rainfall, making it the fifth-wettest December since 1901. The city also recorded its highest single-day December rainfall in 101 years, with 41.2 mm on December 28 (Friday). This year, Delhi experienced six rainy days in December, compared to just one in 2023, none in 2022, four in 2021, and a single rainy day in December 2020.

Punjab bandh jams North India

From page 1

The Punjab Government said it was facing a huge resistance from the protesting farmers who had encircled Dullew and prevented him from being taken to a hospital. On Monday, farmers observed a sit-in at Dhareri Jattan Toll Plaza which affected vehicular movement on the Patiala-Chandigarh National Highway. At Amritsar's Golden Gate, scores of farmers staged a dharna near

the city's entry point. Police there assisted some stranded foreign tourists by arranging auto rickshaws for them to reach the Golden Temple. Farmers squatted on tracks at many places, forcing the railways to cancel several trains passing through the state and short-terminated or short-originated some trains. In Ferozepur, Jalandhar, Ludhiana, and Bathinda, passengers were seen stranded at stations. In Phagwara, farmers staged a dharna near

the Sugarmill Crossing on NH-44, blocking the roads leading from Phagwara towards Nakodar, Hoshiarpur, and Nawanshahr. Grain markets were shut in several places across the State. In the Mohali district, farmers staged a dharna at a few points throwing normal movement of vehicular traffic out of gear. Public transport remained off roads at several places, while most private bus operators suspended services, abiding by the bandh call. Many long-

distance private buses and trucks carrying fruits and vegetables were held up due to the bandh. Kapurthala and Jalandhar also observed the bandh with all commercial establishments there remaining closed. Langars of tea and 'daal-parshada' were arranged for the protesters. The bandh's impact was also seen in some neighbouring areas of the state, including Ambala. Hundreds of daily commuters travelling from Ambala to

Chandigarh, Mohali, Patiala and other nearby cities of Punjab were thrown off stride because of the shutdown. Buses took alternate routes to go from Ambala to Chandigarh as they had to cross a stretch of the national highway that passes through Punjab.

Farmers, under the banner of SKM (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha, have been camping at the Shambhu and Khanauri border points between Punjab and Haryana

since February 13, after their march to Delhi was stopped by security forces. A "jatha" (group) of 101 farmers attempted to march to Delhi on foot three times between December 6 and 14 but were stopped by security personnel from Haryana. Besides the MSP, farmers are also demanding a debt waiver, pension, no hike in electricity tariffs, withdrawal of police cases, and "justice" for the victims of the 2021 Lakhimpur Kheri violence.

Security upgrade for New Year's eve

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In New Delhi district, where Connaught Place/Connaught Circus, Khan Market, five-star hotels, including The Lalit, Imperial, Park, Royal Plaza, Shangri-La, Le Meridien, Taj Mahal, Taj Vivanta, Metropolitan, Claridges, Ashoka, Samrat, ITC Maurya, and Taj Palace, India Gate, 'C' Hexagon and Kartavya Path, temples and gurudwaras are located, police will use 'Ikshan' vans which have Face Recognition System (FRS) cameras to identify any unwanted elements.

Ikshana is equipped with 360 degree cameras which are being monitored through AI operated software, which has the data of suspects who roam around in the crowd. "If they come in the sight of these cameras, 'Ikshana' will immediately inform the police about it after which the 'yodha' of the police will catch them," Deputy Commissioner of Police (New Delhi) Devesh Mahla said. In the South district, where elite clubs and bars are located along with the Saket select city walk mall, the police have roped in the

traffic police to facilitate the smooth movement of vehicles and avoid congestion, DCP (South) Ankit Chauhan said. He added that around the mall lies a hospital and Sheraton hotel, which attracts many people during the New Year's eve. "We have reduced the halting point, made limited numbers of entry/exit points and allotted designated places for commercial vehicles to keep the traffic flow around the area in check," the DCP said, adding that a meeting with this regard was also held with the traffic police.

Alcometer, devices used to detect alcohol levels in drivers, will also be provided to the police to curb drink and driving. A senior officer said that officers will also be given 'shoulder lights' which is a beacon mounted on the ground personnel's shoulders and can be seen from a distance even in fog. "It will help people to approach the police, and also save the officer on duty from any accident due to the dark," he said. Police said two ambulances, two fire tenders, two jail vans, two teams of bomb disposal

squad, 28 door frame metal detectors, two teams of SWAT, three teams of Parakram vehicles, 33 MPVs, 30 motorcycle-patrolling teams, 43 foot-patrolling teams, 29 border pickets, 30 vehicle-checking parties at parking lots, seven plain-cloth spotters and five arrest parties will be deployed in the busy New Delhi.

According to police, buses headed towards Connaught Place will be diverted, starting from 7 pm on December 31, and the exit gates of Rajiv Chowk Metro Station will be closed after 9 pm on December 31 to prevent overcrowding. Two doctors will be deployed in the area to conduct medical examinations of people driving under the influence of alcohol. An Excise inspector will be deployed for checking violations of Excise laws and prohibition regulations. In Southwest Delhi, where Hauz Khas village is a popular party place, 27 designated checkpoints with barricades are established to regulate vehicular movement and ensure road safety while 35 key locations are identified for special security coverage.

Delhi LG's latest missive hits AAP..

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In a statement Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva, stated that the letter written by the Lieutenant Governor Vinay Kumar Saxena to Chief Minister Atishi Marlena reflects the true reality of the Delhi government. He said that while political ideologies may differ, it is "at least evident that Atishi Marlena is seen carrying out administrative duties as a Chief Minister, something that has been notably absent during the almost ten-year tenure of Arvind Kejriwal, who merely functioned as a 'ribbon-cutting' Chief Minister".

The LG further outlined the challenges faced by the Delhi government including the Yamuna pollution crisis, garbage management, and the poor state of infrastructure in industrial and slum areas. He slammed the AAP supremo and said, "The public characterisation of a temporary or stopgap chief minister, as articulated by Shri Kejriwal, has no constitutional basis. It is also a deplorable violation of the democratic spirit and values enshrined in the Constitution

authored by Babasaheb Ambedkar". The Lieutenant Governor lauded Atishi for her approach in governance, contrasting it with her predecessor's alleged reluctance to take on administrative responsibilities. "For the first time during my tenure, I have seen a Chief Minister actively performing the duties of the office," he wrote. Saxena had earlier offered words of praise for Atishi, calling her "a thousands times better" than her predecessor, with whom he has had several tempestuous run-ins, on legal, administrative, and governance issues, over the past months.

In September, AAP leader Atishi was named as the new Chief Minister of Delhi following Kejriwal's announcement to resign from the top post after being granted interim bail for his alleged involvement in the Delhi liquor policy case. The official announcement was made by Delhi minister Gopal Rai. Notably, several other AAP leaders were in the fray to succeed Kejriwal, including Kailash Gahlot, Saurabh Bharadwaj and

Gopal Rai. Atishi was elevated to the position of cabinet minister in the Delhi government after Satyender Jain and Manish Sisodia tendered their resignations last year. She, along with Saurabh Bharadwaj, were made Delhi ministers, but Atishi was given charge of 14 departments, including education, finance, planning, PWD, water, power and public relations.

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

Imams ignored, AAP woos Pujaris, Granthis

From page 1

Former Delhi MP Parvesh Verma claimed that Kejriwal is remembering 'Ishwar' and 'Waheguru' due to the fear of loss. But he did not remember them for the last 10 years, Verma alleged, adding he only used to remember 'maulvis' of the mosque, and used to see only one religion and one vote bank.

Taking a dig at Kejriwal, South Delhi MP Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said that Kejriwal should tell how many temples and gurudwaras are there in Delhi and what is the total amount estimated to be spent on this scheme.

Earlier this month, Arvind Kejriwal launched the Mahila Samman scheme which

offered a stipend of Rs 2100 per month to unemployed women. AAP leaders started a registration drive for the scheme. However, the next day, the government's women and child development (WCD) department advertised that the "Mahila Samman" scheme was "non-existent" and urged residents not to share personal data. The AAP later claimed the officers involved in the fiasco were under BJP's pressure. The party also vowed action against them. Delhi Lt Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena has ordered an inquiry against private persons allegedly collecting personal details of women in the name of enrolling them for the proposed scheme of the ruling AAP in Delhi.

Falling Sensex, Sliding Rupee: What It Means for Mutual Fund Investors

From page 1

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

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

— The writer is Professor of Finance – XLRI Xavier School of Management and a BJP Leader

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

AP ■ SEOUL

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

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



aircraft safely during landings — should have been made with lighter materials that would break more easily upon impact. Joo said the ministry has determined that similar concrete structures are in other domestic airports, including in Jeju Island and the southern cities of Yeosu and Pohang, as well as airports in the United States, Spain and South Africa. Video of the crash indicated that the pilots did not deploy flaps or slats to slow the aircraft, suggesting a possible hydraulic failure, and did not manually lower the landing gear, suggesting they did not have time, said John Cox, a retired airline pilot and CEO of Safety Operating Systems in

St. Petersburg, Florida. Despite that, the jetliner was under control and traveling in a straight line, and damage and injuries likely would have been minimized if not for the barrier being so close to the runway, Cox said. Other observers said the videos showed the plane was suffering from suspected engine trouble but the landing gear malfunction was likely a direct reason for the crash. They said there wouldn't likely be a link between the landing gear problem and the suspected engine issue. Earlier Monday, another Boeing 737-800 plane operated by Jeju Air returned to Seoul's Gimpo International Airport shortly after takeoff when the pilot



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

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ LAHORE

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

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

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

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

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

Missing Indian student's body found in Scotland river

PTI ■ LONDON

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

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

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

Taliban to close all NGOs employing Afghan women

AP ■ KABUL

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

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

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

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

Bangkok hotel fire kills 3 foreigners

AP ■ BANGKOK

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

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

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

Syria's long-ruling Baath party faces collapse

AP ■ DAMASCUS

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

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

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

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

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

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

66 killed as truck plunges into river in south Ethiopia

AP ■ ADDIS ABABA

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

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

UP unveils ambitious five year export policy to boost share to 7.5 per cent: Industry Minister Gupta

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

Sebi to auction 23 properties of nine companies in February

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

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

Sensex drops by 451 points, Nifty ends

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

Prospects of economy expected to improve in 2025: RBI Governor

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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



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

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

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

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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



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

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

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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



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

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

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

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

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

INBRIEF

GNDU EXAMS POSTPONED, NOW ON JANUARY 12

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

GNDU'S PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT LEADS MENTAL HEALTH OUTREACH PROGRAMS

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



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

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

GNDU PROFESSOR SUNIL KUMAR APPOINTED AS MEMBER OF BSF VIDWAT MANDAL

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



Magnus Carlsen returns to World Blitz Championship after FIDE allows jeans

AP ■ NEW YORK

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

Lamenting the contretemps, International Chess Federation President Arkady Dvorkovich said in a statement Sunday that he'd let World Blitz Championship tournament officials consider allowing "appropriate jeans" with a jacket, and other "elegant minor deviations" from the dress code. He said Carlsen's stand — which culminated in his quitting the tournament Friday — highlighted a need for more discussion "to ensure that our rules and their application reflect the evolving nature of chess as a global and accessible sport."

Carlsen, meanwhile, said in a video posted Sunday on social media that he would play — and wear jeans — in the World Blitz Championship when it begins Monday. "I think the situation was badly mishandled on their side," the 34-



year-old Norwegian grandmaster said. But he added that he loves playing blitz — a fast-paced form of chess — and wanted fans to be able

to watch, and that he was encouraged by his discussions with the federation after Friday's showdown.

"I think we sort of all want the same thing," he suggested in the video on his Take Take Take chess app's YouTube channel. "We want the

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

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

An official fined Carlsen \$200 and asked him to change pants, but he refused and wasn't paired for a ninth-round game, the federation said at the time. The organisation noted that another grandmaster, Ian Nepomniachtchi, was fined earlier in the day for wearing sports shoes, changed and continued to play. Carlsen has said that he offered to wear something else the next day, but officials were unyielding. He said "it became a bit of a matter of principle," so he quit the rapid and blitz championships.

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



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

PTI ■ DUBAI

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

The other two players nominated for the honour are Australia's Annabel Sutherland and South Africa captain Laura Wolvaardt. "Sri Lanka's all-format captain has been producing the goods with the bat for a long time now for her country. Athapaththu is ranked among the top-10 players in the ICC Women's rankings for batters and all-rounders in ODIs as well as T20Is, proving her mettle with both bat and ball," said ICC in a release.

"A stellar year with over 1,000 runs across formats, picking up 30 wickets as well along the way has underlined her position as one of the most impactful players in women's cricket," it added. Athapaththu made 458 runs in nine ODIs at 65.42 and claimed nine wickets while in 21 T20Is, she scored 720 runs and took 21 wickets.

Kerr has been nominated for her stellar performances, especially in New Zealand's title-winning campaign in the Women's T20 World Cup. "Melie Kerr had a remarkable year, highlighted by leading New Zealand to their maiden Women's T20 World Cup title and setting a national record for the most Women's T20I wickets in a calendar year," the ICC said.

"Her crowning achievement

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

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

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

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

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

"The 23-year-old set new standards with a breakout year that places her among the best all-rounders in the world in the 50-over format," the ICC said. "Sutherland became the first cricketer in women's ODI history to score back-to-back centuries while batting at No 5 or lower in the ODI series against New Zealand. Sutherland also became the second-youngest Australian to score three ODI centuries behind former captain Meg Lanning," it added.



West Bengal, Kerala clash in blockbuster Santosh Trophy final

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

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

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

Both sides have shown form befitting of their stature in the tournament, winning nine of their 10 matches, while drawing one each. Historically, Bengal have dominated at this stage, winning the tournament 32 times, while Kerala are seven-time champions.

In recent years, however, Kerala have had the edge over their eastern rivals, winning the 2017-18 and the 2021-22 titles defeating West Bengal. History, however, has no part to play in the final on New Year's Eve, believes Bengal head coach Sanjoy Sen.

"Perhaps reaching the (Santosh Trophy) final is an achievement for other states,

but that is not the case for us. It means nothing to Bengal — Zero," he exclaimed. "Unless we win the trophy, it all counts for nothing."

"Yes, we have won the tournament 32 times in the past, but the Santosh Trophy is a much bigger tournament now in terms of the number of states that participate in it. I do not intend to downplay past achievements, but I feel that it is more difficult to win it now," said Sen. Sen's counterpart Biby Thomas Muttath echoed similar expectations from his home state.

"The Santosh Trophy is like a World Cup for us, back in Kerala. The minimum expectation is for us to reach the final, but of course, everyone wants a win," he said. In the 10 matches so far, Kerala have scored 35 goals, while Bengal netted 27 times. The former have had a number of options for their goals, Naseeb Rahman (8), Muhammad Ajsal (9), and Sajeesh E (5) leading the charts for the southern state.

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

World Blitz Championship: Koneru Humpy eyeing a grand double

PTI ■ NEW YORK

Having achieved the monumental feat of winning the World Rapid chess title for a second time, Indian stalwart Koneru Humpy would be eyeing a grand double when the FIDE World Blitz Championship commences here on Tuesday. Humpy had on Sunday capped a wonderful year for Indian chess, defeating Irene Sukandar of Indonesia to emerge the FIDE Women's World Rapid Chess champion.

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



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

the championship that will have 13 rounds in the 'Open' category and 11 in the women's section. Another Indian, Dronavalli Harika is also a formidable force in Blitz, but the fans would be hoping for an improved performance from

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

In the 'Open' section, Magnus Carlsen, who was disqualified from the Rapid event following a dress code saga, starts as the overwhelming favourite. But the likes of India's R Praggnanandhaa and Arjun Erigaisi, France's Alireza Froujza and Uzbekistan's Nodirbek Abdusattorov can all give the Norwegian a run for his money.

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



Prolific Lille striker Jonathan David considering new contract offer

AP ■ LILLE

Jonathan David is considering a new contract from Lille and says his chances of staying at the French club are "50-50". The 24-year-old Canada striker is enjoying his fifth season at Lille and tops the league's scoring charts with 11 goals from 15 games. He is out of contract at the end of June and has reportedly been offered a two-year contract. "As the president (Olivier Létang) said several times, discussions are going on. We're

talking but no decision has been reached," David told regional newspaper La Voix du Nord on Monday in an interview. "The door is never closed. It's 50-50."

David has netted 17 goals overall this season — including four in the Champions League and two in the qualifying rounds — to take his tally to 101 since joining in 2020. He is one of the most sought-after strikers in Europe and Lille risks losing him for nothing if he does not sign a new deal.

Norway Chess: Top woman player Ju Wenjun confirms participation

PTI ■ STAVANGER

Women's world No.2 Ju Wenjun of China, No. 9 Anna Muzychuk of Ukraine and No. 21 Sarasadat Khademalsharieh of Spain on Monday confirmed their participation in next year's Norway Chess Women, which also has India's R. Vaishali in the fray. The event will be held from May 26 to June 6.

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

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



Women champion. She is also only the fifth woman in history to achieve a rating above 2600, marking her place among the elite. Muzychuk is a three-time world champion in fast chess. She clinched the Women's World Rapid Championship in 2014 and the Women's World Blitz Championship in

both 2014 and 2016. Her feat of winning both the World Rapid and World Blitz Championships in the same year in 2016 places her alongside legends like Susan Polgar and Norway's Magnus Carlsen.

Sarasadat, who is originally from Iran but now represents Spain, became the national

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

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

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

In 2023, Gukesh finished third in Stavanger.

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

Paulo Fonseca fired by AC Milan

AP ■ MILAN

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

"Yes, it's true. I'm out," Fonseca told reporters when he lowered his car window as he left San Siro following Sunday's match. "That's life... I did everything I could." Milan is expected to hire Sergio Conceicao, another Portuguese coach, as Fonseca's replacement. The Serie A club released a short statement confirming Fonseca's dismissal. "AC Milan announces that Paulo Fonseca has been



relieved from his duties as head coach of the men's first team," it said. "The club extends its gratitude to Paulo for his great professionalism and wishes him the very best in his future endeavours." Fonseca was hired in June and produced only 12 wins in 24 matches across all competitions. His last action

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

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

year stint that included the 2022 Serie A title. Milan has fared better in the Champions League lately following four straight wins, including a 3-1 result at Real Madrid. The Rossoneri are in 12th place and on course to qualify for the knockout playoff round.

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

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

Naomi Osaka wins her 1st match of new season

AP ■ WELLINGTON

Four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka made a winning return to the court after an almost three month absence Monday in the first round of the ASB tennis classic in Auckland, undeterred by protests outside the stadium against her Israeli opponent. Osaka beat qualifier Lina Glushko 6-4, 6-4 in a tight contest in her first match since October when a back injury at the China Open ended her 2024 season.

All the hallmarks of Osaka's game were present Monday: the powerful serve, forceful ground-strokes particularly from the forehand side and the aggression. She looked relaxed and comfortable on court with no sign of her recent injury. Osaka had to deal with a swirling wind on center court and with delays in play caused by the chants of a small group of protesters which were clearly audible



within the stadium. There was a longer break as Osaka was poised to serve out the first set when Glushko had to leave the court for treatment to a hip injury. "I had no idea what the score was most of the time," Osaka said. "I just kept trying to tell myself one point at a time and trying not to get discouraged. "Thankfully it came out in my favor in

the end." Osaka was supported at courtside by her new coach Patrick Mouratoglou who previously had a long-term association with Serena Williams. She broke Glushko in the third game of the first set and held comfortably to win 6-4.

The second set was tighter. Osaka broke Glushko in the third game but Glushko converted her only break point of the match to level at 2-2. Glushko held to love in the seventh game to lead 4-3 but Osaka seemed to step up at that point, held with two aces for 4-4, broke for 5-4 and held serve to love to clinch the win.

Her serve was solid throughout. She sent down seven aces and won 74 percent of first serve points. Her first serve averaged around 180kmh (111mph) and her slice around 140kmh (87mph). "I think she's a really amazing opponent. I've never played her before," Osaka said.

Australia beat India by 184 runs in fourth Test

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

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

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



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

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

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

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

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



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

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

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

Pant and Yashasvi Jaiswal had batted through the post-lunch session, it certainly looked India could achieve a draw because it was a matter of batting for another hour really without losing a wicket, and Australia would have then given up," Gavaskar said. "The whole idea was try and take into the mandatory overs and if around the mandatory overs India had just lost maybe four wickets then Australia, after a couple of overs, would have asked to shake hands but that didn't happen." As Pant got a long hop from Travis Head after a 103-ball vigil, during which he shared the difference between the teams. After dismissing Nissanka, Duffy produced a superb yorker to remove Perera in the 16th over when Sri Lanka was 127-4 and still in with a good chance. He then removed Wanindu Hasaranga (1) and Maheesh Theekshana (0) in the space of three balls in the 18th over as the Sri Lanka tail again failed to fire. Pant and Jaiswal had batted through the post-lunch session, it certainly looked India could achieve a draw because it was a matter of batting for another hour really without losing a wicket, and Australia would have then given up," Gavaskar said. "The whole idea was try and take into the mandatory overs and if around the mandatory overs India had just lost maybe four wickets then Australia, after a couple of overs, would have asked to shake hands but that didn't happen." As Pant got a long hop from Travis Head after a 103-ball vigil, during which he shared the difference between the teams. After dismissing Nissanka, Duffy produced a superb yorker to remove Perera in the 16th over when Sri Lanka was 127-4 and still in with a good chance. He then removed Wanindu Hasaranga (1) and Maheesh Theekshana (0) in the space of three balls in the 18th over as the Sri Lanka tail again failed to fire.

New Zealand beats Sri Lanka by 45 runs in second T20

AP ■ MOUNT MAUNGANUI

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



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

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

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



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

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

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

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

Jaiswal's caught-behind dismissal sparks controversy

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

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



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

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

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

PTI ■ DUBAI

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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