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Delhi Govt depts disown AAP's Mahila Vajpayee's Ken-Betwa interlinking Samman Yojana, Sanjeevani schemes

RAJESH KUMAR NEW DELHI

n an unprecedented move, two departments of Delhi Government have released public notices and disowned the registration process started by Chief Minister Atishi and former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal for two schemes announced by the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in the National Capital. The Delhi government's Health and Family Welfare department and Women and Child Development department on Wednesday issued public notices disowning the existence of schemes, Mahila Samman Yojana and Sanjeevani Yojna and cautioned citizens against falling for "misleading schemes' launched by the AAP.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Atishi has stated that strict administrative action will be taken against two officers who released public notices to disown the registration process started by her and former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal for two schemes. The officers in question are a joint director of the Department of Woman and Child Development and the special secretary of the Health and Family Welfare Department.

Atishi, addressing a press conference at the AAP headquarters, strongly condemned the notices, claiming that the officers were under pressure from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). She insisted that the public notices were false and part of a larger conspiracy by the BJP to undermine the AAP's initiatives, which had gained significant public support. She added that the party would take legal action, including a Delhi Police inquiry, against the officers for issuing misleading statements. During the press conference, Atishi also shared an official notification from the Cabinet that approved the Rs 1,000 allowance for women under the Mahila Samman



Yojana, reaffirming the legitimacy of the

The fresh controversy will add another dimension to the ongoing tussle between the AAP and the bureaucracy, with accusations flying between parties. The underlines the tenuous relationship between the bureaucracy and the elected Delhi Government after an amendment to the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD) Act, the services department comes under the control of the Lieutenant Governor.

The latest flashpoint, which comes weeks ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls, sparked a slugfest between the AAP and BJP leaders. The BJP has accused the ruling party of duping people, since the two schemes have not been approved yet. The Department of Women and Child Development (WCD), in a public notice newspapers, has said the Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana does not exist and has not been approved by the Delhi government. It has urged

citizens to refrain from sharing personal information with individuals or groups claiming association with this "fake scheme", as it could result in identity theft or financial fraud. "As, if and when such a scheme is notified, the Department of Women and Child Development (WCD), GNCTD, will launch a digital portal for eligible individuals to submit their applications online as per the approved guidelines. The eligibility conditions and modalities will be clearly notified by the department as and when it happens.

It is emphasised that since no such scheme exists, the question of physical forms / applications for the registration under this non-existent scheme does not arise," it said, adding that any individual collecting forms or information in the name of this scheme is "fraudulent and without any authority". The department has warned that sharing personal information in the public domain may lead to people falling prey to cybercrime.

vision sees light on his centenary

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI/KHAJURAHO (MP)

The ambitious medical the kind interlinking of the The ambitious first of its Ken-Betwa River as desired by former Prime Minister late Atal Bihari Vajpayee two decades ago, finally kick started with the foundation stone laying by PM Narendra Modi on Wednesday which also marked the birth anniversary of the political stalwart Bharat Ratna Vajpayee.

The Vajpayee government had proposed river linking as a solution for irrigation needs as well as for dealing with floods. Modi laid the foundation stone of the Rs 44,600 crore Ken-Betwa River Link Project at Khajuraho in Madhya Pradesh and said the river linking will open new doors of prosperity and happiness in the Bundelkhand region.

Union Water Resources Minister C R Patil and Chief Pradesh Madhya Minister Mohan Yadav handed over two kalash (urns) containing water from Betwa and Ken rivers, respectively, to Modi, who poured it over a model of the project to launch the river linking work.

As per the initial estimation of the project, nearly 44 lakh people in 10 districts of Madhya Pradesh and 21 lakh in Uttar Pradesh will get drinking water under the project. Nearly 7.18 lakh agricultural families in 2,000 villages will benefit from the project, which will also generate 103 MW of



stone laying ceremony of Ken-Betwa River Linking Project, in Khajuraho,

hydropower and 27 MW of solar energy, officials involved in the project said

Addressing the event Modi said that in the 21st century, only the nations with adequate and well-managed water resources can advance. 'The major challenge of the 21st century is water security. In the 21st century only those countries who have adequate water resources with proper management will move forward," he said.

The PM also released a commemorative stamp and a coin in the memory of Modi Vajpavee. performed 'bhumi pujan' or ground-breaking ceremony for the construction of 1,153

Atal Gram Sewa Sadans costing Rs 437 crore at the Khajuraho program. Under the Ken Betwa project

a 77-metre high and 2.13 kilometres long Daudhan dam and two tunnels (upper level 1.9 km and lower level 1.1 km) will be constructed on the Ken river in the Panna Tiger Reserve. The dam will store 2,853 million cubic metres of water, the chief minister said.

The surplus Ken water will be transferred to the Betwa river through the 221-km-long link canal from Daudhan dam, providing irrigation and drinking water facilities in both the states, he said.



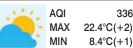
The wreckage of Azerbaijan Airlines Embraer 190 lays on the ground near the airport of Aktau, Kazakhstan AP/PTI

Over 30 dead in Azerbaijani airliner crash

AP MOSCOW

An Azerbaijani airliner with 67 people onboard crashed Wednesday in the Kazakhstani city of Aktau, leaving at least 32 survivors, according to officials. More than 30 people are likely dead.

Kazakhstan's Emergency Ministry said in a Telegram statement that those on board included five crew. At least 29 have been hospitalised, the ministry told Russia's state news agency RIA Novosti. Russian news agency Interfax quoted medical workers as saying that four bodies have been recovered and emergency workers at the scene as saying that both pilots, according to a preliminary assessment, died in the crash. The Embraer 190 aircraft made an emergency landing three kilometres from the city, Azerbaijan Airlines said earlier.



ED investigating some Canadian colleges, **Indian entities in human trafficking case**

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Tuesday said it is investigating the "involvement" of some Canadian colleges and a few laundering case linked to the trafficking of Indians into the United States from the Canada border. The investigation is linked to the death of a fourmember Indian family, hailing from Dingucha village of Gujarat. The four died of extreme cold while trying to illegally cross the Canada-US border on January 19, 2022.

The ED took cognisance of an Ahmedabad Police FIR against Bhavesh Ashokbhai Patel, who emerged as the main accused in the matter, and a few others, to file a complaint under the criminal sections of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). Patel and others have "hatched a well-planned conspiracy to send people (Indians) to the USA through Canada via illegal channels thereby committing the offence of human trafficking," it said.

The agency had earlier found that as part of the racket, the accused "arranged" admission for people, desirous to go to



the US illegally, in colleges and universities based in Canada. A Canadian student visa was applied for such people and once they reached that country, instead of joining the college, they "illegally" crossed the US-Canada border and never joined the Canadian college, the agency said in a statement. "In view of this, the fee received by colleges based in Canada was remitted back to the individuals' account," said ED, adding that Indians were "lured" into the racket and charged between Rs 55 and Rs 60 lakh per person, according to the ED.

The agency said it undertook

fresh searches in this case on December 10 and December 19 at eight locations in Mumbai, Nagpur,

"entities", one based in Mumbai and the other in Nagpur, entered into an 'agreement" for admission of Indians in universities based in foreign countries on a commission basis. The agency said the latest searches found that about 25 000 students are being referred by one entity and more than 10,000 students by the other to various colleges based outside India every year. Further, it is gathered that there are around 1,700 agents/partners based in Gujarat and around 3,500 agents/partners of other entities all over India out of which around 800 are active. It is further revealed that around 112 colleges based in Canada have entered into an agreement with one entity and more than 150 with another entity. Their involvement in the instant case is under investigation," the ED said.

The agency suspects that out of the total 262 such colleges in Canada, a few, which are geographically located near the Canada-US border, are involved in the trafficking of Indian nationals. The ED said it froze bank deposits worth Rs 19 lakh, some "incriminating" documents and digital devices, Gandhinagar and Vadodara. It and seized two vehicles in was found, the ED said, two connection with its probe.

UP man selfimmolates near **Sansad Bhavan**

SAUMYA SHUKLA NEW DELHI

In a shocking incident, a **⊥**man in his early 30s tried to immolate himself on Wednesday afternoon opposite the high security premises, the police recovered a singed note from the victim, identified as Jitendra. It hints Pradesh's Uttar government's inaction in a case relating to the Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe Act. An official of the Delhi Fire Service said that a call regarding the incident near the Railway Bhawan opposite the Sansad Bhavan was received at around 3.35 pm on Wednesday, and a fire tender was pressed into service.

The security personnel deployed near Sansad Bhavan rushed the man identified as Jitendra, a resident of Baghpat in Uttar Pradesh, to the Ram Manohar Lohia (RML) Hospital. "He set himself on fire at the roundabout near Rail Bhawan. The local police and railway police along with some people immediately extinguished the fire and the person was sent to the hospital," an official statement

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Ready to spar on Boxing Day: India fret on Rohit's batting position

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Divine intervention and a wagging tail might have lifted India's sagging spirits in Brisbane but an out-of-form skipper Rohit Sharma's batting position will be in focus against a dangerous Australia bracing to deliver the knockout punch in the Boxing Day' Test starting punch in the 'Boxing Day' Test starting here on Thursday. The Indian skipper was the last to hit the nets on Christmas eve and there is speculation doing rounds that he could replace the team's most assured opener, KL Rahul, at the top of the order. If that happens, Rahul will come in at No. 3 while Shubman Gill could either play in the middle order or make way for a Dhruv Jurel in the playing eleven. The series is currently locked 1-1. The Indian skipper stopped batting in the middle order after being elevated to the opening slot back in 2019. But he chose to come down in



an in-form Rahul and first-Test centurion Yashasvi Jaiswal.

The move was a spectacular failure and it remains to be seen how the team adjusts in case Rohit opens and Gill is either dropped or bats at number five. Asked Adelaide and Brisbane to accommodate about his batting position during the pre-

match press conference, he was borderline

"Let's not worry about that. I think who bats where, we should be discussing that within ourselves and I shouldn't be answering this question in every press conference," the skipper just about held his composure.

Both captains feel that 1-1 after three games is a fair reflection of the competition between the sides but things can quickly change at the MCG. The rainaffected draw at the Gabba was like a soothing balm for India after the Pink Test debacle in Adelaide.

But now, India are back at one of their favourite Australian venues where they have remained undefeated in Tests since the 2014 series. The last two (2018-19 and 2020-21) of the three Tests (other being 2014-15) resulted in Indian wins where solid batting played its part.

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Translocation of deer comes to a halt in PT

here is a big halt to the translocation of deer from Bhagwan Birsa Park (BBBP) Ormanjhi Ranchi to Palamu tiger reserve.

A total of 269 deer was to be translocated from the BBBP to PTR. The Palamu tiger reserve could bring in only 147 deer. The translocation of the remaining 122 hangs in limbo.

Deputy director south

division of the PTR Kumar Ashish said, "We could bring only 147 deer from the BBBP. Now for remaining 122 deer we are to wait for the permission from the Central Zoo Authority (CZA) of India

"The CZA had given us permission to translocate 269 deer from the BBBP from 12.6.24 to 11.12.24. It was a 6 month time for us to bring all the 269 deer." added

The CZA is very strict with the time frame for the translocation. Expiry of the time frame calls for fresh set of permission. The PTR failed to complete the translocation of deer in 6 months.

The translocation of deer started as late as third week of November. It was on November 18 and 19 that a lot of 29 deer was brought to the PTR from BBBP.

On being asked as to why so much of delay was done in the translocation of deer to which Ashish said "There was an office order dated 19.7.24 of the chief wild life



warden to translocate the deer but vagaries of Nature

Heavy rains lashed at Latehar and Palamu tiger reserve too. Bringing in deer from captivity to the wilderness of the jungles in the rainy days has never been a desirable thing reminded

Deer are very sensitive to vagaries of climate. Hence conducive time and climate were waited for the translocation of deer. It finally took off on November 18 said the

deputy director south division Ashish. "We made 8 trips in all from November 18 to December 4. We used our multi lakh air conditioned BOMA truck to translocate a total of 147 deer from Ormanjhi to the PTR." informed Ashish.

Among the translocated 147 deer, female deer count 115 while it is 32 male deer All the translocated only. deer have been secured in the soft release centres at Teno and Parsa

The south division of the PTR keeps the lion's share of the 147 deer. The south division gets only 3 deer and that too all male ones.

The BBBP released these deer for the PTR as they were in excess number and were officially branded as under the category of the 'extra animals in the BBBP."

The deer have been imported here in the PTR to replenish the prey base for the carnivores in the south

Bokaro crowned champions, to represent Jharkhand in National Tribal Sports Meet

The second day of the statelevel tribal sports competition, organized by Vanvasi Kalyan Kendra at JRD Tata Sports Complex, witnessed an exhilarating football final Bokaro Seraikela. Emerging victorious, Bokaro's football team clinched the championship title. Earlier, the semifinals saw intense matches between Seraikela and Chatra, and Bokaro and East Singhbhum. Teams from various districts of Jharkhand participated in the tournament.

As the state-level champions, Bokaro's football team will represent Vanvasi Kalyan Kendra, Jharkhand, at the 24th National Tribal Sports Meet to be held in Raipur, Chhattisgarh, from December 28 to 31. This national event will witness participation from states across India, including northeastern regions and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Tribal players from



Nepal will also compete in this prestigious tournament.

The closing ceremony featured former Chief Minister of Jharkhand, Shri Arjun Munda, as the chief guest, along with the Vice-Chancellor of Jamshedpur Women's University, Prof. (Dr.) Anjila Gupta, as the distinguished guest. Both dignitaries presented trophies, medals, and certificates to the winner and runner-up teams while extending their best wishes to the players for

a bright future.

Other notable guests Regional included Organization Minister of Vanvasi Kalyan Kendra, Vinod Upadhyay; international handball coach and Tata Steel Sports Division Manager, Dr. Hasan Imam Malik; and ASIA President, Inder Agarwal. Individual awards were distributed to Amit Maji of Seraikela for Best Goalkeeper, Gurupura Hembram of Seraikela for Best Scorer, and Dharmveer

Soren of Bokaro for Best Player, along with trophies and cash prizes. Referees were honored with trophies and shawls by Regional Co-Organization Minister, Shri Prafull Akant.

Speaking on the occasion, Shri Arjun Munda emphasized the abundance of sports talent in Jharkhand, stating, "There is no shortage of talent in Jharkhand; what is needed is the right platform. The Vanvasi Kalyan Kendra is making commendable

efforts at the national level to identify and nurture tribal talents from remote villages. If players remain dedicated and persevere, they will undoubtedly excel and bring pride to their state and country." He extended his heartfelt wishes to all the players.

Prof. (Dr.) Anjila Gupta, Vinod Upadhyay, Dr. Hasan Imam Malik, and Inder Agarwal also motivated the participants and conveyed their best wishes.

The event was coordinated by program convenor Sura Birouli, with a vote of thanks delivered by State Minister Vineet Kumar.

The ceremony was graced by prominent members of the Vanvasi Kalyan Kendra, including Regional Organization Minister Singh, Devnandan Organization Minister Sushil Marandi, Doman Chandra Mahato, Amitabh Senapati, Rohit Kumar, Ruby Gautam, Ramnath Singh, Bhattu Mandi, and many other dedicated volunteers

3 held with arms and ammunition in Garhwa

GARHWA

In the Hariharpur OP area of Garhwa district, police have apprehended three individuals suspected of planning a criminal act, confiscating a country-made gun, a sevenround revolver, a six-round pistol, and a live cartridge during the operation.

Superintendent of Police Deepak Kumar Pandey confirmed the arrests, stating that authorities received confidential information suggesting that the trio from Hariharpur village were in possession of illegal firearms, which they were allegedly using to intimidate local residents. In response, a police team was mobilised under the direction of SDPO Satyendra Narayan Singh from Banshidhar Nagar.

During a raid, officers targeted the home of one Raju Kumar in Hariharpur Bhundar, where they found a concealed country-made gun on the roof of the property

leagues, attended the occa-

and seized his mobile phone. Continuing their investigation, police located another illegal firearm, equipped with seven rounds, in a field roughly 150 metres from Raju Kumar's residence, following a lead from Pawan

Kumar Gupta. The team then proceeded to the home of Subodh Kumar Gupta, also known as Prince Kumar, who was recognised in a photograph alongside Raju Kumar and

Enthusiasm rules

Winter Carnival

Pawan Kumar Gupta. Acting on Gupta's information, police unearthed an additional country-made gun with six rounds and a cartridge buried in a field approximately 400 metres from his

All three suspects have been taken into custody. Superintendent Pandey further noted that all officers who participated in the operation will receive commendations for their efforts.

Experts discuss role of Hydrogen in Power and Transport Sectors

PANKAJ: DHANBAD

K.V. Vidyanandan, Professor of Practice in the Department of Electrical Engineering at the National Institute of Technology (NIT) Calicut, Kerala, delivered an insightful lecture titled Emerging Roles of Hydrogen in Power and Transport Sectors at IIT (ISM) Dhanbad

The lecture, held in the Conference Room of the Department of Electrical Engineering at IIT (ISM) Dhanbad, was attended by faculty members, research scholars, and students. The session was led by Prof. Sukumar Mishra, Director of IIT (ISM)

Prof. Sukanta Das, Head of the Department of Electrical Engineering at IIT (ISM) and other faculty members of the Department were also present during the lecture. During his talk, Dr. Vidyanandan explored the vast potential of hydrogen as a clean energy carrier. He highlighted advancements in hydrogen technologies for power generation and transport, discussed the challenges and solutions associated with integrating hydrogen into existing systems, and provided a global perspective on the role of hydrogen in the energy transition.

Dr. Vidyanandan holds a Electrical Engineering from REC/NIT Calicut, a D.C.A from Raipur, and both M.Tech and Ph.D. Electrical Engineering from IIT Delhi. Vidyanandan's

research interests include wind and solar PV systems, energy storage, grid integration of renewables, electric vehicles, and hydrogen and fuel cells. He has authored five thermal power plant simulator

operation manuals and published 23 articles in national and international journals and conferences. with his work garnering over 1.200 citations.

International Experience Professional Engagements

He has undergone professional training in England and Australia and has conducted technical training programs for engineers in the Middle East. A qualified simulator instructor for 210 MW, 500 MW, and 660

MW power plants, Dr. Vidyanandan regularly delivers lectures to both national and international audiences.

Mission Rozgar Job Fair organized by NBJK and SBI Life who, along with his col-

BSL plot vacated after 30 years of illegal occupation

AVINASH ANJAN : HAZ-

The Mission Rozgar project, a collaboration between NBJK and SBI Life, organized a successful Job Fair at Prince Hotel, Hazaribag. The event provided a platform for skilled trainees from the 2nd and 3rd batches of the program to connect with potential employers from various sectors. Employers present at the event included Sashi Kr. Kuswaha (Hexire Group), Abhishek Kr. (Perfect Academy), Upendra Kr. (Apna Mart), Jeetendra Kr.



(Blue Sky Salon & Spa), and Deepsikha Mishra (Chola Finance). The event resulted in the on-the-spot appoint-

ment of 40 trainees, with salary packages ranging from Rs. 3,500 to Rs. 9,000. Additionally, 10-15 trainees were shortlisted for further selection, with their final process to be completed in the coming days. The event was graced by Ritesh Prasad (GSM, SBI Life, Hazaribag),

under the leadership of

General Manager (LRA-TA)

A.K. Singh, along with the security team, sealed the

plot today after a coordinat-

The plot was originally allotted to P.J. Wilson on

May 20, 1970. However, the

allotment was canceled after

it was found that the lease

conditions had been violat-

ed. Following the cancella-

tion, the matter was taken to

the Estate Court. The court

ruled in favor of BSL and

ordered the eviction of unau-

During this period, unde-

sirable elements occupied

thorized occupants.

ed operation.

sion to support the recruitment efforts. The successful event was facilitated by Rupesh Mallick (Program Head & Center Manager), Mrityunjay Jha (Placement In-Charge), Shalini (BCA Faculty), Renu Rana (GDA Faculty), Sushila Dev (Tailoring Faculty), and Suresh Kr. (Mobilizer). This event marks a significant milestone in the ongoing efforts of Mission Rozgar to empower youth and provide them with meaningful employment opportunities.

plot without legal

authorization. Reports indi-

cate that these occupants

had been residing on the

property without paying for

utilities such as electricity

Estate Court's order, a joint

team comprising members of BSL's Land Revenue

Administration (LRA), led by

TA/GM A.K. Singh, and the

security department cleared

the plot and sealed it to pre-

vent further encroachments.

This operation marks a sig-

nificant step in BSL's efforts

to reclaim its properties and

ensure lawful usage

In compliance with the

the

and water.

PNS: JAMSHEDPUR The Masonic Lodge Ground

in Northern Town was abuzz with excitement as the Winter Carnival, organized by Art Lab on the initiative of Freemasons, brought together people of all ages for a day filled with joy and creativity. This event, a first of its kind, celebrated talent, local artistry, and community spir-

The carnival had something for everyone—children, youth, and the elderly. A variety of stalls showcased handicrafts, calligraphy, paintings, and Christmas-themed items like Xmas trees and Santa dresses. Food stalls offered delicious treats, adding to the festive atmosphere. The highlight of the event was the platform it provided for young talents to hone their skills and expand their businesses. Arun Raisurana, a member

Freemasons, shared vision behind the carnival: This Winter Carnival is not just about celebration; it's about giving back to society. The funds raised will go towards charity, aiding those working for the betterment of our community. Additionally, we aim to encourage local artists and businesses through this event." The event was a collective

effort by several prominent contributors, Digvijay Singh, GM Sharan, Barbhaya, Ladsariya, JR Amin, and others. Their dedication ensured the carnival's success, leaving attendees with cherished memories and a renewed sense of community.

The Winter proved to be a vibrant platform for fostering creativity showcasing local talent, and supporting charitable causes, setting a promising precedent for future events.

Vesuvius and ESL Steel promote Health and Hygiene through CSR

PNS: BOKARO

Vesuvius, a business partner of ESL Steel Limited, has strengthened its CSR efforts by inaugurating four Smart Bio Toilets and a Pure Drinking Water Machine at ESL's project sites. A Menstrual Hygiene Awareness session was conducted to educate schoolgirls on healthier practices, alongside the distribution of 450 school bags. A tree plantation drive at Madhunia High School further highlighted their focus on environmental sustainability. The event was graced by esteemed dignitaries, including Pratima Das, Block Education Officer; Pradeep Kumar, Madhunia Panchayat Mukhiya; Suman Trivedi, Head Refractory, ESL; Kunal Daripa, Head CSR, ESL; and Arvind Kumar Singh, Business Head, Vesuvius India Limited (VIL). Representatives from Vesuvius India Limited, Vedanta ESL's CSR team, and school authorities also participated actively. Speaking at the event, Suman Trivedi emphasized the initiative's goal of creating safer, healthier environments. "These steps reflect our commitment to community welfare, empowering students to lead more confident lives, she said. This program aligns with ESL's broader vision of sustainable development, focusing on health, education, and environmental care



Emerging Trends in the Modeling Industry: A Diverse Array of Opportunities BY RACHNA TIWARI

Bokaro Steel Limited (BSL)

has successfully reclaimed

PNS: BOKARO

The modelling industry, long associated with runway shows and highfashion photo shoots, is undergoing a significant transformation. Todav's models are no longer confined to fashion magazines; they are expanding their roles to embrace a wide range of new and exciting opportunities. From fitness modeling and beauty blogging to brand ambassadorship and philanthropy, models are leveraging their skills and influence in diverse

One of the most rapidly growing sectors is Fitness Modeling. With a focus on promoting athleticism and healthy lifestyles, fitness models are in high demand by sports apparel brands, fitness products, and wellness campaigns. These models not only represent physical ideals but also embody the ethos of hard work, discipline, and health. Brands recognize the appeal of models who live and breathe their values, making fitness

modeling an increasingly lucrative and sought-after field.

Plot No. C-3, which had been

under illegal occupation for

the past 25 to 30 years. The

LRA department of BSL,

Another avenue where models are making an impact is through Beauty Blogging. By sharing beauty tips, makeup tutorials, and product reviews, models are building personal brands that resonate with their followers. With their insider knowledge and polished appearances, models are perfectly positioned to influence consumers in the beauty and skincare industries. Many models use platforms like Instagram and YouTube to monetize their content, blurring the lines between modeling and content creation.

Some models are also branching out into Acting and Hosting. Armed with oncamera experience and natural charisma, many are successfully transitioning into the entertainment world. Whether acting in films or hosting television shows and web series, models are finding that their experience in front of the lens translates seamlessly





into these related fields. This shift allows them to further diversify their skill sets while gaining exposure in new markets.

In the corporate world, models are also finding unique opportunities as Product Demonstrators and Brand Ambassadors. Companies often hire models to showcase products at trade shows, conferences. and corporate events. Their professionalism and presentation skills make them ideal candidates for demonstrating everything from technol-

ogy to lifestyle products. Furthermore, brands are increasingly turning to models as Brand Ambassadorsrecognizable figures who embody the company's image and values. These ambassadors attend events. promote products on social media, and help forge a deeper connection between

Corporate Training is vet another area where models are contributing. Some models are hired to teach communication skills, public speaking, and presentation

the brand and its audience.

techniques to business professionals. With their expertise in body language and presentation, models are uniquely qualified to coach others on how to command a room or deliver a compelling speech.

In addition to career expansion, many models are using their platforms to make a difference in the world. Philanthropic Modeling is an emerging trend where models leverage their influence to raise awareness for social causes. From supporting charitable organizations to advocating for health or education initiatives, models are proving that their roles go far beyond aesthetics.

Environmental and social causes have also found champions among models Environmental Advocacy is on the rise, as many in the industry push for sustainable fashion and eco-friendly beauty products. Models are becoming vocal advocates for reducing waste, using ethical materials, and promoting green business prac-

tices. In a similar vein, Social

Justice Modeling sees models using their influence to challenge societal norms, promote inclusivity, and fight for equality. Models are uniquely positioned to amplify marginalized voices and encourage change in industries that have historically been exclu-

sive or discriminatory The modern model is not just a face for fashion but a multifaceted professional. Whether showcasing athletic prowess, influencing beauty trends, or standing up for social justice, today's models are seizing new opportunities and redefining what it means to work in the industry. As they continue to break new ground, one thing is clear: modeling is no longer just about looks; it's

about making an impact. With a career spanning ten years, the writer has solidified her expertise in HR, entrepreneurship, and innovation ecosystem devel-

SHE IS A PRINT AND RAMP MODEL WHO WAS ALSO FEATURED IN VOGUE AND GLADRAGS MAGAZINES.



Raghubar Das resigns from Odisha Guv post, set to re-join politics

Dr Hari Babu Kambhampati the current Governor of Mizoram, has been appointed as his successor in Odisha

¬ ormer Jharkhand Chief Minister Raghubar Das may become active once again in the state politics soon with the BJP planning strategy Harvana Jharkhand. Das resigned as Governor of Odisha and he was immediately relieved. Despite playing tribal-centric politics with three tribal CMs Babu Lal Marandi, Arjun Munda and Champai Soren -working for it in the 2024 Assembly elections, the BJP failed to romp home.

So, they are now planning a new experiment by bringing Das back with tribal versus the rest. The BJP feels that infighting marred his chances

to become CM for the second time but despite anti-incumbency, his performance was better that this time round. There are a certain number of tribals who believe in Hindutva politics vote for the

According to the press communiqué Rashtrapati Bhawan, the President of India has officially accepted Raghubar Das' resignation. Dr Hari Babu Kambhampati, the current Governor of Mizoram, has been appointed as his successor in Odisha.

Raghubar Das, who stepped down as Odisha Tuesday, Governor on expressed his willingness to return to active party work,

leaving his future role to the high command's discretion.

come from a common mazdoor family. From a booth-level worker, I served in various capacities. I was given a chance to serve the people of Jharkhand. I will discharge whatever responsibility the party entrusts me Das said on Wednesday, highlighting his journey from a working-class background to top leadership

"Our party will decide my role," he said amid speculation that he would return to active politics. Das was in Puri to visit the Lord Jagannath temple. "I feel blessed to have served the people of Odisha. The state has been progressing very fast with a double engine government led by Minister Narendra Modi. I am sure it will be among the most developed states in the country by its centenary year in 2036," he said. Months before the Assembly election Das has expressed his desire to join politics. Jharkhand September this year Das when he was Governor of Odisha had changed colour of the profile picture of Odisha Governor Raghunar Das on X and Facebook, sparking speculations over his return to Jharkhand politics once again. Interestingly, Das changed the frame of his profile picture on social media

platforms to green and saf-

fron for some time, but as soon as it went viral on social media, it was replaced with the earlier photograph.

It was largely believed in

the political circles that Das might contest from his old seat Jamshedpur East in the recently held Assembly elections, but for some unknown reasons the idea was postponed and his daughter-inlaw was fielded from there.

In the Jamshedpur (East) constituency, political greenhorn Purnima Sahu (30) has emerged victorious after beating warhorse Ajoy Kumar of Congress, securing her family's political heritage. She defeated Kumar by an impressive margin of over 42,000 votes. The seat, which

slipped from BJP's grasp in 2019 when former chief minister Raghubar Das lost to independent candidate Saryu Roy, has now returned to the family's fold. Following her victory, Sahu said, "This win is because of the good work done by my father-in-law in the last 25 years as a public representative from this seat. I went to the polls on the development plank and now, I will work towards continuing

his activities. The former journalistturned-homemaker-turnedpolitician garnered 106,398 votes while Ajoy Kumar managed to secure 62,938 votes. Sahu maintained her lead throughout all 21 rounds of



Special Kumbh Mela trains to run from Ranchi

PNS: RANCHI

Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 is going to be held in Prayagraj from 13 January 2025 to 26 February 2025. In view of the extra rush in trains on the occasion of Maha Kumbh Mela, the Railways has announced to operate Ranchi-Tundla-Ranchi (train 08067/08068)

Kumbh Mela Special Train. This train will depart Ranchi at 10:30 hrs, arrive Muri at 11:38 hrs, depart at 11:40 hrs, arrive Bokaro Steel City at 12:55 hrs, depart at 13:00 hrs, arrive Gomo at 14:05 hrs, depart at 14:10 hrs, arrive Gaya at 16:10 hrs, depart at 16:15 hrs, Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya arrival at 19:45 hrs, depart at 19:55 hrs, arrive Prayagraj at 23:10 hrs, depart at 23:20 hrs, arrive Govindpuri at 02:00 hrs, depart at 02:05 hrs and arrive Tundla at 06:30 hrs. This train will depart from Tundla at 16:20 hrs, Govindpuri arrival at 20:00 hrs, departure at 20:05 hrs, Prayagraj arrival at 01:00 hrs, departure at 01:10 hrs, Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay arrival at 05:20 hrs, departure at 05:30 hrs, Gaya arrival at 08:40 hrs, departure at 08:45 hrs, Gomoh arrival at 11:25 hrs, departure at 11:30 hrs,

Bokaro Steel City arrival at

12:45 hrs, departure at 12:50

hrs, Muri arrival at 13:50

hrs, departure at 13:52 hrs

and Ranchi arrival at 15:50

Sakhi Mandal products

PNS: RANCHI

about TB and other diseases

December 2024 to 06 January 2025.

attract visitors at Khadi mela

Information about Aabha App being given under

Avushman Bharat Digital Mission

The crowd of people is increasing in the National Khadi and Saras Mela going on at Morhabadi Ground in Ranchi. Due to

hrs. These trains will have 01 coach of SLRD, 01 coach of generator car, 08 coaches of general class, 03 coaches of AC 3-tier, 04 coaches of AC 3tier economy and 01 coach of AC 2-tier, total 18 coaches.

Indian railways has started preparations ahead of Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 which is expected to witness a huge surge in the number of visitors. During the Kumbh Mela, a total of 992 special trains will be operationalised to manage the large influx of pilgrims from January 12 to February 28.

Pilgrims will take part in Kumbh Mela for several religious events such as Paush Poornima, Makar Sankranti, Mauni Amavasya, Basant Panchami, Maghi Poornima, and Mahashivaratri.

A total of 992 more trains will be in addition to the existing 6580 regular trains operating during the Kumbh Mela. Apart from increasing the number of trains, the railways have also granted stoppages to 140 passingthrough trains to allow boarding passengers from Prayagraj areas daily during

Recently, Railway minis-Ashwini Vaishnaw chaired a high-level meeting, also attended by Minister of State for Railways Ravneet Singh Bittu and V Somanna, reviewing the Kumbh Mela preparations and discussing the arrangements for special



Chief Minister Hemant Soren paying heartfelt tribute to brave martyr Nirmal Mahato, the pioneer of Jharkhand movement, on the occasion of his 74th birth anniversary by garlanding his statue at Shaheed Nirmal Mahato Chowk in Ranchi on Wednesday. PNS

3rd edition of Young Changemakers Program begins at IIM-R



PNS: RANCHI

IIM Ranchi started the third edition of the Young Changemakers Program (YCP) on the theme 'Pillars of Society'. Designed to nurture socially conscious leaders, YCP 3.0 will build on its legacy of empowering change makers to address pressing societal challenges and create meaningful impacts.

The Young Changemakers Program is a transformative initiative hat equips students with the skills and empathy needed to engage with real world problems. In its past editions, YCP successfully bridged gaps between communities and changemakers thereby fostering a culture of innovation, leadership and social impact. The theme 'Pillars of Society' will celebrate the contribution of unsung heroes who have helped shape communities and will also inspire participants to embrace their roles as change-

During the inauguration, the first honoured guests were the people of Rasabeda whose stories of resilience and dedication to healthcare, education and community development left a lasting impression on the audience. Women drivers of the Pink Auto initiative shared their empowering journeys of creating safer public places and supporting their families. Professor Deepak Kumar Srivastava, Director of IIM Ranchi spoke about the past, present and future of YCP and the larger vision for creating social change and also motivated participants to see themselves as key drivers of transformation. Raj Singh, founder of Samachar Wala YouTube channel,

emphasised that YCP is a commendable initiative and it also highlights the societal gaps that need to be addressed which makes the program even more vital in today's world.

During the unveiling of the YCP mural 'The Social Canvas', participants and guests left their handprints on the mural as a symbolic act of unity and equality, reminding everyone present of the shared responsibility to foster societal progress.

While addressing the audience, Professor Gaurav Marathe spoke about the importance of aligning personal aspirations with the broader goal of social change and emphasised the urgent need for programs like YCP to build a better and more equitable socie-The ceremony culminated with the felicitation of community pioneers such as Suman Devi, Sushila Devi, Heera Devi Jagpati Devi, Etwa Bedia and Manisha Kumari for their extraordinary

Birsa Zoo welcomes new inmates

Civet Cat, Night Heron to attract visitors in New Year

As a part of an animal exchange programme authorized by the Central Zoo Authority (CZA), Ranchi's Bhagwan Birsa Zoological Park is now home to a white tiger, fox, katas or civet cat, night heron, ibis, grey pelican and mouse deer. The new inmates have been brought Nandankan from Biological Bhubaneshwa, Odisha to enhance the biodiversity of the City's animal reserve.

The initiative undertaken will promote breeding and conservation purposes along with maintaining the diversity of animals. The arrival of new members in the park will also introduce a fresh dimension of information and excitement amongst the visi-

Biological Park is the largest

Bhagwan Birsa

biological park in Jharkhand and is known for playing an important role in the field of wildlife conservation. research, and education. As many as 91 species including 41 birds, 31 mammals and 19 reptiles are housed and protected here. The park not only provides protection to wildlife but also gives an opportunity to tourists to get closer to biodiversity and understand the precious her-

itage of nature.

In order to ensure a safe and favourable environment for the wildlife, various efforts are made and as a result of which numerous animals have given birth this vear. These include hippopotamus, hyena, sambhar, chital, kotra, blackbuck, white blackbuck, nilgai, langur and badar. In the bird and reptile category hatchlings of peacock, silver pheasant, golden pheasant, budgerigar, parrot and ostrich, crocodile and tortoise have enriched the park.

special occasion of New Year, the park will remain open on Monday, December 30 2024 and also on January 6, 2025. For December 31, 2024 January 1 and 2, 2025, the

Bhagwan Birsa Biological

Park remains closed every

Monday. However, on the

ticket prices in the park have been fixed at Rs 70 for adults and Rs 30 for children between 3 to 12 years while facility for group will not be available on these dates. For the convenience of the visitors facilities like visitor

shed, arrangement for drinking water, toilet and motherchild home have been provided in the park. As an initiative to bring people of all sections closer to nature and also to promote inclusive tourism, wheelchairs have also been arranged for the specially abled.



State set to witness foggy days, light rains ahead

PNS: RANCHI

After a dry spell of few days in the state in the last 24 hours and light fog at some places, there is forecast of rain in Jharkhand for two days. Its effect will be seen in many districts.

Ranchi Meteorological Office said that there is no change in the minimum temperature in the state during the next 4 days. On the fifth day, the temperature is likely to drop by 2 to 3 degrees

According to the center, there will be light fog or mist in the morning on 26 and 27 December. After this the sky



on 28 December. There is a possibility of light rain at

effect will be seen in Garhwa, Palamu, Chatra, Latehar, Lohardaga, Hazaribagh. Koderma, Giridih, Gumla, Simdega districts.

Similarly, it will be partly cloudy on 29 December. Light rain is expected in some parts of the south-western region. Its effect will be seen

in Gumla, Khunti, Simdega, will be clear. According to the some places in the west and adjacent northern parts. Its possibility of any major center, it will be partly cloudy West Singhbhum districts. BJP remembers Vajpayee's contribution to State make India a developed India, a



become a symbol of success and women empowerment. The National Khadi and Saras Mahotsav will run from 20 **BJP State President Babulal** Marandi paid tribute by garlanding the life-size statue of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on his 100th birth anniversary at the Vidhan Sabha in Ranchi on Wednesday. On this occasion, many officials including Regional Organization General Secretary Nagendra Tripathi, State Organization General Secretary Karmveer Singh were present. PNS

PNS: RANCHI

The state BJP celebrated the birth anniversary of former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee as Good Governance Day. Party workers at all the booths in the state remembered Atal ji by garlanding his pictures. State President Babulal Marandi inaugurated the exhibition on the personality and work of Atal ji at the state BJP headquarters.

Earlier, state president and former Chief Minister Babulal Marandi, regional organization general secretary Nagendra Tripathi, state organization general secretary Karmaveer Singh and other state leaders paid tribute to the life-size statue of Atal Bihari Vajpayee located in the assembly premises. Seminars were organized in all the districts of the state regarding Atal ji, which were

addressed by senior BJP leaders A seminar was organized by Ranchi Mahanagar BJP in Atal Vendor Market. Addressing the seminar, state president Babulal Marandi said, great personalities like Atal ji are rare. Today Atal ji may not be physically present among us, but his words, his poems, his thoughts are still guiding the people of the country and the world. Crores of BJP workers are inspired by Atal Ji and are



BJP State President Babulal Marandi viewing the photo exhibition on Atal's biography on the 100th birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in Ranchi on Wednesday. PNS

playing their role in society and life. He was a leader with a big heart. He had a soft heart but he was firm and steadfast in his ideas in the service of Maa Bharati. He insisted on freedom of action for the workers in the organization and was not in favor of unnecessary pressure. Atal Ji, who started his life journey as the son of a teacher, shaped his great personality with his struggle and hard work. He never compromised on his ideas for power. As the first non-Congress Prime Minister, he gave a

new direction to Indian politics. He strengthened the coalition politics to take the country forward and to free it from the anti-national policies of the Congress party. But the greed for power could not touch him. He accepted to be separated from the Janata Party government formed after the Emergency but did not compromise on his ideas. He started a new political journey in the form of BJP. First for 13 days, then for 13 months and then for four and a half years, as Prime Minister, Atal Ji tried his best to

self-respecting India, a world leader. For the first time, Atal Ji's government took a meaningful initiative to connect villages, poor and farmers with the mainstream of development.

The Prime Minister Gram Sadak Yojana started a new revolution in the country. Whether it was the Golden Quadrilateral Yojana, or the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Kisan Credit Card or the River Linking Campaign, all the schemes brought the rays of development to the common man. Atal Ji did not bow down to the world's superpowers and conducted the Pokhran test. He also assured the world that India would never use the nuclear bomb first. It was only for self-defense.

In order to build cordial relations with neighboring Pakistan, he traveled by bus to Lahore but also gave a befitting reply to the enemy's deception in Kargil. By giving a speech in Hindi for the first time in the UNO, Atal Ji glorified the national language on the world stage. Atal Ji's government was dedicated to tribal welfare. Respecting public sentiments, he fulfilled the dream of a separate Jharkhand state. Santhali language was included in the 8th Schedule. Tribal Welfare Ministry was created at the Centre.



important role in empowering rural women. Sakhi Mandal has



PM Modi, President Murmu join prayer ceremony to pay tributes to Vajpayee on birth centenary

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI /IMPHAL /BHUBANESWAR/LUCKNOW

President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi were among the dignitaries who joined a prayer ceremony at the memorial of former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on Wednesday to pay tributes to him on his birth centenary. Union ministers, including Amit Shah and J P Nadda, besides BJP allies such as Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and Union ministers Lalan Singh of the JD(U) and Jitam Ram Manjhi of HAM(S) paid homage to the BJP stalwart at 'Sadaiv Atal'.

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankar and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla besides the members of Vajpayee's adopt-Prime Minister Modi said in a social media post the impact

of how Vajpayee preserved constitutional values and gave new direction and momentum to the country will remain forever.

Union Home Minister Shah in his tributes said his dedication towards good gover-nance and public welfare will continue to guide future gen-

After paying tributes to Vajpayee at his memorial, 'Sadaiv Atal', here, Shah said Vajpayee ushered in a new era of development and good governance in the country with his dedication towards ideology and value-based pol-'Atal ji's dedication towards good governance and public welfare will continue to guide future generations," the minister said in a social media post in Hindi.

He said Vajpayee made cultural nationalism a work culture and always kept the country's security and public welfare paramount. "Atal ji

countrymen on the path of national service till eternity like the Pole Star," Shah said. In his tributes, Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh said the former Prime Minister's principles and teachings have inspired the building of a robust economy for this

Singh said in a social media post "Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee ji has been a pivotal figure in shaping India's diplomacy and national security, while continuing to serve as a source of guidance and wisdom to all of us..

"His principles and teachings have inspired the building of a robust economy for this nation, serving as an enduring source of motivation for the generations to come" Singh added..

Singh in another post also extended his greetings on the occasion of Good Governance



He said "This day, observed in honour of the birth anniver-sary of former PM and Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee Ji, reminds us of the importance of transparent, accountable, and people-centric gov-ernance. Let us reaffirm our dedication to building a state where governance empowers every citizen and paves the way for a brighter future."

Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and his predecessor and BJD leader Naveen Patnaik on Wednesday paid tributes to former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

The Odisha government's Information and Public (I&PR) Department, in a message, termed Vajpayee as 'Vikas

Purush' and said the state

The government recounted some major developmental projects, including the estab-lishment of AIIMS Bhubaneswar, an oil refinery at Paradip and creation of the East Coast Railway (ECoR) division with its headquarters in Bhubaneswar, undertaken

In Bhubaneswar, undertaken during the tenure of the former Prime Minister.

The construction of 400 km of highways in Odisha under the Golden Quadrilateral project, and road network of more than 18,000 km (PMSY) to connect the unconnected stand testament to the eponym 'Vikas Purush', it

On the occasion of Good Governance Day, the people of Odisha pay heartfelt tribute to Vajpayee, the architect of administrative excellence,

In a social media, Chief Minister Majhi paid tributes to the former prime minister and extended heartiest congratulations and best wishes to everyone on the occasion of Good Governance Day. Several senior political leaders from Odisha, including Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, Union Minister for Tribal Affairs

Jual Oram, and state BJP

president Manmohan Samal

paid respects to Vajpayee on his birth centenary.
"Humble tributes to former Prime Minister of India, #AtalBihariVajpayee on his birth anniversary. #Atal ji was a distinguished statesman, outstanding parliamentarian, a renowned poet and orator. His contribution to the nation building will continue to inspire," former chief minister Naveen Patnaik wrote in

a social media post. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said Vajpayee's good governance and foresight gave India a new direction in the

Elaborating on the definition of good governance, Rajnath Singh said it is one where every person's needs are ful-filled, he feels safe and has the opportunity to express his

'This was Atal ji's vision, which is being carried forward by Prime Minister Narendra Modi today," Singh said addressing the birth cen-tenary celebrations of Vajpayee with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi

Adityanath in Lucknow. The leaders paid floral tributes to the statue of the former prime minister in Lok Bhavan. Vajpayee's birth anniversary is observed as 'Good Governance' Day.

The defence minister also praised Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on the issue of law and order and the implementation of welfare

Row over Waqf land: Karnataka State officials to appear before Parliamentary Panel

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE **NEW DELHI**

Amid a row over Waqf land in Karnataka, offi-cials from the state government are scheduled to appear before the parliamentary panel examining the Waqf Amendment Bill on Thursday. The Joint Committee on the Waqf Amendment Bill, chaired by BJP member Jagadambika Pal, is scheduled to hear views from representatives of the governments of Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha and Delhi in sittings spread over two days beginning Thursday. Delhi's Food and Supply Minister Imran Hussain is also scheduled to address the committee on Friday, followed by the recording of evidence by the representatives of the Delhi government. The deposition of officials

from the Congress-led Karnataka government comes in the wake of a row over claims by BJP leaders that over 1,500 acres of land belonging to farmers in the state were being taken over by ಕर्माधर ठाय विभावन वाठवष्ठ

Pal had visited Karnataka and interacted with the farmers who had received notices regarding encroachment over properties belonging to the Waqf Board.

The committee had also written to state governments seeking details of Waqf properties occupied by them in an unauthorised manner as per the Sachar panel report.

The UPA government constituted the Sachar Committee in 2005 to study the social, economic and educational

munity in India.

constituted on August 8, soon after the Waqf (Amendment) Bill was introduced in Lok Sabha. Opposition parties have stridently criticised the amendments proposed by the bill in the existing Waqf Act, alleging that they violate the religious rights of Muslims. The ruling BJP has asserted that the amendments in that the amendments will bring transparency in the functioning of the Waqf boards and make them

CRPF has done a commendable job in tackling Naxalism, says Shah

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ **NEW DELHI**

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday said the Central Reserve Police Force(CRPF)has done a com-mendable job in tackling Naxalism and restoring peace and stability in the Northeastern states and Jammu and Kashmir. Shah also said the CRPF is

playing an important role in ensuring internal security and peace in the country, according to an official statement. The home minister said this while visiting the CRPF headquarters where he met senior officers of the force, including its Director General Anish Dayal Singh, it said. During the visit, Shah had a

comprehensive review of the operations and administrative efficiency of the world's largest paramilitary force. The CRPF has done a commendable job in tackling Naxalism and restoring peace and stability in the Northeastern states and Jammu and Kashmir, he said. The CRPF chief apprised the home minister about the various welfare schemes being implemented for the families of martyred jawans of the force, including compassionate appointments in the CRPF. Shah emphasised the importance of promoting Hindi in the daily functioning of the force to strengthen linguistic unity.

Along with emphasising the use of more and more 'Shri Ann' (Millets) for better health of the soldiers, the home minister also called upon the soldiers to extract the benefits of Ayurveda and

participate in 'Prakriti Parikshan Abhiyan' to get health insights as per individual's Prakriti, fostering wellbeing and better health. The visit of the home minister underlines the government's recognition of the CRPF's commitment to national security and its multifaceted contribution to nation-building, the state-

ment said. Several senior officials of the Ministry of Home Affairs, including Union Home Secretary Govind Mohan, were present at the meeting.

PM Modi greets people on Christmas



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi greeted people on Christmas on Wednesday. He said in a social media post, "Wishing you all a Merry Christmas. May the teachings of Lord Jesus Christ show everyone the path of peace and prosper-

The prime minister also shared highlights from his participation at the Christmas celebrations hosted by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India on Monday. In his speech at the event, Modi stressed the importance of strengthening the spirit of love, harmony and brotherhood in line with the teachings of Jesus Christ. BJP president and Union minister J P Nadda visited the Catholic

Bishop's Conference of India headquarters and the Sacred Heart Cathedral Church here on Christmas. He said in a social media post, "As we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, let us also celebrate the spirit of giving, the pursuit of peace, the power of hope, and how we as a nation can embrace and amplify the values of love, compassion and harmo-Nadda added that he prayed for happiness and wellbeing of all fellow countrymen. He said, "May our nation continue to progress on the path of development, guided by the mantra of Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas, and reach our destination of Viksit Bharat 2047 with the contribution of all Indians. Wishing you all a Merry Christmas!"

Governance reforms must begin at grassroot level to bring about lasting change, says Jitendra

NEW DELH

Union Minister Jitendra Singh on Wednesday said that the governance reforms must begin at the grassroot level to bring about long-lasting and meaningful change. In a significant step towards strengthening grassroots governance, he launched the 'Viksit Panchayat Karmayogi' initiative on Good Governance Day, celebrated very year to

mark birth anniversary of for-

mer Prime Minister Atal Bihari

Vajpayee The initiative, which is part of the broader 'Prashasan Gaon Ki Aur' campaign, aims to enhance the capacity and competence of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) by equipping elected representatives and officials with the tools and knowledge required for effective governance and parthe Minister of State for

He emphasised "that governance reforms must begin at the grassroots to bring about long-lasting and meaningful change as well as to fill up the capacity gaps".

Piloted in Odisha, Assam, Gujarat, and Andhra Pradesh, the initiative leverages e-learning platforms, AI-powered chatbots, and mobile apps to bridge knowledge gaps and enhance service delivery, Singh said.<He said that this program aligns with the government's broader mission to decentralise governance and foster participatory decision-making at the grassroots level. The initiative is expected to create scalable models of citizen-centric governance, enabling PRIs to drive equitable and sustainable development across rural India,

The enhanced dashboard is according to a Personnel

The minister also launched a series of transformative initiatives on the occasion of the Good Governance Day. The first initiative unveiled by Singh was the launch of a new dashboard on the iGOT (integrated government online training) Karmayogi platform, along with the milestone introduction of the 1600th e-learning

designed to empower ministries, departments, and state administrators with advanced tools to monitor user registrations, course completions, and overall progress in capacitybuilding efforts. With customisable views and robust data filtration capabilities, the dashboard provides detailed insights to improve decisionmaking and optimize training initiatives, the statement said. Additionally, the introduction

platform underscores the government's commitment to fostering a diverse and comprehensive learning ecosystem, it said. The minister also launched **CPGRAMS** (Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System) Annual Report 2024. As the world's largest citizen interface platform, CPGRAMS has redefined grievance redressal by integrating advanced technologies, multilingual support, and comprehensive trackmechanisms. The

CPGRAMS allows citizens to raise grievances against government departments online. The report showcases key achievements, including the resolution of over 25 lakh grievances annually and the implementation of the Redressal Grievance Assessment and Index (GRAI), the statement said.

Potato plants naturally produce SGAs, which are harmful if humans consume them

NEW DELHI

Did you know that potato plants naturally produce chemicals called steroidal glycoalkaloids (SGAs), which are found in high quantities in the green parts of the potato peels and in the sprouting areas? While these compounds help the plants protect themselves from insects, these are harmful in case consumed by humans. Now, scientists have discovered a way to remove these toxic compounds from potatoes, making them safer to eat and easier to store. This break-through could reduce food waste and enhance crop farming in space and other extreme environments.

"These compounds are critical for plants to ward off insects, but they make certain parts of these crops inedible," said Adam Jozwiak, a UCR molec-



ular biochemist who led the study. "Now that we've uncovered the biosynthetic pathway, we can potentially create plants that produce these compounds only in the leaves while keeping the edible parts safe.'

Sunlight can induce the production of SGAs in potato tubers—the part of the potato plant that is eaten—even after they've been harvested. By identifying a key genetic mechanism in SGA production, UC Riverside researchers may be able to reduce potatoes' toxic-

natural defenses. Removing SGAs from potatoes will also make them easier to store and transport in open air. The research, published in Science, focuses on a protein called "GAME15," which plays

a key role in directing the plant's production of SGAs. This protein acts both as an enzyme and a scaffold, organizing other enzymes into a "conversion factory" that efficiently produces SGAs while preventing toxic compounds from leaking into other parts of plant cells, where they would cause damage.

By engineering plants to control when and where SGAs are produced-such as in the leaves but not in the potatoes themselves—the researchers envision crops that can be stored without the risk of toxicity from sunlight exposure. "You could store the potatoes in

ity while preserving the plants' your kitchen and not w about exposure to the sun, which makes them produce more SGAs. Then, you could eat them whenever you want, reducing food waste," Jozwiak

> Additionally, the findings could enable the use of other plant parts, such as leaves, for food n limited-space environments like space missions or vertical farming systems. "For space farming, where every part of a plant may need to be edible, these findings are especially promising," Jozwiak added.
> "Our work demonstrates that plants have evolved ingenious ways to balance growth, reproduction, and defense," Jozwiak said. This research involved scientists from the Weizmann Institute of Science in Israel, as well as Kobe University, the

RIKEN Center for Sustainable

Resource Science, and Osaka

University in Japan.

NDA leaders meet at BJP president Nadda's residence

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE **NEW DELHI**

A mid heightened attacks from the Congress and the INDIA bloc over Union Home Minister Amit Shah's remarks on B.R. Ambedkar, National Democratic Alliance (NDA) leaders met here at BJP president J P Nadda's residence on Wednesday on the birth centenary of former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

According to sources, Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP president J P Nadda discussed the constitutional issues raised by the Congress party in detail during the meeting with NDA leaders. Sources said the BJP's central message to its allies was clear: the NDA must present a unified front to neutralise the Opposition's attacks effectively. Notably absent from

Minister Nitish Kumar and Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde. The JD(U) was represented by Union Minister Rajiv Ranjan, also known as Lalan Singh, while the Shiv Sena sent Union MoS Prataprao Ganpatrao Jadhav.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Telugu Desam Party (TDP) president and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, Union Civil Aviation Minister Ram Mohan Naidu Kinjarapu, and Union ministers from various NDA constituents such as Apna Dal (S) president Anupriya Patel, and JD(S)

the meeting were Bihar Chief

leader H D Kumaraswamy, were present. Bihar's Hindustani Awam Morcha (S) leader Jitan Ram Manjhi, also a minister in the Modi government, Rashtriya Lok Morcha (RLM) president Upendra Kushwaha, a

Rajya Sabha MP, and Thushar

Vellappally, president of Bharath Dharma Jana Sena, were also present at the meet-

"Attended the NDA leaders' meeting in New Delhi today. Under the visionary leadership of PM Narendra Modi,

India is achieving unprecedented milestones and has positioned itself as a global superpower," Nadda said in a

post on X after the meeting. "The NDA government remains steadfast in its pursuit of the vision of 'Viksit Bharat@2047', ensuring a brighter and more prosperous future for all," he added.

During the discussions, Shah reportedly reflected on recent political developments, particularly lessons drawn from the Winter Session of Parliament. He accused the Congress of historically disregarding Ambedkar's legacy while now attempting to appropriate it for political gain. He underscored the need for

the BJP and its allies to respond robustly and in unison to such manoeuvres. Uttar Pradesh's NISHAD Party chief Sanjay Nishad said it was an "informal" meeting of the NDA leaders

on the occasion of the birth

centenary of Vajpayee. "Our

future strategy is to move for-

ground and "promises made to people during elections" are fulfilled. The issue of giving reservation to the fishing community was also raised at the meeting, he "I gave 30-37 page evidence on the issue of giving reservation to the fishing com-

ward together. We have to came up at the meeting, the NISHAD Party chief said, show unity in all the upcoming elections...Everyone con-...We have come for people's gratulated (the BJP leaders) welfare. How to get success in in the meeting for the victothat, energy needs to be spent in Haryana and Maharashtra assembly polls," There is no need to respond

about the meeting.
Nishad said the meeting also discussed coalition strategy to ensure that "all the work" done by Prime Minister Modi reaches the

he told reporters when asked

remarks Though there was no official word on the agenda of the meeting, sources said good governance and political issues were discussed.

to their narrative and nega-

tive thoughts," he added in an

apparent reference to the

Congress and other opposi-

tion parties who are up in arms against Shah over his

The NDA meeting comes amid the alliance's focus on simultaneous elections, with all constituents lending support to the proposal.

A Joint Committee of munity since it was a poll promise. They will call (us) Parliament, constituted to after a week and discuss it, scrutinise two bills for simul-Nishad said. Asked if issue of taneous polls, is expected to Shah's remarks on Ambedkar meet on January 8.

Suspense grips as unidentified vehicle rams ambulance carrying suspected terrorists' bodies

 $S_{mysterious\ accident\ late}^{uspense\ looms\ large\ over\ a}$ Tuesday night on the Rampur bypass, where an unidentified vehicle rammed into an ambulance transporting the bodies of three suspected terrorists of the 'Khalistan Zindabad Force.' The terrorists had been killed in a dramatic encounter in Pilibhit just days earlier.

The collision occurred as the ambulance was en route to Punjab with the bodies of the suspected militants, who were allegedly involved in a grenade attack on a police post in Gurdaspur. While no injurior areas at the control of the contr injuries were reported, the sustained ambulance significant damage, forcing the authorities to transfer the

Rampur Superintendent of Police Vidyasagar Mishra described the incident as "highly unusual" and said the circumstances are being closely investigated. "As soon as we received information

bodies to another vehicle.



about the accident, our teams rushed to the site. The damaged ambulance was removed, and the bodies were safely shifted to another vehicle," Mishra stated.

The police remain perplexed about the motive behind the collision, with no clear leads on the identity of the vehicle or its driver. Officers on the case have not ruled out the possibility of sabotage. "We cannot ignore any angle,

deliberate interference by elements seeking to disrupt the transportation process. high-profile Given the nature of the deceased, the possibility of a planned attempt to tamper with evidence or create chaos cannot be dismissed," said a senior police officer on

condition of anonymity.
The Punjab Police, which

had collaborated with Uttar

Pilibhit's Puranpur, coordinating investigation into this incident. Sources suggest the possibility of local sympathizers 'Khalistan Zindabad Force' being involved, though no concrete evidence has yet emerged. The three militants killed in

neutralizing the suspected

the encounter had been wanted for orchestrating the grenade attack in Gurdaspur, which left the security establishment on high alert. Their deaths had been seen as a major breakthrough, but this accident has cast a shadow of doubt over what should have been a straightforward process.

Witnesses have reportedly provided conflicting accounts of the collision, further deepening

"It happened so suddenly. The vehicle came out of nowhere and hit the ambulance before speeding

It didn't seem like an said accident," evewitness who was near the scene. Both Rampur Police and Punjab Police have launched separate inquiries, but the lack of CCTV footage on the bypass and the absence of a vehicle registration number are hampering progress.

'This incident raises more questions than answers," admitted a seni-investigator. "Was it coincidence, or was it a calculated move to unsettle the ongoing case? The answers will determine whether we are dealing with a road accident or something far more sinister.

As the investigation unfolds, the police are tightening around security transportation of high-profile detainees and evidence. Meanwhile, the incident has left locals and officials on edge, with fears that the shadow of Khalistani extremism could once again be looming in the region.

Snowfall closes 226 roads in Himachal Pradesh, disrupts power supply amid freezing temperatures

A total of 226 roads, including three national highways, were closed in Himachal Pradesh following snowfall in several districts, officials said on Wednesday. People shivered under piercing

cold wave conditions as minimum temperatures dropped by a few notches in Jot, which received 10 cm of snow in the past 24 hours, followed by Khadrala (5 cm), Pooh (2 cm), Sangla (1.2 cm) and Keylong (1 cm). Tabo in the Lahaul and Spiti district was the coldest place in Himachal Pradesh, recording a night temperature of minus 10.6 degrees Celsius. A total of 226 roads, including three national highways including Attari and Leh, Sanj to Aut in Kullu district, Khab Sangam in Kinnaur district, and Gramphoo in Lahaul and Spiti district were closed for traffic, officials said.

According to the state emergency operation center, a maximum of 123 roads were closed in Shimla district, 36 in Lahaul and Spiti and 25 in Kullu. Additionally, 173

transformers were disrupted, affecting power supply across the state. The hopes of locals and tourists to experience a white Christmas in the Queen of Hills, Shimla, were dashed as the city was greeted by bright sunshine on Wednesday morning. Bhuntar received 9.7 mm of rain, Rampur 9.4 mm, Shimla 8.4 mm, Bajaura 8 mm, Seobagh 7.2 mm, Manali 7 mm, Gohar 6 mm, Mandi 5.4 mm, and Jubbarhatti 3.8 mm,

The Met office has predicted rain and snow at isolated places in some parts of the state, particularly in Shimla, from Friday evening to Sunday

the Met office reported.

afternoon, with precipitation expected to peak on Saturday. An intense cold wave persisted in Mandi, Manali, Chamba, Hamirpur, Sundernagar, while dense and moderate fog was observed in Sundernagar and Mandi, respectively, the Met office

The weather office has issued an 'orange' warning for severe cold in Bilaspur, Una, Hamirpur, and Mandi on Wednesday and a 'yellow' warning for dense fog over parts of the Bhakra Dam reservoir area and the Balh Valley in Mandi on Thursday and Sunday.

UP to soon unveil new five-year export policy: UP industrial development minister Nand Gopal Gupta



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE LUCKNOW/NEW DELHI

The Yogi Adityanath-led Uttar Pradesh government will soon unveil a new export policy for 2025-30 as the State aims to significantly increase its share in India's outward shipments and create more employment opportunities.

Under the 2020-2025 export policy, the state government comprehensive hand-holding support to the exporters. In an interview to The Pioneer, Uttar Pradesh minister for industrial development,

investment promotion Nand Gopal Gupta 'Nandi' informed that the state government is working on a new five-year export policy and extensive consultations with different stakeholders are being held.

'We are working on unveiling an ambitious Export Policy for 2025-30 to boost the state's contribution to India's exports," the Minister said. In FY 2023-24 state's share in India's total export was 4.71 per cent. In the first two quarters (April-September) of the current financial year, Uttar Pradesh's share in country's total export was estimated at 4.89 per cent.

"Our focus on enhancing export capabilities will propel UP towards becoming a USD 1 trillion economy, driving revenue and fostering development. The Yogi government remains committed to transforming Uttar Pradesh into India's most prosperous state," Gupta

operationalisation of the Jewar Airport will further help exports from the state. It will time and save expenditure on freight charges

To promote export-oriented industries, the Government of Uttar Pradesh has ensured development of adequate infrastructural facilities in the state. It is to be noted here that the state has the largest rail network in the country, 38 per cent of the expressways, 4 international airports, domestic airports and 7 under-construction airports along with Jewar Airport which is due to be operational very soon. The Minister informed that

the government is providing financial assistance to the exporters through various schemes, including Marketing Development Assistance, Gateway Port Scheme and Air Freight rationalization schemes. Uttar Pradesh has also started organising International Trade Show (UPITS) since 2023 through which it is providing global marketing exposure and business to the exporters by conducting B2B sessions. Besides the government is also

providing international marketing exposure exporters from the state by participating in various international trade shows organised by the central government like IITF and Bharat Tex. Minister Gupta emphasised

the state government has adopted export as well as investment friendly policies along with a focus on the development of better logistics facilities in the state. All these initiatives will help in increasing exports from the state and help Uttar Pradesh become a USD One trillion economy.

India's total (merchandise and services combined) during April-November 2024 was estimated at USD 536.25 billion, a growth of 7.61 per cent from USD 498.33 billion in the year ago period.

Giriraj Singh bats for Bharat Ratna for Bihar CM Nitish Kumaran and Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik

PTI BEGUSARAI/PATNA

Tnion minister Giriraj Singh Union Wednesday said the highest civilian honour, Bharat Ratna, should be conferred upon Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and former CM of Odisha, Naveen Patnaik.

The outspoken BJP leader expressed the sentiment in Begusarai, his Lok Sabha constituency, lavishing praise on Kumar, a current ally, and Patnaik, a former alliance partner whom the saffron party ousted from power earlier this year. "Bihar was known for decrepit

roads, schools and buildings until the ascent to power of Nitish Kumar, who took the state to new heights. Likewise, Naveen Patnaik served Odisha for so many years.

Leaders like them deserve the highest honour, like Bharat Ratna," he said. Widely perceived as a detractor of Kumar in Bihar's political circles, Singh also asserted that "mischief" of RJD supremo Lalu Prasad notwithstanding, the NDA was looking forward



assembly polls under the JD(U) supremo's leadership. Notably, the averment comes in the backdrop of attempts by the RJD, which has aligned with the JD(U) twice, to fish in the NDA's troubled waters. On Tuesday, Prasad's son and heir apparent Tejashwi Yadav had alleged, "The BJP has assumed control of the chief minister's

office. Four close aides of Kumar, of whom two are in Delhi, are in touch with the BJP leadership. Amit Shah is clearly at work. The young leader had made the remark in the backdrop of Shah's reluctance to affirm, at an event hosted by a private be the NDA's face for assembly polls in Bihar. This has led to speculations in a section of the media that the BJP might push for a strategy in Bihar, where assembly polls are due in less than a year, similar to the one adopted in Maharashtra. In the Maharashtra assembly

polls held last month, Chief Minister Eknath Shinde was not projected as the NDA's face. After the NDA's landslide

victory, the BJP, which emerged as the largest constituent, muscled its way through and Devendra Fadnavis became the new chief minister.

Security agencies hunt for local helpers of Khalistani terrorists in Terai region

PTI ■ BAREILLY/UP

 $F^{\text{ollowing the encounter of}}_{\text{three Khalistan Zindabad}}$ Force (KZF) terrorists in Pilibhit, security agencies are intensifying their search for their local helpers in the Terai

Three suspected Khalistani terrorists allegedly involved in grenade attack in Gurdaspur were killed in an encounter with police in Pilibhit early Monday, with Punjab's Director General of Police Gauray Yaday terming it as a major breakthrough against a Pakistan-sponsored

terror module. Bareilly Range IG Rakesh Singh said the police and intelligence agencies are on high alert following the threats. "Investigations are underway, and security have measures intensified in the border

"Action will be taken against helped the terror elements,

he said. The success in Pilibhit comes after three blasts which took

place in different districts of Puniab this month. The gunfight members of the KZF and a joint team of Uttar Pradesh

Police and Puniab Police took place in Puranpur area of Pilibhit after three module members opened fire at the police party.

Following the encounter, a police case was filed here on Tuesday after a video turned up on X showing a person making threats to spread terror during the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj, an

officer said. "On December 24, a video was shared on various handles on social media platform (X) in which a person was

objectionable words against

Mandala pooja at Sabarimala Temple to take place on December 26

The mandala pooja, a key I ritual marking the conclusion of the first phase of the annual pilgrimage to the Sabarimala Lord Ayyappa Temple, will take place on December 26. The ritual will be carried out

between noon and 12.30 pm on the day by temple tantri (head priest) Kandararu Rajeevaru, Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) President P S Prasanth said in a press conference here on Tuesday.

The ceremonial "thanka anki" procession procession, commenced from the Aranmula Parthasarathi Temple in Pathanamthitta on

Sunday, would reach Pamba by Wednesday afternoon, he said. The procession will first be welcomed by Devaswom Minister V N Vasavan at Pamba, and then received by the TDB President and members at (temple Sannidhanam complex) in the evening.

Later, the "thanka anki," the

sacred attire, would be draped on the idol of the presiding deity before the aarathi. After the mandala and "neyyabhishekam,"

portals of the Lord Ayyappa temple would be closed by 11 on December 26, marking the culmination of the first leg of the annual The Sabarimala would be reopened on December 30 evening for Makaravilakku festivities, Prashant said, adding, the ritual would be

held on January 14. As part of crowd management, the virtual queue bookings have been limited to 50,000 and 60,000 for events on December 25 and 26. The cap is also in line with a high court directive, according to which, the spot bookings must be limited to to 5,000 on both days, the TDB president said.

The number of virtual queue bookings on January 13 and 14 as part of the Makaravilakku festivities has been fixed at 50,000 and 40,000, he said.

Tsunami survivor Sowmya finds new joy 20 years later, becomes mother after overcoming unimaginable loss

PTI CHENNAI

2004.

The ineffaceable scars of the tragic loss of their close blood relations still haunt the survivors 20 years after the Tsunami struck on the fateful morning of December 26,

one of the Sowmya, survivors, who was rescued in Nagapattinam district that bore the brunt of the giant tidal wave killing 6,065 people, has become a mother of a girl child now. Like several other children orphaned by the Tsunami, she accepted the harsh reality and showed resilience to overcome the crisis and live.

destroying property and lives. Sowmya became goddaughter of IAS official Dr J Radhakrishnan and completed her BA in

Economics. Radhakrishnan solemnised her marriage with K Subash, a technician, in 2022. In October this year, she became a mother of a girl

"It is heartwarming to see our goddaughter grow up become a mother. Our family felt blessed," Radhakrishnan, currently Additional Chief Secretary, Cooperative Department

the Tsunami hit the coast, He was joined by his wife Krithika and son Dr R Arvind and Nagapattinam district collector P Akash, in showering blessings and gifts on Sowmya at her foster home in the district.

Meena, rescued as a toddler, and Sowmya were among the 40 child survivors who grew up in the Annai Sathya Children's Government Home.

They came together and celebrated their reunion on December 22, ahead of the 20th anniversary of the Tsunami. Among them, Tamilarasi Vijayabalan, now 35, who is BSc in IT, and also holds MCA degree, is Annai Sathya Government Children's Home established post-tsunami to take care of 100 children.

The home located in Samanthanpettai Nagapattinam now takes care of victims of abuse and child marriage. Radhakrishnan was then posted as collector to oversee the relief and rehabilitation activities in Nagapattinam district.

Apart from Radhakrishnan and his family, Collector Akash, district Protection Officer Ezhilarasi and Juvenile Justice Board member M Malarvizhi too lauded the survivors who displayed

working as a teacher at the pilgrimage, he said. resilience. She was four years old when Hindu religion. Haryana CM Nayab Singh Saini stresses importance of sensitivity and Survey report on Sambhal's Jama Masjid-Harihar empathy in governance on Atal Bihari Vajpayee's birth anniversary Mandir dispute likely to be submitted in January

BISWAJEET BANERJEE

The Court Commissioner, Ramesh Singh Raghav, is expected to submit the survey report concerning the claim that Sambhal's Jama Masjid was originally the Harihar Mandir. The report will likely be filed in a sealed envelope in the first week of January 2025, according to sources.

The survey report, which is said to be nearly complete, is expected to be submitted on either January 2 or 3. The matter came to light after a lawsuit was filed on November 19, 2024, in the court of Civil Judge (Senior Division), Sambhal, by Kaila Devi Temple's Mahant Rishiraj Giri, advocate Harishankar Jain, and six district



other petitioners. The suit claimed that the Shahi Jama Masjid was originally the Harihar Mandir.

On the same day, advocate Ramesh Singh Raghav was appointed as the Court Commissioner and directed to conduct a survey of the site under heavy security and in the presence of senior officials.

attempted to conduct a second survey under the protection of the District Magistrate and

Superintendent of Police, violent clashes erupted, resulting in the deaths of five individuals and injuries to several police personnel. Following the incident, the report, initially due on November 29, was delayed, and a 10-day extension was granted by the court

The submission was further postponed to December 9 Court to the Commissioner citing health

and requesting issues additional time to finalize the This led to objections from On the Jama Masjid's legal

November 24, when the counsel, Shakeel Warsi, who Court Commissioner opposed the repeated opposed the extensions. Court Commissioner Raghav

stated that with the court scheduled to reopen on January 1, the survey report is nearly ready and will be submitted in a sealed envelope by January 2 or 3, 2025.

"The report is almost complete. Once the court resumes after its week-long recess, we plan to submit it promptly," said Raghav. The case, which has already

seen significant tension and loss of life, is being closely monitored for its potential to further escalate communal sensitivities in the region. Authorities are maintaining heightened security as the legal process unfolds.

PARVESH SHARMA

On the occasion of the birth anniversary of Bharat Ratna awardee and former Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Haryana Chief Minister, Nayab Singh Saini, addressed the State-level Governance Day programme in Gurugram on Wednesday. During the event, Saini emphasized the importance of sensitivity and empathy in government administration, urging officers to view their roles as an opportunity to uplift society and ease the hardships of the common

The Chief Minister urged the officers to view each case with compassion, stating that when someone approaches empowered nation. their office with a problem, He said that Atal Bihari

they should not simply see it as a piece of paper. Instead, they should recognize it as a symbol of the individual's pain and hardship. He said that if we can understand the story behind that paper, we will have truly succeeded in our efforts towards good governance.

The Chief Minister also paid tribute to Bharat Ratna awardees Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya and Atal Bihari Vajpayee on their birth anniversaries, reflecting on monumental contributions to the nation. He said that today's day is not

only a memorable occasion for all of us, but it also inspires us to strengthen our commitment towards building a better and more

Vajpayee's leadership was truly transformative for India. His vision and policies were pivotal in shaping the country's progress on both domestic and international fronts. His leadership laid the foundation for the India we see today, and it is this vision of a 'Vikist Bharat' that Prime Minister Sh. Narendra Modi is dedicated to realizing.

The Chief Minister said that when our government assumed the responsibility of public service in 2014, we launched a campaign of governance reform, from good transitioning governance (Sushasan) to service (Sewa). He said that the success of such a campaign depends on Niyat Nishtha (intent), (commitment), and Niti For good

(policy).

must be a genuine intention to serve, and the policies must be designed in a way that leaves no room for corruption. On the strength of Niyat, Nishtha, and Niti, our government is successfully realizing the true essence of good governance, said Nayab Singh Saini. Government has successfully completed the journey toward governance

governance, he said, there

embracing various governance initiatives The Chief Minister said that in a bid to curb irregularities in land registration, government has introduced the online issuance of No Objection Certificates (NOCs) from various departments, boards, and corporations, which are required during registration.

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-PAPER WITH PASSION-

Extradition dilemma

Bangladesh's request to extradite Sheikh Hasina raises critical questions about India's role as a key player in South Asian politics

angladesh has formally requested India to extradite former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who fled to India following her ouster on August 5, 2024. The request, conveyed through a diplomatic "note verbale," places India in a delicate position, requiring a careful balancing of international law, bilateral relations, and regional stability. This article explores the background of the situation, the implications of such an extradition, and the options available to India. Sheikh Hasina, a towering figure in Bangladeshi politics and leader of the Awami League, was ousted from power after a student-led movement erupted into nationwide protests. Despite the government meeting the protesters' demands, unrest persisted, which Hasina claims was orchestrated by Muhammad Yunus, Chief Adviser to Bangladesh's interim government. The protests culminated in her removal from power, prompting her to flee to India. The diplomatic note issued by Bangladesh's interim government reflects its inten-



tion to bring Sheikh Hasina back to face accountability or to address the political turmoil she left behind. India and Bangladesh share a complex relationship shaped by historical ties, mutual interests, and occasional tensions. Extraditing Sheikh Hasina could be seen as India's support for the interim government, potentially straining ties with the Awami League, one of Bangladesh's major political forces. The political crisis in Bangladesh has already created ripples in South Asia. Any decision by India regarding the extradition could influence the region's political dynamics, including relations with other South Asian nations. Sheikh Hasina's safety and the fairness of any trial

are also suspect as she might face attrition upon her return. India would need to weigh these concerns against its international obligations under extradition treaties and agreements. How India handles this case may affect India's stance as a regional power and its commitment to democratic principles. India could provide asylum to Sheikh Hasina, citing humanitarian grounds or concerns about the fairness of legal proceedings in Bangladesh. This would align with India's historical role as a refuge for political exiles but might antagonise the interim Bangladeshi government. India could agree to extradite Hasina with conditions ensuring her safety, fair trial, and adherence to international legal norms. Such a move might help India maintain its relations with both the interim government and Hasina's supporters. India can also delay the extradition while engaging diplomatically with Bangladesh to seek a mutually acceptable solution. This would allow India to assess the evolving political situation and minimize potential fallout. While India's decision will undoubtedly influence India-Bangladesh relations, its impact will also resonate across the region. India must weigh its options carefully, prioritising both the immediate political implications and its long-term vision for South Asian stability.



The Jakhu Temple and its premises covered with snow after fresh snowfall, in Shimla

ONOP: A bold reform or a political gamble?



As Prime Minister Narendra Modi pushes forward with his vision of 'One Nation, One Poll' the nation waits to see whether this proposal will unite or divide

he introduction of a controversial bill, 'One Nation One Poll,' has created more controversy than acceptance. The BJP has been talking about it but introduced it, which has been sent to the joint select committee of the Parliament. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is in a hurry to fulfil the BJP's unfinished agenda. He had already opened the Ayodhya temple and got the revocation of Article 370 of the Constitution, which gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir. This long-awaited bill aims to streamline the electoral process for 28 states and eight union territories, with an electorate of nearly a billion voters. The bill has triggered widespread debate, significant interest, and Opposition from various parties.

Though momentum is building for simultaneous elections, some questions need answers. They include whether Modi has the required two-thirds majority to pass the bill in Parliament. Is there a political consensus? Will the Opposition come on board? Is the timing of the bill right? Most Opposition parties reject the idea of simultaneous polls. They include the Congress, the Left parties, the Trinamool Congress, and regional and smaller parties. They reject it mainly to settle

political scores and apprehension that they may benefit the BIP. Former President Ram Nath Kovind chaired a ninemember committee recommending simultaneous polls last year, labelling it a 'game changer.' Thirty-two parties supported the concept, and 15 rejected it. The panel also advised that the Centre form a panel to oversee the implementation of this proposal. Also, there should be a joint electoral roll for all elections so that voters will use the same list for national, state, and local

Over the years, elections have become a standard feature, but the 'One Nation, One Poll' bill Telugu Desam. Most opposhas the potential to reshape our election process. Proponents of the bill argue that it could Congress, the Left parties,

significantly reduce campaign costs, alleviate the strain on administrative resources, and streamline governance. This could ultimately benefit the public by reducing the frequency of elections, a prospect that should inspire optimism. Elections in India are held at different levels. The first is panchayat, followed by the district level, the state assembly level, and finally, the national level. They happen at different times, and the government wants to streamline the system. Interestingly, the idea of simultaneous polls is not new. Historically, it was a synchro-

nised poll from 1952 to 1967. The premature dismissal of various governments and the consequential dissolution of Assemblies led to staggard polls. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi dismissed many Opposition-ruled state governments. The most important thing is that the BJP needs the support of the allies and friendly parties. In the recent 2024 polls, the BJP was 40 short of a majority in the house and could form the government only with the neip of JD (U) and ing parties reject simultaneous polls, including



HISTORICALLY, IT

WAS A **SYNCHRONISED** POLL FROM 1952 TO 1967. THE **PREMATURE**

DISMISSAL OF **VARIOUS GOVERNMENTS AND** THE CONSEQUENTIAL DISSOLUTION OF ASSEMBLIES LED TO STAGGARD POLLS the Trinamool Congress, and regional and smaller parties. Even in the BJP, 20 MPs were absent while the bill political manoeuvring. was introduced. The Kovind panel also suggested having the votes in two parts.

The first will be for Lok Sabha and Assembly votes, and the second for local groups. The bill faces significant constitutional, legal, and political challenges. The Kovind panel suggests amending Articles 83 and 172 to allow simultaneous elections.

However, the BJP lacks the two-thirds majority for this amendment, and the Constitution needs clarification on concurrent polls. The potential impact on the federal structure of the country and the logistical challenges of conducting simultaneous elections for a billion voters are crucial factors to consider. Prime Minister Modi's main challenge is to gather enough support in Parliament. At the same time, the government must build political consensus and persuade the Opposition to

The Opposition has rejected simultaneous polis, learing it might benefit the BJP. The 15 opposing parties hold 205 MPs, while Modi needs 362 votes to proceed.

Shyam Benegal passes away at 90

A legal framework for simultaneous elections is essential to address mid-term government collapses and central

The one nation, one poll approach reduces waste and election frequency, so the Opposition should consider it carefully and present any alternative proposals for public discussion. The One Nation One poll has been one of the poll promises of the BJP. Some core issues have already been addressed, such as the revocation of Article 370 and the building of the Ram temple in Ayodhya.

In his third term, Modi wants to finish the unfinished agenda. Modi presents this legislation with a clear strategy: Whether he succeeds or not, he benefits. If the bill gets passed, it will be an advantage for the BJP government. If it fails, he can claim that he tried to enact reform but faced Opposition obstruction. Despite potential delays, it's important to debate the bill, as election spending ultimately comes from taxpayers' money. Now that the bill has been sent to a joint select committee, we must wait for its report.

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

Lessons from yesterday: Reflections that shape a lifetime



The past is a treasure trove of memories and lessons, each shaping who we are and guiding us into the future

The past shapes our present. The present is past the next moment, to make way for the future. We are left with fond memories. These memories also teach us invaluable lessons. I was prone to my share of mischief as a child for which I would get scolded by my parents. At such times, I was assured of a haven hiding behind my grandmother. She was impartial to both sides as she counselled my parents to be more indulgent and taught us to be well-behaved.

I remember another afternoon. I returned from school excited about my outstanding results in the examinations. Unmindful of my mother's much-needed siesta, I woke her up. Still groggy, she hugged and blessed me, before continuing with her interrupted sleep. That one spontaneous gesture was my reward which would continue to inspire me throughout my life. My father usually rested and slept on Sunday after-

We tried not to disturb his sleep. One day, we might have been noisier than usual and ended up soundly thrashed by our father. I wit-

nessed a different facet of my father's personality later in the evening, as he gently expressed his regret for the outburst. I would remember in times to come that there was no shame in accepting if I was wrong. I remember the day I met the young girl who became my wife and life partner in the next few months. After the initial heady days, we buckled up to the serious business of making a life together.

We have been married for 40 years. These have not been easy decades faced with the harsh realities of life. We never give up, whatever the setbacks. We continue to strive towards the common goal of leading a happy and contented life together. It is easier to face challenges and find solutions as a team.

from a long-ago holiday to the beach town of Puri. Our guest house was a couple of hundred meters from the beach. Our daughters were much younger.

I was, and continue to be, a protective father, worrying about their safety. That one day, I sat on the veranda, fondly looking at the two children playing with sand on the beach. Their innocent efforts, many of which were unsuccessful, to mould a work of art out of the slippery sand, taught me not to give up. My mother kept a copy of Ramcharitmanas in her prayer corner. I read somewhere that you could find a solution to any problem in the

All you had to do was open any page, and the top line would help you find ways to Another nostalgic memory is tackle your most pressing

issue. I also tried it sometimes. I remember that a simple reading of the lines was not enough. What mattered was the action plan that I arrived at based on my interpretation, and the determination with which I pursued.

Fair play, guiding the team members, impartiality, giving undivided time to team members however busy one might be, empathy, working for the team, pride in the performance of the team members, and out-of-box thinking, were only a few of the invaluable lessons that my experi-

ences taught me. They have stood me in good stead through the rough and tumble of life. The words of psychiatrist, Abraham Twerski would resonate with many, "Ruminating about the past will get you nowhere. So go ahead and learn from the past whatever you can, and then put it behind you. Remember, there is nothing you can do to change it, but you can use its lessons to improve your future."

(The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)

TRUMP'S ACQUISITION PLANS

Madam —Trump is on a shopping spree to buy Canada, the Panama Canal and Greenland, desiring to make Canada its 51st state with Trudeau as its governor. He wants the gifted Panama Canal back to his country. The Panama president has, however, expressed his disagreement with both his conditions, thereby creating another contentious issue ready to be dealt with in the near future. He is also eyeing Greenland to gain its strategic advantage for monitoring the missiles launched from Russia and China on the US and alternatively using it as a launching pad for the US missiles on them. Greenland being rich in minerals like uranium is another factor for its advantage to the US. More so, the greatest island on this planet is not green but mostly ice-filled, comprising glaciers that create many new waterways on its melting due to global warming each year, giving a wider area for its exploration.

He is also creating a powerful force by enriching it with the recruitment of capitalists like Elon Musk and AI experts in his cabinet to act as resources for implementing his future plans. Indian brain drain forms a substantial part of his team, like Sriram Ramakrishnan, the AI expert, and such other talents that India has lost to another country at its cost for its inability to identify and hold them at the appropriate time. If this happens, the demography will start taking a new shape, and interrelation equations of friends and foes will change. India needs to withhold its talent by stopping its brain drain at any cost by providing them better than what they get abroad to discourage their move to foreign lands. However, the unpredictable nature of Donald Trump will keep the world guessing with fingers crossed till it actually happens in reality after he takes over as president, as for all you know, he may suddenly say one day "I was just joking.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

he sad demise of legendary filmmaker and stalwart of Indian cinema Shyam Benegal at the age of 90 is an irreparable loss for both the cinema and the society. His historic contribution to parallel cinema will be written in golden words in the history of Indian cinema. He was the vanguard of the movement

PRITHVI SHAW'S FUTURE IN DOUBT

Madam— Ravi Shastri once saw Sachin Tendulkar, Brian Lara and Virender Sehwag in Prithvi Shaw. He was a player born to play cricket," Shastri had said of Shaw. A ton on test debut against the West Indies in 2018 and a blistering 52-ball 70 in the next announced Shaw's arrival on the big stage. But Shaw played his last test for the country in 2020. He was part of the Indian ODI team for a little more than a year. Now at 25, he has not only been left out of the Indian team, but he does not find a place in the Mumbai side as well.

His exclusion from the state team for the Vijay Hazare Trophy has effectively rendered all chances of Shaw making a comeback to the Indian team extremely slim because Indian cricket is bristling with talent and perseverance, hard to replace. Indiscipline, antics, and arrogance reportedly caused his downfall. Shaw was embroiled in frequent off-field controversies. While those could have been shrugged off, through his poor fitness and casual pproach, he was apparently becoming a R S Narula | Patiala liability for teams. As rightly put by an

of realistic and issue-based filmmaking, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s. His directorial debut movie. 'Ankur.' in 1974 itself was a landmark in Indian cinema. Along with his timeless movies, he launched the careers of many highly accomplished actors, including Smita Patil, Naseeruddin Shah and Shabana

Besides his contribution to cinema, Shyam Benegal was a man of great values who never hesitated to speak his mind. Despite his ideological differences with the right wing and the Modi government, he opposed returning national awards as a mark of protest against the alleged increase in intolerance in India. He, himself a two-time chairman of FTII, did not support the strike of students of the institute against the appointment of TV actor Gajendra Chauhan as its chairman.

Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

office bearer of the Mumbai Cricket Association, "Shaw is his own enemy." Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

CONCERN OVER SHAMI'S FITNESS

Madam — The team India has been endeavouring for over a period to gain the ground, where it's seen the bowlers and batters are totally at sea. Then, everyone wishing for Shami's comeback, which can drastically strengthen the tie of the team, especially the bowling attack, as he showcased his back-to-back top-notch performance in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, leading bowling length effectively.

But once again, BCCI's update about his fitness, that he has been deemed not fit for selection in the remaining two tests due to concern over left knee swelling, has ruined countless hopes. Our wishes for his speedy recovery and the team's unparalleled persistence to heal up the millions' fresh wounded hearts.

Jakir Hussain | Kanpur

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FIRST COLUMN

THE TRANSFORMATIVE **POWER OF MANTRAS**

The Divya Chikitsa Mantras stand out as a remarkable system for channelising divine energy



ASHWANI GURU JI

ou might have heard of Sanjeevani Vidya given by Guru Shukracharya, which could bring back the dead to life, or of a certain herb called Sanjeevani buti, which brought back Lakshman to life. You may have also heard of the Madhu Vidya or Brahmavidya as possessed by Sage Dadhichi which could enable one to attain immortality, or the Chyawanprasha prepared by the Ashvini Kumars to restore the youth of Sage Chyawan.

These are not tales or works of fiction, the Vedic rishis were masters of Creation, the human body being a microscopic part of that. The proof that these were not fiction lies in the fact that most of the modern scientific discoveries have come from the Vedic shastras. You may visit www.dhyanfoundation.com to know which scientific discovery has come from which shastra. While most of the ancient Vedic healing sciences are lost in the dust of kaliyuga and most herbs have become extinct, a fraction of them still can be accessed and even that fraction is enough



to achieve amazing results. Divya Chikitsa Mantras as detailed in Sanatan Kriya is one such gem from the treasure trove of Vedic gyan. Divya Chikitsa Mantras use sound and vibrations to bring about the desired effect and changes in your body.

When done right their healing and transformational effects are apparent for all to see. A combination of 7 mantras they work to unclog certain nadis (energy channels) and awaken specific centres, to channelise the force of divine energies for a practitioner. It is said that the body of a deva resides in the mantra. This has been practically experienced by each one who has attended a yagya at Dhyan Ashram where complete forms of the deities were invoked through specific chants manifested in the Yagya Agni. For the mantra to bear fruit, it has to be received from a Guru who is Siddha in the mantra, in line with the ancient Guru Shishya Parampara. Guru channelises the force of the respective deity in the mantra and also imparts the dhwani (correct pronunciation) of the mantra. The efficacy of a Vedic mantra depends on the correctness of its chant; faulty pronunciation of even a single syllable changes the entire mean-

Taittiriya Samhita narrates the story of Tvashta in this regard. Tvashta performed a sacrifice to destroy Indra. He used the mantra, 'indrashatru' to manifest his thought. However, he placed a lofty note on the word 'Indra' instead of 'shatru' because of which the meaning of the word changed from 'slayer of indra' to 'the one who will be slain by indra' and thus the son, Vrutra, so born to him was defeated by Indra, just because of a pronunciation defect. To quote from Panini Shiksha, a mantra devoid of the correct vowels (svar) and consonants (varna) is faulty and does not convey its intended meaning. It is like a verbal thunderbolt that harms the one who is chanting, as had happened in the case of erroneous pronunciation of the word, Indrashatru). The Vedic seers had mastered this incredible science of sound in the form of mantras, they were well aware of the high degree of specificity and precision that is required to harness the power of sound.

Shiksha, one of the six vendangas, deals with the science of proper pronunciation of words and laws of euphony. Volumes have been written on Shiksha by Panini, Yadnyavalkya and Vasishtha. Shatpath Brahman states that every alphabet of a word possesses some kind of strength and explains the secret of every alphabet. Therefore it is important that one partakes the vidya of mantras from a Guru. Reading from books /internet or hearing on television/social media and starting self-practice may have detrimental effects if the chant is not proper.

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

State budgets on the brink: RBI sounds alarm



With outstanding debts exceeding the prudential threshold, the RBI urges states to adopt "next-generation" fiscal rules to ensure sustainable financial management

ccording to a report on 'State Finances: A Study of Budgets of 2024-25' released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on December 19, 2024, the consolidated gross fiscal deficit (GFD) of all State governments was contained within 3 per cent of their gross domestic product (GDP) during the financial years (FY) 2022-23 and 2023-24. For 2024-25, their GDP The budgeted at 3.2 per cent of GDP. They have complied with the stipulation under the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act, 2003 which requires them to keep it within the 3 per cent cap. But, the good news ends here. The report reveals that the total outstanding liabilities of States were 28.5 per cent of the GDP in March 2024. Though lower than the peak of 31 per cent reached as of March-end 2021, it remained significantly above the prudential debt-GDP ratio of 20 per cent mandated for the states under the

Another measure of how a State government is managing its budget is its revenue expenditure (RE) about capital outlay (CO). While, the RE being on items such as salaries, wages, pension bills, subsidies etc essentially goes towards non-asset creating spending, CO results in the generation of capital assets thereby providing a foundation for income stream over some time. Greater emphasis on the latter is considered fiscally prudent whereas more of the former can lead to fiscal destabilisation. The record of many states on this crucial parameter is disconcerting. For all states, the total expenditure increased from around Rs 3428,000 crore in 2020-21 to Rs 5760,000 crore during 2024-25 (budget estimate). As regards RE, it increased from Rs 3018,000 crore in 2020-21 to Rs 4840,000 crore in 2024-25. The CO increased from Rs 410,000 crore during 2020-21 to Rs 920,000 crore during 2024-25. These numbers yield a ratio of RE to CO or RECO of 5.2 (4840,000/920,000).

In several states, the RECO is much higher than even this national average. For instance, in Punjab, at 17.1 it is more than three times followed by 14.1), Kerala (10.6) and Delhi (10.3). There are some better-performing states too such as Manipur having the best ratio (2.4), followed by Gujarat (2.9) and Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh (3.1). However, the abnormally high RECO of other states pushes up the national average. How does it compare with the Centre? The total expenditure of the Central Government increased from Rs 3042,000 crore during 2020-21 to Rs 4820,000 crore during 2024-25. Of this, the RE increased from Rs 2603,000 crore during 2020-21 to Rs 3709,000 crore during 2024-25. On the other hand, its CO increased from Rs 439,000 crore during 2020-21 to Rs 1111,000 crore during 2024-25. So, RECO for the Centre is 3.3 in 2024-25 (3709,000/1111000) against 5.2 for the

Barring a couple of good performers like Gujarat which is doing even better than the Centre, most of the states



BARRING A COUPLE OF GOOD **PERFORMERS** LIKE GUJARAT WHICH IS DOING EVEN **BETTER THAN** THE CENTRE, MOST OF THE STATES HAVE BEEN RECKLESS IN THEIR

REVENUE SPENDING AND THAT INCLUDES A SHARP RISE IN EXPENDITURE ON SUBSIDIES

spending and that includes a sharp rise in expenditure on subsidies. Since 2018-19, subsidies given by the states have grown 2.5 times to over Rs 470,000 crore being the budget estimate for FY 2024-25), The RBI cites farm loan waivers, free or subsidised services like electricity, transport, gas cylinders, and cash transfers to farmers, youth and women as key areas of incipient stress. It suggests that states need to adopt "next-generation" fiscal rules, time-bound glide paths for fiscal consolidation, and rein in subsidies and freebies so that it doesn't crowd out more productive expenditures. Such exhortations have been made umpteen times in the past not just by the RBI but also by several committees set by the government on 'expenditure reforms' from time to time. Now, we have more jargon like

"next-generation" fiscal rules to convey the same message with greater intensity.

The RBI posits these rules as "combining the medium-term fiscal sustainability objective with short-term flexibility allowing state governments more maneuverability in dealing with exogenous economic shocks". The banking regulator goes on "these will involve inter alia, the use of data analytics, including machine learning (ML) and artificial intelligence (AI); improved data transparency and disclosure practices; and strengthening the institution of State Finance Commissions to deliver public services more effectively and scale up social and physical infrastructure," Put sim-ply, the RBI expects the State governments to not just bring about policy reforms and refinements to better target welfare schemes focusing primarily on the poor

sections of the society but also to galvanise the administrative machinery and institutions to deliver benefits efficiently and prevent misuse/diversion by making the best use of technology interventions.

Do the States understand?
The answer is a categorical 'no'. Forget a finely crafted system desired by the RBI and government committees, most of the states have put in place crude and non-transparent subsidy regimes call them freebies - a jargon for "something given free of charge" - all aimed at alluring voters and winning elections. The political parties have sought to cover under 'something' literally everything that touches the life of a

free education, free LPG cylinder, free laptops, free transport, state Already, without the MMSY, the support for marriage, and piigrimage for the elderly; it's an unending list.

It includes free food, free health,

In the last couple of years, the freebies promised by them have become more brazen with parties coming out with 'cash transfers' to the account of voters. Such schemes mostly directed at women have won elections for the concerned parties in elections held during 2023 and 2024 in Madhya Pradesh (MP), Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Haryana. The parties compete with each other in offering more. A common refrain is 'Who will promise more"?

Look at this. In the budget for 2024-25, Delhi finance minister Atishi announced the Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana (MMSY) under which, the AAP government will give Rs 1000 per month to all the women

above the age of 18 in the national capital. Now, ex-Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has increased the amount to Rs 2100 per month. In response, the BJP has reportedly promised a still higher cash transfer of Rs 2500 per month. Let us be clear. Unlike 'normal' budget expenses which are planned and backed by wellorchestrated efforts to garner revenue, additional financial liabilities imposed by the freebies promised in the election manifesto affect the budgetary position of the State in a totally uncontrolled' and 'unplanned' manner. Moreover, these freebies don't have a sunset date meaning these will continue to be given 'eternally' – no matter which party rules. This is the surest invitation to fiscal catastrophe. Take the case of Delhi.

financial position of the Deini government has come to such a pass that CM Atishi has recently forwarded a request to the Centre seeking a loan of Rs 10,000 crore from the National Small Savings Fund (NSSF). Now, if AAP were to come to power yet again, MMSY @Rs 2100 a month would cost the exchequer an additional Rs 17,000 crore per

annum. Since 2018-19, state subsidies have grown 2.5 times to over Rs 470,000 crore (2024-25), courtesy freebies cult. This will increase exponentially, destabilising State budgets, and making a mockery of the much-touted fiscal consolidation drive. The Supreme Court has on several occasions observed that 'freebies are bad'. Will it force parliamentarians to enact a law to curb them?

(The writer is a policy analyst;

Festive cheer meets smart choices: Navigating the real estate boom of 2024

By evaluating long-term financial goals, buyers can turn festive opportunities into lasting investments

Tith the festive season ongoing in full swing, there is a surge in consumer spending. This time is often marked by a flurry of purchases fuelled by tradition and sentiment. While the allure of buying a home can be particularly enticing during this festive period, buyers must approach such decisions with careful consideration. They must look beyond the festive fervour and reflect on key aspects that can guide them to make informed deci-

As per a report 'Unravelling

Decoding Festive Demand the Trends Shaping India's Real Estate Market in 2024' by CBRE, from January to September, the luxury housing category collectively constituted 16 per cent of the overall



RAHUL MEHROTRA

housing demand.

This growth has spurred developers to launch new projects, resulting in the category representing 19 per cent of the total new launches during the first nine months of 2024. This trend is only going to

grow further spurred by the

festive season as buyers are

club-house, larger living spaces, and modern facilities. Metro cities, in particular, have seen a wave of new project launches by developers this year, catering to various buyer While luxury properties grab

headlines, the affordable housing sector remains the backbone of India's real estate market as this is where buyers purchasing their first home find the most value.

Having said that, many firsttime homebuyers are compelled to buy a property given the abundant promotional offers and incentives provided by realtors. It is so because the festive season spurs confidence as it often coincides with salary increments, bonuses, investing in end-products that and a general uptick in eco-

offer better amenities such as nomic activity. However, buyers much before they scout for a property, should evaluate the long-term aspects. Questions such as - "Can I support paying the EMI?" or "Is it the right approach" may seem overwhelming at first, but assession ing one's worth is very crucial at this stage. **Interest Rate Matters**

The interest rate set by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is a huge factor in deciding other crucial interest rates. The repo rate is unchanged for the 10th consecutive time, and this implies that the Equated Monthly Installments (EMIs) are likely to remain manageable. Further to this, I believe there would be a pickup in demand for housing loans as the festive season progresses.

Recent data from the RBI



cent increase in home loan deployment, highlighting the diminishing gap between monthly rents and EMIs. Additionally, 80 per cent of aspiring homeowners preferred home loans as the top choice for property acquisition

Typically, possessions and property deliveries are scheduled in the latter half of November, aligning perfectly with the festive momentum.In addition to stable interest rates and EMIs, the array of offers and discounts available during the festive season can be another key factor of consid-

eration. However, it's essential to look for transparent offers that can help avoid hidden fees and unexpected costs. One should seek out reduced processing fees, flexible repayment plans, cashback schemes, and opportunities for negotiation that can make the festive season an advantageous time to invest.

What Should Buyers And **Investors Do?**

Investors and buyers must focus on long-term value by evaluating their income and cash flows to ensure manageable EMIs. The festive season can be an opportunity to reduce upfront costs and select properties in developing areas with strong amenities and connectivity for better appreciation.

The predictability in EMI

outflows coupled with festive discounts can make the dream of homeownership more achievable. First-time buyers, particularly in the affordable housing segment, must rely on loans to bridge the financial gap as well as look for special offers and dis-

While festive discounts are great, buyers should align their decisions with pragmatic goals rather than being swayed by just sentiment. Buying a property during a festive season is certainly the start of a prosperous journey, but to truly benefit, one needs to have a stable financial plan whether it's the first home or adding to one's portfolio.

(The writer is MD & CEO, RHDFCL; views are personal)

Israel, Hamas accuse each other of complicating ceasefire efforts as they inch closer to deal

AP MEXICO CITY

not go unpunished".

Israel and Hamas accused each other of complicating ceasefire efforts on Wednesday, as the two sides inch closer to a deal that could wind down the 14-month war in Gaza. The two sides appear closer than they have been in months to reaching an agreement that would bring home dozens of hostages being held in Gaza. However, talks have

come close before, only to collapse. Although Israel and Hamas have expressed optimism that progress was being made toward a deal, sticking points remain over the exchange of hostages for Palestinian prisoners and the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza, people involved in the talks say. On Wednesday, Hamas accused Israel of introducing new conditions related to the withdrawal from Gaza, the prisoners and the return of displaced people, which it said was delaying the deal. Israel's government accused Hamas of

The organiser of a Christmas fair in southern Mexico was assassinated at

his city's holiday event, authorities said late

Tuesday. The governor of the southern

state of Guerrero said gunmen killed the

organiser of the annual Christmas and

New Year's fair in the state capital of Chilpancingo. Gov. Evelyn Salgado called

the Christmas Eve killing of Martín Ramírez Ruíz "an unacceptable act that will

Salgado wrote on her social media

accounts that state prosecutors were inves-

tigating the crime. There was no immedi-

ate information on the motive, but the

gangs gain much of their income extort-

ing money from local businesses and rou-

tinely kill those who refuse to pay. In a sep-

arate statement, state prosecutors said that

another person was killed along with

Ramírez Ruíz, and that a third person in

the crowd gathered outside a church was

reneging on reneging on understandings that have already been reached." Still, both sides said discussions are ongoing. Israel's negotiating team, which includes members from its intelligence agencies and the military, returned from Qatar Tuesday evening for internal consultations, following a week of what it called "significant negotiations".

During its October 7, 2023, attack on southern Israel, Hamas and other groups took about 250 people hostage and brought them to Gaza. A previous truce in November 2023 freed more than 100 hostages, while others have been rescued or their remains have been recovered over the past year.

Israel says about 100 hostages remain in Gaza - at least a third of whom it believes were killed during the October 7 attack or died in captivity. Sporadic talks have taken place for a year, but in recent weeks there's been a renewed push to reach a deal. President-elect

Organiser of Christmas fair in southern

Mexico assassinated at his event

month for his second term, has demanded the immediate release of Israeli hostages, saying on social media that if they're not freed before he is sworn in, there will be "HELL TO PAY". Families of the hostages are becoming increasingly angry, calling on the Israeli government for a ceasefire before

Trump is sworn in.
After Israel's high-level negotiation team returned from Doha this week, hostage families called an emergency press conference in Tel Aviv, pleading for a ceasefire and a complete end to the war. Shir Siegel, the daughter of Israeli-American Keith Siegel, whose mother was released after more than 50 days in captivity, said every delay could endan-

ger their lives.
"There are moments when every second is fateful, and this is one of those moments," she said.

The families are planning a special candle lighting ceremony in Hostages

6. Mayor Alejandro Arcos was killed just

a week after he took office as mayor of the

state capital. Officials had blamed the

killing on one of the gangs. The mayor's

Square Wednesday, marking the first night of Hanukkah. The agreement would take effect in phases and include a halt in fighting, an exchange of Israeli hostages for Palestinian prisoners, and a surge in aid to the besieged Gaza Strip, according to Egyptian, Hamas and American officials. The last phase would include the release of any remaining hostages, an end to the war and talks on reconstruction.

Israel's bombardment and ground invasion into Gaza have killed over 45,000 Palestinians in Gaza, more than half of them women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between fighters and civilians in its count.

The offensive has caused widespread destruction and displaced some 90 per cent of Gaza's 2.3 million people, often

multiple times. Hundreds of thousands are packed into squalid tent camps along the coast as the cold, wet winter sets in.

Iran restores access to WhatsApp and Google Play

Tehran. Iran's government on Tuesday said it had lifted a ban on access to WhatsApp and Google Play after more than two years, the official IRNA

news agency reported. The report said the country's Supreme Council of Cyber Space made the decision in a meeting led by reformist President Masoud Pezeshkian, who has vowed to remove restrictions on social media. Iran's telecommunication minister Sattar Heshemi in a post on X called the decision a "first step" in removing restrictions and said "the path will continue" - indicating the possibility of unblocking other services. Many people reached by The Associated Press across the capital, Tehran, and other cities said they had access to the services on computers but not yet on mobile phones. WhatsApp has been the third most popu-lar messaging platform in Iran after Instagram.

Pakistani airstrikes killed 46 people in eastern Afghanistan: Taliban

AP PESHAWAR

Pakistan's airstrikes on east-ern Afghanistan killed 46 people, mostly women and children, a Taliban govern-ment official said on Wednesday, raising fears of further straining the relations between the two neighbours. Hamdullah Fitrat, the deputy spokesman for the Afghan government, said those killed in the strikes that targeted four locations in Barmal, a district in the province of Paktika, were refugees, adding that six others were also wounded. This comes a day after Pakistani security officials, speaking on the condition of anonymity in line with regulations, told The Associated Press that Tuesday's operation was to dismantle a training facility and kill insurgents in Paktika in Afghanistan. Earlier Wednesday Wednesday, Mohammad Khurasani, the

spokesman for the Pakistani Taliban or Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, claimed in a statement that 50 people, including 27 women and children, have died in the strikes. He said they were "unarmed refugees" who fled to Afghanistan because of Pakistan's offensive in the northwest.

The TTP - a separate group but also a close ally of the Afghan Taliban - also shared photos, alleging they were of children killed during the Pakistani operation. The strikes came hours after Mohammad Sadiq, Pakistan's special representative for Afghanistan, travelled to Kabul to discuss a range of issues. Afghanistan's Foreign Ministry in Kabul summoned the Pakistani envoy and lodged a strong protest over the strikes by Pakistan's army. In a statement, it said while a representative of the civilian government of Pakistan was busy in talks with the Afghan officials, the strikes were carried

an uptick in recent months. The latest was this weekend when at least 16 Pakistani soldiers were killed when the TTP attacked a checkpoint in the country's northwest. Pakistani officials have accused the Taliban of not doing enough to combat militant activity across the border, a charge the Afghan Taliban government denies, saying it does not allow anyone to carry out attacks against any country. North and South Waziristan are former strongholds of Pakistani Taliban, who have fled to Afghanistan. Tensions were at an all-high in March when Pakistan said intelligence-based strikes took place

out by the Pakistani army to Defence Ministry denounced the attacks on Tuesday and "create mistrust in the relations between the two countries". promised retaliation. On It said Kabul "will not accept Wednesday, the situation along the violation of the country's the shared border seemed to be territory under any circumbusiness as usual. stances, and the country is However, security analysts say ready to defend its indepenthe TTP could launch retalia dence and territory" and "such tory attacks in Pakistan. Pakistan has seen innumerable irresponsible actions will defmilitant attacks in the past initely have consequences". Meanwhile, residents in the two decades but there has been area told an AP reporter over

in the border regions inside Afghanistan.

wounded in the attack. The gunmen had apparently waded into the crowd and directly targeted Ramírez Ruíz. Ramírez Haiti gang attack journalists covering hospital

 $H_{
m aiti}$'s online media associtation said two reporters were killed and several others were wounded in a gang attack on Tuesday on the reopening of Port-au-Prince's biggest public hospital. Street gangs have taken over an estimated 85% of and they forced the closure of the General Hospital early this year. Authorities had pledged to reopen the facility Tuesday but as journalists gathered to cover the event, suspected gang members opened fire in a vicious Christmas Eve attack.

Robest Dimanche, a spokesman for the Online Media Collective, identified the dead journalists as Markenzy Nathoux and Jimmy Jean. Dimanche said an unspecified number of reporters had also been wounded in the attack, which he blamed on the Viv Ansanm coalition of gangs.

Haiti's interim president, Leslie Voltaire, said in an address to the nation that journalists and police were among the victims of the attack. He did not specify how many casualties there were, or give a breakdown for the dead or wounded. "I send my sympathies to the people who were victims, the national police and the journalists," Voltaire said, pledging

reopening leaves two dead

AP PORT-AU-PRINCE "this crime is not going to "this crime is not going to go unpunished." A video posted online by the reporters trapped inside the hospital showed what appeared to be two lifeless bod ies of men on stretchers, their clothes bloodied. One of the men had a lanyard with a press credential around his neck. Radio Télé Métronome initialists and two police officers were wounded. Police and officials did not immediately respond to calls for information on the attack. Video posted online earlier showed reporters inside the building and at least three lying on the floor, apparently wounded. That video could also not be immediately verified. Johnson "Izo" André, considered Haiti's most powerful gang leader and part of a gang known as Viv Ansanm, which that has taken control of much of Portau-Prince, posted a video on social media claiming responsibility for the attack. The video said the gang coalition had not authorized the hospital's reopening. Haiti has seen journalists targeted before. In 2023, two local journalists were killed in the space of a couple of weeks radio reporter Dumesky Kersaint was fatally shot in mid-April that year, while journalist Ricot Jean was found dead later that month.

body was found in a pickup truck, with his severed head placed on the roof of the vehicle, in an apparent message from the gang. The same gang is thought to be responsi ble for killing 11 market vendors, including four boys, in late October. The vendors, members of an extended family, were abducted as they travelled to sell their wares. Their bodies were found dumped in the bed of a pickup truck on an avenue in Chilpancingo. Chilpancingo, a city of Ruíz was the head of the civic group that about 300,000, is so completely dominated by gangs that in 2023, one of them for almost two centuries has organised an arts, food and handicrafts fair that runs staged a demonstration of hundreds of from roughly Christmas to January 7. The fair also honors the local patron saint, St. people, hijacked a government armoured Matthew. Two rival drug gangs, the Tlacos car, blocked a major highway and took police hostage to win the release of arrest-ed suspects. Violence in Guerrero reached and the Ardillos, are fighting for control of the city of Chilpancingo, and violence against officials and residents there has such unprecedented levels that earlier this reached grisly levels. In November, a foryear, Roman Catholic bishops announced mer prosecutor and local police official was they had helped arrange a truce in another part of the state between two warring drug cartels. arrested in connection with the grisly decapitation of the city's mayor on October



been blockaded for weeks as part of a wider movement demanding accountability over the November 1 tragedy in Novi Sad when a huge concrete construction at the railway stastudent delegation to a meet- tion crashed onto the people below. any in Serbia blame the reflected wider discontent with collapse on widespread corruption and sloppy work on the building renovation, one of a number of questionable infrastructure megaprojects involving Chinese state companies. Prosecutors have arrested 13 people over the Novi Sad tragedy, including a govern-ment minister whose release later fuelled public scepticism

Striking students have received wide support in Serbia from their professors, farmers, actors and others. Tens of thousands joined a student-led protest in Belgrade on Sunday that also Balkan nation.

populist President Aleksandar Vucic's rule. Protesting students on Wednesday carried banners featuring red handprints - a protest symbol telling the authorities they have "blood on their hands.

In an apparent attempt to defuse the student strikes, Vucic has been advertising what he describes as "favourable" loans apartments. The increasingly autocratic Serbian leader has faced accusations of curbing democratic freedoms despite formally pursuing European Union membership for the

Indian soldiers in WW 2 Christmas truce

Spice tins honour role of

A UK historian has highlighted further evidence of the widespread contributions made by Indian soldiers to the First World War effort as part of the British

the phone that at least 13 peo-

ple were left dead, adding that the death toll could be higher.

They also said the wounded

were transported to a local hos-

pital. Pakistan has not com-

mented on the latest strikes.

However, the Pakistani military

said Wednesday that security

forces killed 13 insurgents in an

intelligence-based operation in

South Waziristan, a district

located along eastern Afghanistan's Paktika province. Pakistan's Interior Minister

Mohsin Naqvi praised

"Pakistan's brave security force'

in a statement for thwarting

"the nefarious designs" of "ter-

rorists". He didn't mention the Pakistani air strikes inside Afghanistan. The Taliban

covery of spice tins that were used during the Christmas truce in 1914. Professor Peter Doyle,

a military historian at Gold's miths, University of London, is quoted in 'The Times' on Wednesday

to showcase how new research has found that these spice tins ended up in the hands of German soldiers when the Western Front fell silent as soldiers walked across no man's land to exchange handshakes, gifts and a game of football 110 years ago. Doyle organised an exhibition about the truce, including details around these spice tins, at the Great War Huts Museum in Bury St Edmunds, eastern England. "The truce was not just a case of 'Anglo-Saxon' to 'Saxon' fraternisation," Doyle is quoted as saying. "Up until recently, people didn't really believe or expect Indian soldiers took part in the truce, though they may have been observers," he said. The spice tins were part of morale boosting Christmas gifts to soldiers in the war by Princess Mary, the daughter of Britain's King George V. For British soldiers, her gift was made up of a smoking kit, which was deemed inappropriate as many members of the Indian army were non-smokers. Instead, their tins were filled with spice along with a picture of Princess Mary in place of a cigarette card for their UK counterparts. Doyle, the author of 'For Every Sailor Afloat, Every Soldier at the Front: Princess Mary's Christmas Gift 1914', documents how Princess Mary aged just 17 set out to send

a Christmas gift to all those

on active service. His book

is set against the backdrop of

an unofficial "Truce in No Man's Land" during the war and his research led him to the discovery of one of the spice tins - only the second one known to still be in existence. He knew that the 39th Garhwal Rifles were at



the Christmas of 1914.

UN Sec-General pays tributes to Indian peacekeeper

PTI UNITED NATIONS

AP BELGRADE

Serbia's striking university students on Wednesday ral-

lied outside the chief prosecu-

tor's office to demand justice

over a concrete canopy collapse

that killed 15 people last month

More than 1,000 students sym-

bolically left letters on the

doorstep of the public prosecu-

cutor Zagorka Dolovac that

students expect you to fight for

law and justice, without polit-

ical abuse or corruption".

Dolovac's office later respond-

ed with a statement inviting a

in the country's north.

N Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has paid tributes to Brigadier General Amitabh Jha of India, who was serving with the UNDOF at Golan Heights, and said he will be remembered for his "leadership and unwavering commitment to United Nations peacekeeping.

Brigadier Jha was serving as Deputy Force Commander of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) from April 2023 and had recently served as acting Force Commander of UNDOF in complex circumstances, following the fall of the Assad Government in Syria. "He will

be remembered for his leadership and unwavering commitment to United Nations peacekeeping, including in the United Nations Organization Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) as a Military Observer from 2005 to 2006," a statement by the spokesman for Guterres said late on Tuesday. The Secretary-General extends his heartfelt condolences to Brigadier General Jha's family and to the Government of India for their loss, the statement added. Earlier, the Indian Army while paying tributes to Brigadier Jha in

a post on X said, "#GeneralUpendraDwivedi #COAS and All Ranks of #IndianArmy expresses deepest condolences on the untimely

demise of Brigadier Amitabh Jha due to medical reasons. Indian Army stands firm with the bereaved family in this hour of grief." According to the UNDOF website, Brigadier Jha joined the UNDOF Mission on April 14, 2023.

He was an Infantry Officer & prior to his deployment to UNDOF, had commanded a Brigade in Glaciated Mountainous terrain of India, and a Specialised unit as Commanding Officer. Jha had a keen interest in reading on "military diplomacy, geopolitics, Indo-Pacific, modern & small wars, sub-conventional warfare & tribes & culture," it said, adding, he was a keen sports enthusiast, who played troop games and enjoyed backpacking in the mountains.

Japan's foreign minister seeks 'positive' direction in bilateral ties during China visit

AP BEIJING

Tapanese Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya met with top Chinese leaders Wednesday during his visit to Beijing, the first since the heads of the two countries met at a summit in Peru last month, in an effort to make positive inroads in the bilateral relationship. The two neighbours have had a tense relationship in recent years. At the top of Iwaya's agenda is China's ban on Japanese seafood in response to the release of treated radioactive wastewater into the sea from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, as well as China's increasingly assertive military activity in the East and South China Seas.

Iwaya met with China's premier Li Qiang Wednesday as well as Wang Yi, his Chinese counterpart. "Currently the China-Japan relations are at a crit-



opment," said Li, in his remarks. "China is willing to work together with Japan to move towards the important direction proposed by the leaders of the two countries." "I want to build a relationship where the people of both countries feel that Japan-China

gressed in a positive direction," said Iwaya, ahead of his meeting with Wang. His trip comes just before US President-elect Donald Trump is to take office in January. Tokyo considers the Japan-US alliance the lynchpin of its diplomatic and security poli-

cies, a tone emphasised in the past four years under US President Joe Biden's direction, but it's unclear how Trump will impact the alliance. Japan has revamped its approach to defense in response to Chinese actions in recent years, boosting military spending and shifting away from a principle of self-defense. Earlier this year, Japan protested when

a Chinese military plane flew into Japan's airspace, while in the summer, a Chinese survey ship sailed into Japanese territorial waters. While how US-China relations come out under the Trump administration is unclear, Japan is seeking stability in its relationship with its neighbour and hopes to develop ties in areas of mutual interest, including the economy and the elderly care industry. Iwaya told reporters before his departure Tuesday that he will also hold bilateral highlevel people and cultural exchange

talks, joined by the education ministers from the two sides."The relationship with China, our neighbouring country, is one of Japan's most important," Iwaya told reporters Tuesday. he said. "The two countries share important responsibilities for the peace and prosperity of the region and the international society. Iwaya, a security expert, is also expect-

ed to reiterate his concern about Japanese nationals detained in alleged spying allegations. Japan maintains that the water discharged from the Fukushima plant is treated and diluted to levels much safer than international standards and adequately monitored, but China calls the water contaminated. Both agreed in September to work toward easing the seafood ban by allowing China in multinational sampling missions under the framework of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

which led him to explore whether the spice tins may have become part of the Christmas truce there, along with the men who carried them. He approached Robin Schafer, a German historian who went into the archives and found references in German newspapers to men receiving the spice tins as gifts during the brief cessation of hostilities 110 years ago. A soldier named Wilhelm Althoff wrote: Some Indians gifted us figs [and] a shiny metal box with spices." Doyle and Schafer hope that more of these tins, which Doyle describes as "unprepossessing", may be found by people in Germany and elsewhere if they go looking. They also hold out hope that some photographs of the event may exist, as picturetaking was initially encouraged in German trenches to boost morale. During the First World War (1914-18) India, which at that time included Pakistan and Bangladesh under British colonial rule, sent the largest share of Commonwealth soldiers to the war effort at over 1.4 million. Shrabani Basu, historian-author of For King and Another Country: Indian Soldiers on the Western Front, 1914-18' has also documented their immense contributions to the war effort. Today there are descendants of the soldiers living in Britain who can be proud of

what their ancestors

achieved," she notes.

Fate of Trump's Cabinet picks unclear as Republicans prepare to take power in Senate

The fate of President-elect Donald Trump's Cabinet is still unclear after Republican senators spent much of December carefully dodging questions about Robert F. Kennedy Jr. 's views on vaccines, accusations of sexual misconduct against Pete Hegseth and Tulsi Ğabbard's 2017 meeting with then-President Bashar Assad of Syria.

While some GOP senators have indicated they are all-in for Trump's picks, others have withheld support, for now, especially on some of his more controversial nominees.

The dynamic is injecting uncertainty into the process as Republicans prepare to take the Senate majority in January with a four-seat margin and as Trump aggressively challenges them to confirm his Cabinet immediately.

It's not unusual for senators to wait until after confirmation hearings to publicly announce a decision. But Republicans are under more pressure than usual as Trump and his allies make clear that they will confront senators who don't fall in line.

"You only have control of the Senate because of Donald Trump," the president-elect's son, Donald Trump Jr., warned during a media appearance this month. "Without that, you'd be relegated to insignificance.

There has been one casualty of the process so far - former Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida, who



withdrew from contention as attorney general after senators relayed private concerns. But Trump has enthusiastically stood by the rest, including Kennedy for secretary of Health and Human Services, Hegseth for secretary of Defense and Gabbard for director of nation-

al intelligence. With hearings starting by mid-January, before Trump is even inaugurated, senators will soon have to decide how closely they will scrutinize the nominees and whether they are willing to vote against any of them. Republicans will have a 53-47 majority, so Trump cannot lose more than three votes on any nomination if Democrats are united in opposition.

The outcome of the confirmation process, and the level of dissent in the Senate, will likely set

high-profile cases in Russia in

Some analysts have said that

Moscow may be using jailed

Kremlin's military operation in

Ukraine. Those detained includ-

ed Wall Street Journal reporter

Evan Gershkovich, Michigan

corporate security executive

Paul Whelan and Radio Free

Europe/Radio Liberty journal-

All three Americans, who were

freed as part of the largest pris-

oner exchange since the end of

the Cold War in August 2024,

vehemently denied the charges

brought against them, which

range from espionage to spread-

ing false information against the

Letter No.: 5833(I)/ Nivida-01/2024-25

PD PWD Almora

PD PWD Almora

PD PWD Almora

District Almora.

Name of Work

Improvement and Damarikaran work in

Goluchina Galli Bashura Govindpur

Motor Road under State Sector in

Someshwar Constituency of District

Improvement and Damarikaran work in

Dholaghat Rikhe Silani Motor Road

under State Sector in Someshwar

Constituency of District Almora.

Improvement and Damarikaran work in

Pokhari Bagniya and Pokhari Binwal via

Chaykhan to Baliya Link Motor Road in

Km 1 to 9 under CM Ghoshna No.

284/2024 in Jageshwar Constituency of

(In anticipation of sanction)

(In anticipation of sanction)

(In anticipation of sanction)

ist Alsu Kurmasheva.

Russian army.

No.

recent years.

as tensions remain

the tone for Trump's presidency and his relationship with Congress, which was frequently tumultuous during his first term. He often clashed with the Senate, in particular, but has signalled he expects Republican senators to be more compliant

this time around. 'It's not about putting yeses on the board, it's about keeping nos off the board," said Oklahoma Sen. Markwayne Mullin, one of Trump's top allies in the Senate, who speaks with him frequent-

While most Senate Republicans have scrambled to display as much loyalty to Trump as possible, a handful have made clear that they are willing to defend the body's "advise and consent" role. Among the senators to watch are moderate Republicans Lisa Murkowski

For the more controversial nominees, though, party unity will be key.

One of Trump's most embattled picks is Hegseth, a Fox News host and veteran who some see as inexperienced and has publicly questioned whether women should serve in combat. He has also faced allegations of sexual assault and excessive drinking that he has denied. But it's all given some senators pause, despite Trump's enthusi-

astic support. Hegseth has faced particular pressure from Iowa Sen. Joni Ernst, herself a combat veteran who has worked to address sexual assault in the military. She has met with Hegseth several times, and has not yet said she will support him. She will have a chance to question him, publicly and face-to-face, in a Senate Armed Services Committee confirmation hearing that is scheduled for January

Though a hearing for Gabbard has not yet been set, senators will also be able to question her publicly and in a classified setting about her trip to Syria after the US had severed diplomatic relations.

Gabbard has defended the trip. saying it's important to open dialogue, but critics hear echoes of Russia-fuelled talking points in her commentary. Assad fled to Moscow earlier this month after opposition forces overtook Syria in a surprise attack, ending his family's five decades of

Russia targets Ukrainian energy infrastructure on Christmas Day

 $R^{\text{ussia launched a massive}}_{\text{missile and drone barrage}}$ targeting Ukraine's energy infrastructure on Wednesday, striking a thermal power plant and prompting Ukrainians to take shelter in metro stations on Christmas morning.

The strikes on Ukrainian fuel and energy sources included 78 air, ground, and sea-launched missiles as well as 106 Shaheds and other types of drones, Ukraine's air force said.

It claimed to have intercepted 59 missiles and 54 drones, with 52 more drones being jammed. In Russia, meanwhile, one woman died and three people were wounded after falling debris from a downed drone sparked a fire in a shopping mall in the city of Vladikavkaz. The head of Russia's republic of North Ossetia-Alania, Gov. Sergey Menyaylo, said security footage showed that the explosion took place outside the Alania Mall Wednesday morning. At least one person was killed in Russia's attack on Ukraine's Dnipro region, Vice Prime Minister Oleksii Kuleba said on Telegram, adding that heating was disrupted for 155 residential buildings. He also said 500,000 people in the Kharkiv region were without heat. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha said one Russian missile passed Moldovan and Romanian air-

space.
"Putin deliberately chose Christmas for an attack. What could be more inhumane? Zelenskyy said on X. "They continue to fight for a blackout in Ukraine."



Ukrainian Energy Minister Herman Halushchenko said Russia again "massively attacks energy infrastructure. Ukraine's air force said that multiple missiles had been fired at the Kharkiv, Dnipro and Poltava regions in the east of the country. He said the power distributor took the necessary measures to limit consumption. "As soon as the security situation allows, energy workers will establish the damage caused," he said. State energy operator Ukrenergo applied preemptive power outages across the country due to a "massive missile attack," leading to electricity going out in several districts of the capital, Kyiv. Ukraine's biggest private energy company, DTEK, said Russia struck one of their thermal power plants Wednesday morning, making it the 13th attack on Ukraine's power grid this year.

"Denying light and warmth to millions of peace-loving people as they celebrate Christmas is a depraved and evil act that must answered,"

wrote on his X account. At least seven strikes targeted Kharkiv, sparking fires across the city, regional head Oleh Syniehubov wrote on Telegram

At least three people were injured, local authorities said. "Kharkiv is under massive missile fire. A series of explosions rang out in the city and there are still ballistic missiles flying in the direction of the city. Stay in safe places," Kharkiv Mayor Ihor Terekhov said.

Russia's Ministry of Defence said in its morning report Wednesday that it had shot down 59 Ukrainian drones overnight, including over the Belgorod, Voronezh, Kursk, Bryansk and Tambov regions, as well as over the Azov Sea. It did not mention the incident in North Ossetia-Alania. Four people were also killed as a result of Ukrainian shelling in the town of Lgov in the Kursk region, regional head Alexander Khinshtein said. Three people died after several residential blocks and a beauty salon were hit, he said.

Dutch citizen sentenced to three years prison in Russia for punching police officer



Russian court sentenced a ADutch citizen to three years in prison on Wednesday after he Westerners as bargaining chips found guilty of punching a police officer.

Harry Johannes van Wurden was arrested and placed under house arrest following an altercation with a police officer in central Moscow in October, Russian news agency RIA Novosti reported, citing police. It said that van Wurden punched the officer in the face following a disagreement about a knocked-down road sign.

Van Wurden was found guilty of using violence against a government official by the capital's Khamovnichesky District Court, Russia's Interfax news agency said. The charge carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison.

A number of foreign nationals from the US and Western Europe have been jailed in

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform all concerned that Sh. Yuvara Singh Chauhan son of Sh. Tejpal Singh, R/ Gali No.3, Village-Chhalera, Sector-44, Noida respect of Residential Plot No.A-146, Secto 151, Noida, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar-U.F area measuring 162.0 Sq.Mtrs., in my favou which is registered in the office of Sub Registrar, NOIDA.

Whereas Sh. Yuvarai Singh Chauhan died o 13.12.2024 and after his death I, Satish Chauhan son of Sh. Amichand Chauhan, R/H.No.5, Gali No.3, Near Primary Schoo Village-Chhalera, Noida, want to get mutatio of the said property on the basis of WILL in m favour. If anyone has any objection, he/she wi submit his/her objection in th Residential(Plot), Deptt. of Noida Authorit within 30 days of the publication of this notic SATISH CHAUHAN

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform to all concern that Sh. Ishwa Dayal Sharma S/o Harbhajan Lal Sharma R/o 3413, Malyam Street, Delhi Gate New Delhi-110002, who is the original allottee of Plot No 34, Block-D, Sector-40, Noida(U.P), had sold the said property on General power of attorney basis to the following person(s). GPA was executed on in favour of Mrs. Madhu Kapoo W/o Sh. Madho Kapoor R/o B-31, Near DAV School, Sector-56 Noida (U.P) which is registered on Dated 26.02.1997 in Sub Registrar office Delhi. The agreement to sell was not registered or not executed. So it is informed to all concern that the said property is going to be transferred in favour of Mrs. Charu Bansal W/o Sh. Rajiv Bansal R/o 16/331-B. Khajoor Road Karol Bagh Centrel Delhi. If any one has/have any objection he/ she may file his/her objection along with the sufficient proof in the Residential Plot Department of the Noida Authority within 30 days from the date of publication of Mrs. Madhu Kapoor

Hasina's son claims Yunus govt weaponising judiciary for 'political witch hunt'

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Sanjeeb Wazed, son of deposed Bangladesh prime minister Sheikh Hasina, has accused the Muhammad Yunus led interim government of "weaponising the judiciary" for carrying out a "political witch hunt" against the Awami League leadership.

Wazed's allegations, as a long post on X, came two days after the interim government on Monday said it has sent a diplomatic note to New Delhi seeking Hasina's extradition from

Supply, Erection and installation of 20 mtr. high mast

with complete accessories for power house at SSTPP,

AOH work of Boiler Non-Pressure Part of Unit

No. 2 at 2x600MW, SSTPP, MPPGCL, Dongalia.

Procurement for set of carb clad coated seat and disc (gate)

of 200 NB Branch Segregating valve (BSV) installed at

AHP of 2x660 MW, Stage-II, SSTPP, MPPGCL, Dongalia.

MPPGCL, Dongalia. (T-2024_MPPGC_386126)

(T-2024_MPPGC_382194_1)

(T-2024 MPPGC 381794 1)

M.P. Madhyam/117981/2024

gov.in

India. Hasina, 77, has been living in India since August 5 when she fled Bangladesh following a massive student-led protest that toppled her Awami League's (AL) 16-year regime. Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) has issued arrest warrants for Hasina and several former Cabinet ministers, advisers, and military and civil officials for "crimes against humanity and genocide

of Alaska, Susan Collins of

Maine and incoming freshman

"Anybody who wants to give me

heat for doing my job, bring it on," Curtis said Sunday on

ABC's "This Week" when asked

about vetting Trump's nomi-

nees. "This is my job. It's my

Still, even moderate senators

have shied away from directly

criticising Trump's picks. And

not a single Republican has gone

on the record against a nominee.

Several of Trump's picks are

expected to sail to confirmation,

perhaps even with some

Democratic votes. Sen. John

Fetterman, D-Pa., has indicat-

ed he will support Florida Sen.

Marco Rubio for secretary of

State and Rep. Elise Stefanik for

United Nations ambassador, as

have a few other Democrats.

constitutional responsibility."

Sen. John Curtis of Utah.

The judges and prosecutors appointed by the unelected Yunus led regime to conduct

Office of The Addl. C.E. (P & W), Shree Singaji Thermal Power Project, Dongalia Distt. Khandwa (M.P.) E-mail ID: sepnw.sstpp1@gmail.com
No. 515-1700/SSTPP/MPPGCL/P&W/7093

Dated: 24.12.2024

NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER (Website: mppgcl.mp.gov.in)

For extension & other details, the bidders are requested to please visit e-portal of GoMP at www.mptenders.

//SAVE ELECTRICITY//

Validity

of

Tender

Days

120

Days

120

Days

Time of

Completion

15 Month

(including

Rainy Season

and Winter

Season)

15 Month

(including

Rainy Season

and Winter

Season)

15 Month

(including

Rainy Seasor

and Winter

Season)

Office of the Superintending Engineer

1st Circle, Public Works Department, Almora

Phone/Fax: 05962-230295 Email: sepwdalm@rediffmail.com

Earnest

Money

(Rupee in

lakh)

₹ 10.32

Lakh

₹ 3.25

Lakh

₹ 12.25

Lakh

NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING (E-Tendering)

E-TENDER NOTICE

In anticipation of sanction on behalf of Honourable Governor of Uttarakhand for following works. All other

information will be available from dated 27/12/2024 & onwards on website http://www.uktenders.gov.in

Cost of

Tender

Form

5000.00

+ 18%

GST

5000.00

+ 18%

GST

5000.00

+ 18%

The Superintending Engineer, 1st Circle, PWD Almora invites tender through E-Tendering (Two Bid System)

M.P. POWER GENERATING COMPANY LIMITED

farcical trial process through International Crimes Tribunal makes it a political witch hunt that forsakes justice and marks another ongoing onslaught to persecute Awami League leadership," Wazed said in his post on Tuesday. An IT entrepreneur, Wazed is based in the US and has been an ICT adviser in Hasina's government. "The kangaroo tribunal and subsequent request for extradition comes while hundreds of leaders and activists are extrajudicially killed, framing of outrageous murder charges, illegal incarcer-

& EMD in

Rs.

2000/- &

1,32,700/-

5000/- &

3,71,350/-

2000/- &

1,07,100/

(Rs.) including

GST

66.33

371.35

Time for closing

of Online

submission

20.01.2025

up to 15:30

13.01.2025

up to 15:30

17.01.2025

up to 15:30

Dated: 23/12/2024

Contractor's

Category of

Registration

for tendering

Class "A" & Higher

in Road work in

Central Govt./

Any state Govt./

Any Govt.

Undertaking.

Class "B" & Higher

in Road work in

Central Govt./

Any state Govt./

Anv Govt.

Undertaking.

Class "A" & Higher

in Road work in

Central Govt./

Any state Govt./

Any Govt.

Undertaking.

ation of thousands by law enforcement and violent attacks including looting vandalism and arson going on with impunity everyday fuelled by denial of the regime," he added. On Monday, India confirmed receiving the 'note verbale' or diplomatic communication from the Bangladesh high commission in New Delhi but | Property No. 425, Kohat refrained from commenting on it. Under the provisions of the India-Bangladesh extradition treaty, extradition may be refused if the offence is one of a "political character."

DOON UNIVERSITY

Doon University, Dehradun invite Electrospinning Unit at Door University.Dehradun. Uttarakhand The tender documents are available on Uttarakhand government eprocurement www.uktenders.gov.ir Interested firms may apply through

e-tender Store & Purchase Officer

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform all concerned that SH

BHOOP SINGH son of Sh. Nanuva R/o Village-Illahabas, Dadri, Sector-86, Phase-Il NOIDA, had executed a WILL on Dt 13.02.2024 in respect of Residential Plo No.SU-12, Sector-86, Noida, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar-U.P. area measuring 127.0 Sq.Mtrs., duly allotted by the Noida Authority against 5% Villager Quota against Khel No.193 & 310, Village-Suthiana, Noida, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar-U.P., in our favour which s regd. Whereas Sh. Bhoop Singh died on 26.05.2024 and after his death We, Manvi o SH, Ramu, R/o 158, Vill, Behlolour, Secto 5, Noida & Kirti Bhati S/o Sh. Dinesh Bha R/o 7118, Vill. Shahdara, Sector-141, NOIDA want to get mutation of the said property on the basis of WILL in our favour. If anyone has an objection, he/she will submit his/her objection in the Residential(Plot), Deptt. of Noida Authority within 30 days of the publication of this notice. MANVIR & KIRTI BHATI

Kiran Aggarwal D/o

Satpal Aggarwal R/o 425, Kohat Enclave, Pitampura, Delhi 110034 have lost cancelled lease dead of the Enclave, Pitampura, Delhi 110034. Finder Please Contact: 9871063925

LOST & FOUND

PD(1142)A

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Anju Bala C/o Anil Sharma R/o P-33 Krishan Vihar, Sultanpuri C-Block North West Delhi-110086 have changed my name to Anju to

Anju Bala for all purposes. PD(1143)C

I, Abhinav Aggarwal S/o Anil Kumar Aggarwal R/o B-150, Sector-51, Noida GB Ngr, UP, hereby inform that as per adhaar my father's name is Anil Agarwal and as per Passport & Pan Card my father's name is Anil Kumar Aggarwal. Both Anil Kumar Aggarwal and Anil Agarwal are one Person only for all future purposes.

PD(1144)A RAJINA, W/O. JAMIL

AKHTAR, R/O, C- 584, JAHANGIRPURI DELHI-110033, HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO RAJEENA KHATOON. RAJINA AND RAJEENA KHATOON IS THE SAME PERSON

PD(1145)C

I, RAVI KUMAR TANWAR

S/o RATTAN SINGH R/o WZ-1420, Nangal Raya New Delhi, South West Delhi, Delhi-110046 have changed the name of my minor son RUDRAKSH TANWAR aged 12 years and he shall hereafter be known as VEDANSH TANWAR.

PD(1146)C I, hitherto known as RAJAN KUMAR alias RAJA BABU S/o SURENDRA SINGH, R/o WZ-856, Nangal Raya, South West Delhi, Delhi-110046, have changed my name and shall hereafter be

known as RAJA BABU.

PD(1147)C I, Magi Devi, Mother of No.15808086M Jagdish Prasad Saran, R/o-Vill- Charnisara, Post-Gudha Bhagwandas, Dist-Nagaur, Rajasthan, have changed my name from Magi Devi to Mangi Devi, affidavit dated vide 25/12/2024 before Notary

PD(1148)C

I, Sunita, W/o- JC-472281L Sub Sunil Kumar Nunia, R/o- Vill+Po- Nunia Gothra, Teh-Chirawa, Ihunihunu, Rajasthan-333026, have changed my name from Sunita to Sunita Devi, vide affidavit dated 25/12/2024 before Notary Public Delhi. PD(1149)C

M.P. ROAD DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION LTD.

Public Delhi.

(M.P. State Highway Authority) (Govt. of M.P. Undertaking) 45-A, Arera Hills, Bhopal-462011 (CIN: U45203MP2004SGC016758) Ph. No.: 0755-2597290, 2765205, Fax: 0755-2572643, Website: mprdc.gov.in Date: 24.12.2024

Madhya Pradesh Road Development Corporation Limited (MPRDC) Bhopal invites online tender for Upgradation of following roads in the state of Madhya Pradesh under proposed NDB

Pkg. No.		Length (in Km)	Project Cost	Bid Security (EMD) (in INR Cr.)	Document	Period of Completion (In Months)
10	Upgradation of Gadasarai- Pandariya Road (CG Border)	47.32	227.37	2.27	50,000/-	24
11	Upgradation of Bachhon-Chandla- Sarwai-Gorihar-Chandrapura Road (MP - UP Border)		299.56	3.00	50,000/-	24
12	Upgradation of Ujjain - Maksi Road	38.95	273.45	2.73	50,000/-	24
13	Upgradation of Morar-Chitora Road.	29.40	127.35	1.27	50.000/-	24

be purchased online only up to 15:30 hrs. on 04.02.2025 from website www.mptenders. gov.in. The bidders have to submit the Technical bid as well as Financial Bid online only. The Addendum/Corrigendum (if any) shall only be published on the website of www. mptenders.gov.in only. If holiday is declared by Govt. of M.P. on the date of opening, the same will automatically be shifted to subsequent working days. MPRDC reserves the right to accept/ reject any/all tenders without assigning any reason thereof.

M.P. Madhyam/117983/2024 MANAGING DIRECTOR

NIT No. 12513/664/Procu./MPRDC/NDB/CW/2024

NOTICE INVITING TENDERS

9.	manio or modu	_0g	Lottimatou	Dia Cocarry	0001 01 014	
No.		(in Km)	Project Cost	(EMD)	Document	Completion
			(In Rs. Cr.)	(in INR Cr.)	(in Rs.)	(In Months
	Upgradation of Gadasarai- Pandariya Road (CG Border)	47.32	227.37	2.27	50,000/-	24
	Upgradation of Bachhon-Chandla- Sarwai-Gorihar-Chandrapura Road (MP - UP Border)		299.56	3.00	50,000/-	24
12	Upgradation of Ujjain - Maksi Road	38.95	273.45	2.73	50,000/-	24
13	Upgradation of Morar-Chitora Road.	29.40	127.35	1.27	50,000/-	24
The	dates for purchase, submission, etc	c. are m	entioned in	the key date	es. Tender	forms car

Infrastructure projects, marketing campaigns drive tourism growth in 2024

The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, several undertook initiatives in 2024 to boost tourism in the country. These included infrastructure development projects under Darshan Swadesh and PRASHAD schemes, promotion and marketing campaigns like "Bharat Parv" and "Dekho Apna Desh," and

travel fairs to showcase India's diverse tourism offerings to the global market. ■Ministry of Tourism has sanctioned a total of 76 projects for an amount of Rs.5287.90 Crore under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme,

out of which 75 projects are

participation in international

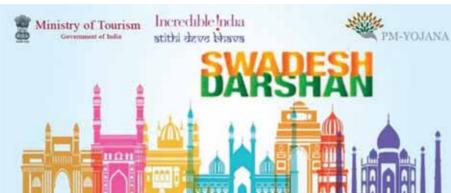
physically complete. ■Ministry of Tourism has Swadesh its Darshan Scheme as Swadesh Darshan 2.0 (SD2.0) with the develop sustainable and responsible destinations following a tourist & destination centric approach. 34 projects have Crore under SD2.0.

■Ministry of Tourism has sanctioned a total of 48 projects for an amount of Rs.1646.99 Crore under the PRASHAD Scheme, out of which 23 projects have been completed

A total of 65 projects for an amount of Rs 937.56 Crore have been sanctioned under the Assistance to Central Agencies Scheme, out of which 38 projects have been physically completed.

Ministry of Tourism has formulated guidelines for 'Challenge Based Destination Development' as sub scheme of Swadesh Darshan 2.0 Scheme to enhance tourist experience across all points of the tourist value chain. Under this scheme, proposals have been invited under four thematic categories Spiritual Tourism, (ii) Culture & Heritage, (iii) Vibrant Program, Ecotourism Amrit Dharohar Sites. The Ministry of Tourism has selected 42 destinations under various





development under the

■As a follow up to the Budget Announcements 2024-25, a total of 40 projects across 23 States have been sanctioned for an amount of Rs. 3295.76 Crore under the Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment (SASCI) -Development of Iconic Tourist Centres to Global Scale to infuse long term interest free loans for a period of 50 years to States for comprehensive development of iconic tourist centers in the country and branding & marketing them at global

of Tourism ■ Ministry organized "Bharat Parv" event at the Red Fort grounds, Delhi, as part of the Republic Day Celebrations from 23rd to 31st January, 2024. Thematic Pavilions of States/ UTs were setup to showcase diverse tourist attractions of country. Cultural performances by various regional cultural associations

Local, through the participation of local artisans from across the country by displaying and selling their products.

Launched 'Dekho Apna Desh People's Choice 2024' - a Nationwide poll to identify the most preferred tourist attractions under 5 categories. It is also an effort to identify attractions and destinations for development in mission mode, contributing to India's journey towards Bharat@2047.

■Ministry of Tourism in

collaboration with the Ministry of Education is organizing a nation-wide Dekho Apna Desh Schools Kendriya Contest for Vidyalaya Navodaya Vidyalaya (NV) Schools. The students are expected to create physical brochure of their District's tourism attractions, destinations, experiences, and other offerings. The initiative aims to make the students aware about the tourism were also organized. The wonders and attractions

■Chalo Diaspora Campaign was launched to enable Indian diaspora members become Incredible India ambassadors. The campaign has been implemented in the spirit of Jan Bhagidari for an Atulya and Viksit Bharat to encourage the diaspora to invite their 5 non-Indian friends to travel to India every year. One lakh free e-visas for foreign tourists visiting India under 'Chalo India' campaign have been announced for the remaining part of the current Financial Year.

■On the occasion of the 46th Session of the World Heritage Committee held at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi in July 2024, an 'Incredible India' exhibition was set up at Bharat Mandapam to highlight India's rich cultural heritage, age-old civilization, geographical diversity, hidden gems in tourism along with modern developments, for

Government committed to improve quality spending in FY26: Finmin report amid legal tussle with SEBI

The government will continue its focus on improving quality spending, strengthening the social security net and bring down the fiscal deficit to 4.5 per cent of the GDP in FY26, a finance ministry document

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is schedule to present the Budget for 2025-26 in Parliament on February

The Union government is

committed to pursuing the path of consolidation as announced in the Budget for FY 2021-22 and to attain a level of fiscal deficit lower than 4.5 per cent of GDP by FY 2025-26, according to finance ministry statements on the half yearly review of the trends in receipts and expenditure and



obligations of the government Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2003. The statements were tabled in the Lok Sabha last week.

"The thrust will be on improving the quality of public spending, while at the same time, strengthening the social security net for the and needy. This

approach would help further strengthen the nation's macro-economic fundamentals and ensure overall financial stability," it

According to the statements, the Budget 2024-25 was presented in the backdrop of global uncertainties caused by the wars in Europe and the

economic fundamentals have cushioned the country from the vagaries afflicting the

global economy.
"It has also helped the nation pursue growth with fiscal consolidation. As a result, India retains its pride of place as one of the fastest growing economies in the world. However, risks to growth still remain," it said.

expenditure Total estimated at about Rs 48.21 lakh crore, of which, expenditure on revenue account and capital account were estimated at about Rs 37.09 lakh crore and Rs 11.11 lakh crore, respectively, as per the Budget Estimate (BE) of

As against total expenditure of Rs 48.21 lakh crore, the expenditure in first half of FY25 was Rs 21.11 lakh crore or about 43.8 per cent of BE. Taking into account the grant

for creation of capital assets. effective capital expenditure (Capex) was projected at Rs 15.02 lakh

Gross Tax Revenue (GTR) was estimated at about Rs 38.40 lakh crore with an implied tax-GDP ratio of 11.8

per cent.
Total non-debt receipt of the Centre was estimated at about Rs 32.07 lakh crore. It comprised tax revenue (net to Centre) of about Rs 25.83 lakh crore, non-tax revenue of about Rs 5.46 lakh crore, and miscellaneous capital receipts of Rs 0.78 lakh crore.

With above estimates of receipts and expenditure, the fiscal deficit was pegged at about Rs 16.13 lakh crore in BE 2024-25 or 4.9 per cent of

In H1 of FY25, the fiscal deficit is estimated at Rs 4.75 lakh crore, or about 29.4 per

BPCL picks Andhra Pradesh for India's last greenfield refinery project

PTI NEW DELHI

Ttate-owned Setroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) has picked Andhra Pradesh for setting up a new refinery-cumpetrochemical complex,

which may be the last greenfield project in India which has detailed a very ambitious energy transition plan to net zero emissions. In a stock exchange filing, BPCL said its board at a Tuesday

meeting "accorded its approval to commence pre project activities for setting up of a greenfield refinery cum petrochemical complex in east coast at Andhra Pradesh at an estimated cost of Rs 6,100

The pre-project activities include initial studies, land identification, acquisition, preparation of environment assessment, basic design engineering package, and front-end engineering design,

While the firm did not reveal the capacity or the timelines for completing the project, the refinery could be at least 9 million tonnes (180,000 barrels per day) capacity. BPCL is India's third largest

oil refiner behind state-owned Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) and Reliance Industries Ltd. It currently owns refineries at Mumbai (12 million tonnes a year capacity), Kochi in Kerala (15.5 million tonnes) and Bina

in Madhya Pradesh (7.8 million tonnes). It had lost a fourth oil refinery to Oil India in the privatisation plan.

BPCL had to give up its Numaligarh refinery in Assam to Oil India Ltd when the government was attempting to privatise the company. The transfer was to keep the Numaligarh unit within the public sector to honour the Assam Accord. But BPCL privatisation was aborted due to lack of interest by bidders. The planned unit in Andhra Pradesh is being touted as India's last greenfield refinery project. BPCL is part of a consortium that is pursuing a 60 million tonnes a year refinery-cum-petrochemical complex on west coast in Maharashtra that was conceived six years back but is yet to get off the drawing board due to land acquisition



Government extends dutyfree import of yellow peas

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has extended the import of yellow peas without duty and MIP (minimum import price) till February next year. However, the imports are subjected to registration online Import Monitoring System, with immediate effect, for all

import consignments where

Bill of Lading (Shipped on

Board) is issued on or before

government has

February 28, 2025. "Import of yellow peas....Is without the MIP condition and without port restriction, subject registration under online import monitoring system, with immediate effect, for all import consignments where the bill of lading (shipped on board) is issued on or before February 28, 2025," the directorate general of foreign trade (DGFT) has said in a

Cement industry looks for better growth in 2025

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

¬he Indian cement industry, witnessing a consolidation and heightened rivalry between two corporate houses snapping smaller players, pins its hope on 2025 for an in sales improvement realisation, higher margins and acceleration in demand, expecting around 8 per cent sales growth helped by an increased government spendings on big-ticket infra projects.
Over 50 MTPA (million

tonnes per annum) capacity are being acquired for USD 4.5 billion by two leading players -Aditya Birla group firm UltraTech Cement and billionaire Gautam Adani-led Ambuja Cements, besides organic expansion of the existing units as they have kept their war chest ready prowling for opportunities.

The industry faced challenges on numerous fronts in 2024, right from moderate capacity utilisation to lower sales



realisation, which impacted the topline of several makers, contraction of margins and slower volume growth.

However, 2024 would also be known big-ticket acquisitions by UltraTech and Adani Cement to consolidate their positions and achieve their targeted growth ahead of

Adani Cements, a lateral entrant in the secto,r completed the acquisition of Saurashtra-based Sanghi Industries, Penna Industries and recently announced to

acquire CK Birla group firm Orient Cement as part of its inorganic growth strategy. Besides, it has also snapped up small players facilities as My Home and its subsidiary ACC has also acquired Asian Concretes and Cements.

These acquisitions expansions helped Adani Cement to cross a 100 MTPA capacity with a pan-India presence in 2024 within two years of entry in the sector, with 70 MTPA acquired capacity from Swiss firm

The Adani group has plans in MTPA by FY28, just a shade market UltraTech's current capacity of 156.66 MTPA grey cement. Aditya Birla group is also firing on all cylinders to maintain its lead, and has plans for 200 MTPA capacity by FY27. In 2024 it announced acquisition of South-based India Cements Ltd and is in

According to Deloitte India Partner Rakesh Surana, 2024 was a year of consolidation for the cement industry, marked by significant mergers and acquisitions.

the process of acquiring Kesoram Industries' Cement

Business.

This trend has highlighted a structural shift in the sector, with the largest companies accounting for a substantial share of the overall capacity. Currently, the top five cement collectively producers command an estimated 60-65 per cent of the industry's capacity," he said.



Ola Electric expands pan-India network

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ola Electric on Wednesday said it has expanded its network to 4,000 stores nationwide, a four-fold increase from its existing network. The company has opened over 3,200 new stores co-located with service facilities. The expansion spans beyond metros and Tier I and II cities into smaller towns

and tehsils, Ola Electric said

in a statement. "With our newly opened stores co-located with service centres, we have completely redefined EV purchase and ownership experience, setting new benchmarks with our #SavingsWalaScooter campaign," Ola Electric Chairman & Managing Director Bhavish Aggarwal

Swan ties up with AG&P for India FSRU

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Energy has lined up a floating receipt regasification unit for its proposed liquefied natural gas import project at Jafrabad in Gujarat, the firm said in a regulatory filing.

Swan signed a Heads of Agreement with Singapore's AG&P Terminals and Logistics to form joint venture companies to provide a

floating storage and regasification unit (FSRU) and a floating storage unit to operate the Jafrabad terminal as well as for supplying LNG. A joint venture company (LNG supply company) will be incorporated "for the purpose of supplying LNG in India or any other jurisdiction", Swan said in the



filing, adding it will hold 51 per cent equity stake and the balance 49 per cent equity stake shall be held by AG&P

venture joint company (vessel company) will be incorporated "for the purpose of providing floating storage and regasification unit (FSRU) and floating storage option with AG&P LNG to

unit (FSU) to operate Swan LNG Pvt Ltd's LNG Terminal. AG&P LNG will hold a 51 per cent equity stake and Swan will hold 49 per cent equity stake in the company, it said. AG&P LNG will also collaborate with Swan for regasification of LNG into have equity participation in Swan Energy's LNG Terminal," it said. With domestic natural gas

production meeting barely half of the country's needs, the fuel in its supercooled, liquid form is imported to meet feedstock demand for feedstock demand for generating electricity, making fertiliser and CNG sales. The country has seven LNG import facilities -- 3 in Gujarat (Dahej, Hazira and Mundra), and one each in Maharashtra (Dabhol), Kerala (Kochi), Tamil Nadu (Ennore) and Odisha (Dhamra)

Swan said all the transactions with AG&P are subject to due diligence by both the parties; and the terms and conditions for the proposed deals will be decided post due diligence. Swan in August announced plans to divest for USD 399

million its majority 51 per

cent stake in the 5 million tonnes per annum LNG FSRU, Vasant One, to Turkey's state-owned gas company Botas. The remaining 49 per cent stake is held by Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative (IFFCO) but it is not known if the fertiliser company plans to divest its

The FSRU, which was built by then-Hyundai

Industries, was delivered to Swan four years ago and was originally destined for its Jafrabad import terminal. But project timelines were delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic that was followed by a typhoon. The FSRU subsequently was

leased by Swan subsidiary Triumph Offshore to Botas under a one-year bareboat charter with a reported day rate of USD 250,000.

GoMechanic eyes over 3-fold business growth by 2027

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

ar services and repair platform GoMechanic expects over three-fold rise in net revenue to Rs 700 crore by 2027 and thereafter go for public listing, a top official of the company said.

GoMechanic Co-Founder and CEO Himanshu Arora told PTI that the company at present has around 3 per cent market share and aims to raise it to $\bar{10}$ per cent in the next three years. The company is also looking to diversify offerings, foraying into the two-wheeler and

electric vehicle services segment. 'We sit at about 3 per cent of the market share right now and to be servicing every 1 car out of ten would be around 10 per cent by 2027. By 2027, we expect our brand to generate approximately Rs 700 crore in revenue. We believe that an IPO is a natural next step for

GoMechanic's growth story," Arora said. The company at present provides services through 800 garages across 125 cities and plans to scale up to 2,500 garages across 500 cities by



GoMechanic was acquired by Servizzy, a subsidiary of the Lifelong Group, in March 2023 after anomalies in its financial records were found under previous management and the firm was put on sale by the investors. "It has been only about 20 months since we

acquired the brand... The trajectory clearly

indicates that an IPO is on our roadmap," Arora GoMechanic posted a revenue of Rs 210 crore in the financial year 2023-24 and a revenue of Rs 85 crore in the April-June 2024 quarter.

"Our spares and accessories are also growing fast. We should be clocking about Rs 432 crore this financial year in gross merchandise value and roughly around Rs 200 crore in the net revenue," Arora said.

Anupati, Raju emerge winners at Junior **National Equestrian Championship**

Young riders Anupati Navyashree Sai and Raju Singh emerged the best performers in the show jumping and dressage categories respectively on the concluding day of the first half of Junior National Equestrian Championships. In the young rider category Anupati, who was astride Abra ka Dabra, secured 32.60 marks without conceding any penalty in the two-phase

showjumping event on Tuesday. She finished ahead of Avik Bhatia, Geetika Tikkishetty, and Monu Kumar to be adjudged the best in her

In dressage freestyle, Raju, who rode Louk, did extremely well in his event, securing 65.18 marks. It was a very competitive event in which Javeer Verma, Geetika and Navyasjree ran him

"It was extremely satisfying to see in this junior championship the talent



game will grow fast in the very categories saw very close competition. The margin

India has. It gives EFI hope that separated the winners and confidence that the and other participants was also produce high-octane thin," country. Almost all the Federation of India secretary general Jaiveer Singh said. he said. "I am sure that the second In the children dressage

half of the championship will Equestrian competitions that will conclude on December 29,"

category, Subh Chowdhri, astride Furstentanz, trumped the challenge of Pranav Deepak, Punnet Jakhar and Deepak, Punnet Jaknar and Jaiwant Nawle while in the children show jumping event, Mogil Anbu pipped Divyaraj Singh Rathore, Sresh Raju Mantena and Eera Shree Harsha to emerge winner. winner.

Adding to the accolades in the children I category, Jaiveer Singh Nagra was awarded the best ritle for his exceptional performances throughout the competition, cementing his place as one of the brightest young talents in Indian equestrian sports. Sahil, astride Candy, logged

93.5 points to emerge winner in the overall individual tent pegging event, finishing ahead of Mohammad Alhamad Chishty (80), Shahrukh Khan (79) and Adeel Ahkter (76).

The action will next resume on December 27 with junior (age group 14-18) and children II (age group 10-12)

Mohun Bagan's set-piece proficiency gives them edge against Punjab FC

Armed with a strong all-round team most proficient at set-pieces, Mohun Bagan Super Giant will fancy their chances when they face Punjab FC in the Indian Super League here on Thursday.

The Mariners have won both their previous ISL matches against Punjab FC. However, Punjab FC have already beaten two sides, Mumbai City FC and Odisha FC, who managed the double over them last season, showing their ability to bounce back. Mohun Bagan enter this match after an eight-game unbeaten run that was ended with a defeat to FC Goa in their last fixture. Head coach Jose Molina has never lost consecutive games in ISL history, and the Mariners themselves have not suffered back-to-back away defeats in a single season.

Punjab FC, on the other hand, have lost their last two matches on the road, conceding six goals across these outings, as many as they conceded in their previous five games combined.

However, their home record

has been solid, with four wins in five games, including a 2-0 victory against Mohammedan SC in their last home outing. Right now, Mohun Bagan lead the points table with 26 points attacking threats. from 12 games, whereas Punjab FC are positioned seventh, having garnered 18 points from 11 matches.

Punjab FC have conceded only one goal in the opening 15 minutes of matches this season, the joint lowest in the league alongside Odisha FC. This defensive strength could give them an early foothold against

Mariners. Punjab FC's Nikhil Prabhu (33) and Tekcham Singh (28) rank first and second, respectively, in interceptions this season. Their defensive awareness will be key in countering Mohun Bagan's

Mohun Bagan have scored six goals from corners this season, the most by any team in the ISL. Contrastingly, Punjab are the only side yet to score from a corner this campaign.

Mohun Bagan's difference of +11 after 12 games is their best-ever in ĬSL history at this stage, underscoring their balanced performance across attack

PKL eliminators: UP Yoddhas to take on Jaipur | Former Chelsea player Oscar returns Pink Panthers, Patna Pirates face U Mumba

UP Yoddhas will play Jaipur Pink Panthers, while Patna Pirates will be up against U Mumbai in the eliminators of the Pro Kabaddi League here on Thursday.

In the fray for the top prize are Haryana Steelers and UP Yoddhas, both of whom have never won the title, and along with them are three-time champions Patna Pirates, season 8 winners Dabang Delhi KC, season 1 and 9 title holders Jaipur Pink Panthers, and season 2 champions U Mumba, who sealed qualification for the playoffs with the last game of the league stage.

The winners eliminators will take on Haryana Steelers and Dabang



Delhi KC in the semifinals scheduled for Friday. Haryana Table toppers

Steelers, who are through to the semi-finals, are gunning for their first PKL title while Dabang Delhi KC have been one of the best teams this before the season began, have season and have stitched seen their young raiders and

together streak, which unbeaten

table. UP Yoddhas, who had to go back to the drawing board

helped them secure the

second position on the points

the defence step up in style and U Mumba stormed into the PKL Season 11 playoffs with a superb win against the Bengal Warriorz in the final league stage game this season. Among the highlights for U Mumba this season has been that the young brigade have

led from the front.
Having finished sixth on the points table, Jaipur Pink Panthers are looking for their third title. And coach Sanjeev Baliyan believes that the mentality and preparations for the playoff week has to be different.

"The playoff is a different kettle of fish and there are no second chances like during the league stage. moreover, to win the PKL title again, the whole squad has to play well, and support Arjun Deshwal."

to Brazil's Sao Paulo from China

AP ■ SAO PAULO

 $F^{\text{ormer Chelsea midfielder}}_{\text{Oscar is returning to his}}$ Brazilian boyhood club Sao Paulo after 14 years, which included a long spell in Chinese soccer.

Sao Paulo president Julio Casares posted photos Tuesday on his social media channels which showed him with the 33-year-old former Brazil international. Casares described the move as "a super transfer."

Minutes later, Oscar thanked China's Shanghai Port, where he played for eight seasons, for his time at the Chinese Super League club.

'Today I finish a cycle that marked my life forever," he said. "I leave with my heart full of gratitude and pride for everything we achieved Internacional, in 2010.



Oscar joined Sao Paulo on a free transfer. Neither the Brazilian club nor the player disclosed the duration of their deal, but local media reports said he signed a

three-year contract. Oscar is returning to a club he sued to leave for another Chelsea and won one Europa League title and two Premier League trophies at the English club.

Oscar joined Shanghai in the middle of Chelsea's 2016-17 season for a transfer fee reported to be \$73 million. He won three Super League titles in China and became a fan favorite in Asia.

Valencia hires Carlos Corberan as its new head coach

AP VALENCIA

Relegation-threatened Walencia has hired West Bromwich Albion manager Carlos Corberan as its new head coach through June

Valencia fired Rubén Baraja on Monday after another setback in La Liga left the Spanish club stuck in the relegation zone and sparked renewed protests against Singaporean owner Peter

"Carlos Corberan has been appointed as coach of Valencia CF, signing a hrough Valencia's statement on website said early Wednesday. "A buy-out option in his contract with West Bromwich Albion was taken up to allow

him to leave." No official figure was given but the compensation for the former Valencia youth player was reported to be in the

region of \$3 million. The Spaniard led West Brom to its current seventh place in England's second-tier

Championship. West Brom earlier said in a statement that the 41-year-old Corberan "is set to return to his homeland with the club's gratitude and best wishes

following a two-year tenure at The Hawthorns.

first-team duties until further

NADA update on Hima Das suspension creates confusion

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

sian Games gold medallist Asprinter Hima Das, who was exonerated for 'whereabouts' failure by the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA), was handed a retrospective suspension by the same body in an unusual turn of events.

The 16-month suspension period ran from July 22, 2023 to November 21, 2024 and the athlete is now free to take part in tournaments but what has created a flutter is that the she had been competing in events as recently as in June this year. NADA has recently announced that she was suspended by its anti-doping panels for failing to provide her



Known as the 'Dhing Express',

she was handed the suspension under a case resolution agreement as per the NADA website. She is currently training Thiruvananthapuram.

The timeline around her suspension has created confusion as the athlete has been competing since April

including

participating in the Indian Grand Prix meet in Bengaluru and the National Inter-State meet in Panchkula in June even as her suspension was till November 21, 2024.

The most intriguing thing is that she ran four races in June. When PTI reached out to her after her training session on Wednesday, Hima declined to comment on the issue. An Athletics Federation of India (AFI) source also confirmed that her suspension got over in November. A 'case resolution agreement' is made between the anti-doping agency and the athlete when both parties consent, and the athlete agrees to accept the consequences imposed without pursuing further appeals.

Former Manchester City player Benjani Mwaruwari challenges ruling in bid to lead Zimbabwe soccer federation

AP HARARE

Former Manchester City Benjani Mwaruwari on Tuesday challenged a ruling to block him from potentially becoming the new head of Zimbabwe's soccer federation. Benjani, who also played for Portsmouth, Sunderland and Blackburn in the Premier League, last week filed his nomination to become the next president Zimbabwe Football Association (ZIFA). But an ethics committee of the association on Monday didn't include the 46-year-old among those eligible to contest the January elections, without immediately giving a



"Our client is aggrieved by your committee's decision and he intends to appeal ... Without any further delay," the player's lawyers wrote to ZIFA's interim boss Lincoln

Mutasa. "We are instructed by our client to humbly request that you urgently provide us with full written reasons why your committee concluded that Mr. Benjani Mwaruwari

Zimbabwe has been under a FIFA - appointed normalization committee

fails to meet eligibility criteria stipulated in the ZIFA

statutes.

since July 2023 when soccer's governing body lifted the southern African country's 17-month international ban caused by government interference. A new executive will be

elected in late January. Former Zimbabwe international Benjani still has a chance, however, through an appeals committee of the federation. Another prospective ZIFA president barred by the ethics

committee is a controversial but popular local cleric, Walter Magaya.

Chris Brunt, Damia Abella and Boaz Myhill "will oversee

Indian cricket in 2024: Painful trophy wait ends before rare loss at home triggers transition talk

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The monkey was finally off India's back in a rollercoaster 2024 when the financial giants of international cricket ended a 13-year wait for a world title, lost a rare Test series at home and dealt with transition triggered by both expected and unexpected retirements by the stalwarts of

There was plenty of action over the last 12 months that kept the loyal Indian fan interested.

World Cup triumph; T20 farewell to Rohit and Kohli The Indian cricket team and its unparalleled fan base were desperate for an ICC trophy after repeatedly faltering in the knock-out stages over the past decade, most recently in the ODI World Cup final at home

last year. The trophy finally came home after Rohit Sharma and Co. Played a near perfect tournament to become the T20 World Cup champions in the

USA and the Caribbean. India's clarity of thought throughout the one-month long event was remarkable and with a little bit of luck on their

the distance.

On undercooked pitches in New York, they were pace heavy before unleashing their trump card Kuldeep Yadav from the Super 8 stage of the tournament.

side, especially in the final at

Barbados, they were able to go

India picked as many as four spinners in the squad but played three in Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel and Kuldeep. With Jadeja not getting to do much with both bat and ball, Axar came of age in the competition producing matchwinning performances with

both and ball. The pace duo of Jasprit Bumrah and Arshdeep Singh also played their part to perfection, collecting 15 and

17 wickets respectively. In the batting department, Rohit led from the front with a

fearless approach demoralised opposition attacks. His approach was best summed up in the Super 8 game against Australia where he tore into the likes of Mitchell Starc and Pat Cummins to make all the difference in the game. His opening partner Kohli was

not able to make the contributions that were expected out of him but the superstar came up with an innings of immense substance when it mattered the most -his not-so-fluent 76 of 59 balls kept India in the final after a poor start.

The contributions from allrounder Hardik Pandya, future captain Survakumar Yadav and Rishabh Pant, playing his first international event following his comeback from a lifethreatening car accident, were

also noteworthy. A better script could not have been written for the likes of Rohit and Kohli, who got to say goodbye to the T20 format



with the coveted trophy in their hands. It was also a fitting farewell for head coach Rahul Dravid, whose tenure drew to a

Change of guard in coahing; Surva's unexpected elevation With Rohit calling it a day, it was expected that Hardik will lead the T20 side into the transition phase, having captained the side in the former's absence.

However, Dravid's successor Gautam Gambhir had a different line of thinking as he played a major hand in elevating India's best T20 batter Survakumar to the leadership retirement of premier offposition ahead of the series in spinner R Ashwin.

Chakaravarthy.

Sri Lanka. To be fair to Suryakumar, the team has ticked all the boxes since he took over, also witnessing the rise of Tilak Verma and rebirth of the likes of Sanju Samson and Varun

All three were simply sensational in India's recent T20 series in South Africa. Alongside Samson, Abhishek Sharma has also shown the talent and resolve at the top of

the order and could serve India for long. India hit rock bottom against

While India moved on from the mighty duo of Rohit and Kohli in the shortest format rather quickly, the same is unlikely in the Test team.

The chatter around the future of senior players in the Test team has gained momentum after India's first whitewash at home in a three-match series and more recently, the sudden

India's loss to New Zealand in their own backyard was easily one of the most embarrassing outcomes for the team in Test cricket over the past decade. Having slayed 'Bazball' earlier in the year against England, India blanked Bangladesh and

were expected to hand out a similar treatment to the visiting Black Caps. However, in a stunning turn of events, the spirited Kiwis out-

batted and out-bowled Rohit and Co. To script their biggest series wins overseas. The Indian batters' weakness

against the turning ball was exposed threadbare and the duo of Ashwin and Jadeja, who run through sides for fun at home, were bettered by Mitchell Santer and Ajaz Patel. It was only after landing in Australia, Ashwin made up his mind on retirement but his underwhelming outing against New Zealand may have contributed to his big decision. With Ashwin gone and Mohammed Shami not

well underway Down Under. The outcome of the remaining two Tests will determine where the Indian batting stands. Jay Shah becomes youngest ICC chairman

available, a Test transition is

India is the engine of the global game and its influence on the sport increased further with the elevation of Jay Shah as ICC chairman, making him the fifth from the country at the helm of the governing body after Jagmohan Dalmiya, Sharad Pawar, N Srinivasan and Shashank Manohar.

Shah took over in early December and has already made his presence felt by ending the deadlock over the hosting of the Champions Trophy in Pakistan by ensuring consensus for a reciprocal hybrid model in which India will not be required to travel across the border for any ICC event till 2028.

Likewise, Pakistan too will get a neutral venue in case of an event in India.

Visitors have exploited Australia's 'brittle' top order: Shastri

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

ormer coach Ravi Shastri has Boxing Day Test, saying the visitors have exploited Australia's "brittle" top order to have their "nose ahead" in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. Shastri added that Indian pace

spearhead Jasprit Bumrah is "almost single-handedly" responsible for the visitors keeping the series levelled at 1-1.

"I think India would take this, the way the series is poised. Any overseas team being 1-1, especially with the games being in Perth, Adelaide and Brisbane, they would take this.

"Going 1-1 into Boxing Day is the best case scenario. I would say India have their nose ahead," Shastri told news.Com.Au.

Australia's top order comprising Nathan Usman Khawaja, Marnus McSweenev and Labuschagne have been unable to

score against Bumrah.

It has have forced them to hand a debut to teenage sensation Sam Konstas while dropping rookie opener Nathan McSweeney.

'Ît's been pretty brittle. When you look at this Australian line-up, it's been a long time since I've seen an Australian line-up where the top order is that brittle. India have exploited that and continue to exploit it," Shastri said.

All-rounder Mitchell Marsh has also largely struggled for runs. In the last year, Labuschagne, Marsh, the last year, Labuschagne, Marsh, Khawaja and Steve Smith all had average less than 30 in Test cricket. "India is 1-1 in the series and that man (Bumrah) has almost single-handedly got India into that position," Shastri said. "As far as Konstas goes, I think he's very refreshing. He's got flair, he's got flamboyance. But Test cricket is Test cricket. His technique will tighten up and he will be the future for Australia."

future for Australia.

Shastri feels McSweeney was



unfortunate to have been axed after just three Tests. "McSweeney

unfortunate. He did the hard yards but he's a middle order batsman. I see him travelling to Sri Lanka when the Australian team go there and rebuild his career from there. "But I think it's a good move getting Konstas in because you need someone who can take the attack to the Indian team, because the punches were coming from nowhere"

India have won the last two series in Australia and now have the opportunity to become only the third touring side to win three consecutive series Down Under, joining the West Indies (1984/85, 1988/89, 1992/93) and South Africa (2008/09, 2012/13, 2012/13) 2016/17).

"Massive. No team has done that in a long time. Australia hammers sides when they come here. For India to pull off three on the trot will be something special.

"But they'll have to play good cricket. I see Australia coming hard in this Test match, especially with the bowlers. It's the batting that'll be the challenge for Australia more than anything

Shastri feels India has come to Australia with a strong intent to

"India have come here to win, they haven't come here to fill in the numbers. Even when I was the coach, our mantra was to play

'You have to think of a method to beat Australia and not just compete. You've got to plan properly, how to take your 20 wickets. India have done that and been very aggressive.

extremely hard, fair and to win.

"They've been in the face of Australia and give as good as they get. It's been entertaining and feisty stuff. The first day of the Boxing Day Test will determine which way the series will go," he added.



Cummins' message for Konstas: Have fun and don't overthink

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Australia skipper Pat Cummins understands skipper Pat what a teenager goes through on a high-profile Test debut and knows what he needs to tell a young Sam Konstas: and don't fun overthink".

Konstas, 19, is all set to make his debut against India in the Boxing Day Test, starting Thursday. Konstas has created a lot of buzz in Australian domestic cricket and his Test debut at the expense of Nathan McSweeney has become quite an event.

When the skipper was asked about his feelings during his Test debut at 18, Cummins naivety that can stop a kid from overthinking about how big a deal it is.

"I spent a bit of the time wondering why or how I was there, how it happened so quick. I just remember being really excited and I think it's similar to Sammy (Konstas) this week.

"There's a level of naivety that you just want to go out and play like you do when you're a kid in the backyard," Cummins said during the prematch press interaction.

"You just want to take the game on, have fun and not overthink. So that's the message to Sam. That's definitely how I felt as an 18year-old, I was just really excited," Cummins fondly recollected. shared Cummins

Konstas, how he, as a teenager, an advantage, Cummins handled his debut back in reminded Rahane's century as

"I was saying this to Sam the other day, I remember as an 18 year old I was thinking if I didn't have a great game it wasn't my fault, it was the selector's fault for picking me. "I was like, well they're the idiots that picked an 18 year ald Voy're so young starting

old. You're so young starting out your career it's just it's boxing day doesn't get any better than this so just enjoy the moment," he laughed. For Cummins, having 38-Üsman

year-old opener Khawaja, who is exactly double Konstas' age is a boon for the youngster as he will have calming influence at the with uncluttered mind always have an edge.

There's so much value in having experience and you've seen everything before. But there's almost just as many positives in having that freedom and naivety just to go out and see the ball and hit the ball."

Indians can throw some challenges at some point Even in a slump, Virat Kohli and Rishabh Pant are players whom this Australian team really respects. There are two Test matches and there could

corner.
"I really hope not but you know they're good players so no doubt they'll throw some challenges at us at some point." Asked if his opposite number Rohit Sharma's poor form is

be a pushback round the

stand-in skipper at Melbourne.

"Look, hard to say. It was a good Test match here a few years ago. I think Rahane got 100 from memory. So yeah, it always seems like a boxing day every year is a cracking test match. Last year was a great Test match against Pakistan as

The Indian team is in transition but Cummins wants to keep focus intact on his set of players.

"Every team always has something they're kind of grappling with or trying to improve on. As I said previously, I'm really happy

"I thought after Perth we bounced back brilliantly in Adelaide and last week in Queensland. So for us it's about focusing on what we do well and getting excited for a great week."

Head fit, Lyon is king at MCG, Boland is world class

Head coach Andrew McDonald has already spoken about Travis Head being fit and the left-hander's extended net session was an indicator. Head had sustained a quadriceps niggle while batting in the second innings in Brisbane.

"Trav is good to go. So he'll play. He just ticked off some final things today and yesterday. No stress, no kind of worries about injury with Trav. So he'll go into the game fully fit."

South Africa aims to seal its place in WTC final in test series against Pakistan

South Africa will be eyeing a place in the World Test Championship final with an all-seam attack against Pakistan in the first test, starting

The Proteas need to win one of its remaining two test matches in this WTC cycle to guarantee a place at the Lord's final next year and captain Temba Bavuma believes expectations have risen in his team to do well in the two-test series.

"There'll be pressure that comes with that," Bavuma said. "But to be honest with you, we're coming into the series to win the series 2-0. We understand that for us to do that, there's certain things that we need to do as a team: keep things simple, keep doing the

small things right, and allow the results to take care of itself."
South Africa has included four fast bowlers in the lineup with Corbin Bosch, who consistently bowls above 140 kph, set to play his first test at his hometown.

Seasoned fast bowlers Kagiso Rabada and Marco Jansen will team up with Dane Paterson and Bosch to challenge Pakistan's batters on an expected pacey Centurion pitch where fast bowlers have a clear advantage over the last six years, picking up 227



wickets with spinners dismissing only 16 batters.

Heading into the tests, South Africa's top-order batters did struggle against Pakistan in a rare 3-0 ODI whitewash with Tony de Zorzi, Ryan Rickelton and Tristan Stubbs all failing to read the offspin bowling of Salman Ali Agha in the opening game of the

Whether it's easy, whether it's hard, we've got to find a way to do it," Bavuma said. "Whatever, I don't know, trauma that was there... Guys will have to deal with it?

Pakistan has long been struggling in test matches in South Africa, losing 12 and winning just two of the 15 test matches since it first toured the country in 1995. Pakistan's below-par show in South Africa includes its lowest test score of 49 at the Wanderers in 2013.

Pakistan is lying at No. 7 in the WTC points table and Aaqib Javed is its fourth head coach in this WTC cycle with Mickey Arthur and Mohammad Hafeez quitting after one series. Jason Gillespie resigned just two weeks before Thursday's test.

Gillespie, who was hired by the Pakistan Cricket Board in April, had a horror start to his two-year contract when Bangladesh swept Pakistan in Pakistan 2-0 in the test series before England won the first test at Multan.
Gillespie was removed from the selection panel and Javed masterminded Pakistan's back-toback wins against England on two engineered spinning pitches where Noman Ali and Sajid Khan bagged 39 But Pakistan has brought in only Noman Ali for the two-test series in

South Africa and is still contemplating whether to follow South Africa and go with an all-out pace attack. Shaheen Shah Afridi, who played in

the preceding white-ball series in South Africa, has been surprisingly left out for the test matches. Naseem Shah and Babar Azam return

to the test fold after missing the last two home tests against England while selectors have recalled seamer Mohammad Abbas after three years with the left-arm seam option of Mir Hamza in the squad. Abbas took 90 wickets in 25 test matches from 2017 to 21 before he ran

out of selectors' favor despite his consistent performances for Hampshire in England and in domestic first-class cricket.

Bumrah equals Ashwin's record for rating points in ICC Ranking for Bowlers

PTI ■ DUBAI

Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah got a huge boost on the eve of the Boxing Day Test when he achieved the joint-highest rating ever by an Indian player, equalling the record held by spinner Ravichandran Ashwin in the ICC Ranking for Bowlers.

The quick gained 14 rating points following his 9/94 in the drawn third Test at Brisbane to not only equal Ashwin's highest-ever 904 rating points but also consolidate his position at the top of the rankings.

Bumrah has a chance to better Ashwin's rating points, which the now-retired offachieved spinner



December 2016, when the fourth match of the Border-Gavaskar Test begins at the MCG on Thursday.

South Africa's Kagiso Rabada (856) and Australia's Josh Hazlewood (852) are trailing

the Indian pacer at the second and third place respectively. Charismatic Australian batter Travis Head's stellar run in the ongoing series against India helped him climb to

fourth spot (825 rating

points) in the Test Ranking for Batters. He is still behind the England duo of Joe Root (895) and Harry Brook (876), and former New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson (867)

Head smashed a scintillating 152 at the Gabba to follow up his century in the second Test at Adelaide.

Compatriot Steve Smith's century at the Gabba got him into the top-10 once again. Among all-rounders, India's Ravindra Jadeja continues to lead the lead the chart with 424 rating points, while Australia skipper Cummins earned his place back in the top-10, following his four wickets and 42 runs in the third Test at Gabba

Cristiano Ronaldo takes family to Lapland for Christmas vacation

AP HELSINKI

Cristiano occer star SRonaldo said it was "just a little cold" as he posed barechested in the snow before taking an icy dip in a pool during a Christmas vacation in Finland's Lapland region. The 39-year-old Portuguese international traveled with partner Georgina Rodriguez and their children, who met

Ronaldo on Tuesday. The former Real Madrid and Manchester United great appeared to decline to ski with his family. He wished his followers - including 645 million on Instagram — a "Merry Spanish. Christmas"

Santa Claus in a 10-minute video posted online by

Head best batter in world, his performances against Bumrah exemplify fearless approach: Chappell

PTI MELBOURNE

Travis Head is the "best batter in the world" whose performances against Indian pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy exemplify his fearless approach and "Australian way of batting", feels legendary cricketer Greg

Chappell. Head has dominated the batting chart with 409 runs in the first three Tests with two hundreds and a fifty, and former Australia captain Chappell believes simplicity and aggression are behind his success as a Test

"Head's performances against Jasprit Bumrah in this series exemplify his fearless

approach. batsmen struggle to survive Bumrah's unorthodox action, sharp pace, and relentless accuracy, Head has treated him like any other bowler," Chappell wrote in Sydney Morning Herald.

"By playing with intent and looking to score off Bumrah, Head has not only nullified his threat but disrupted his rhythm. His ability to dispatch short deliveries with authority and drive fuller ones with precision has been remarkable, underscoring the strides he has made," he added.

Chappell said Head's flourish in the recent years across formats is due to an uncluttered mindset.

"From a raw, unpredictable

While most talent to one of the most dominant male batters in world cricket, Travis Head has soared into his prime with an almost ethereal elegance," Chappell wrote.

"His story is not just about overcoming challenges but about embracing a simplicity of style that has become his hallmark — one that allows mind to remain uncluttered and his game devastatingly effective," he added.

Chappell termed Head's 152 against England in the 2021-22 series as the "turning point".

"The turning point came during the 2021 Ashes. Head's counterattacking 152 in Brisbane was a revelation. Walking in at 5-195, he



transformed the game with a whirlwind innings, taking the opposition bowlers apart and shifting the momentum firmly in Australia's favour," he

"That innings wasn't just about runs, it was a statement of intent, a declaration that he would play his way." Chappell believes Head is one the world who can dictate mind. He has chosen a path terms against the best bowlers. "Since that series, Head has gone from strength to strength, evolving into one of the most feared batsmen in the world.

"His numbers since 2022 underline his dominance: 1800 runs at an average of 56.25, with six centuries at a strike rate of 75.6. These are not just impressive figures, they are a testament to his ability to thrive under pressure and dictate terms against the best bowlers in the world," Chappell added.

Chappell praised the 30-yearold left-handed batter for prioritising intent caution.

"The essence of Travis Head's of the most feared batters in batting lies in his uncluttered that prioritises intent over caution, a mindset that allows him to approach every ball with the aim of scoring runs," he wrote. doesn't 'This

recklessness – it's a calculated, efficient approach that keeps bowlers and captains under pressure. By getting into good positions to score, Head simultaneously positions himself to defend against the better deliveries. It's a virtuous cycle that rewards his positive intent," he added.

Chappell said Head's ability to strike balance between aggression and elegance are the qualities which also make him a captaincy candidate in

"What sets Head apart is his

ability to blend aggression with elegance. He has always been a powerful player of cross-bat shots, but his recent improvement in driving full deliveries down the ground has elevated his game," he "I believe Travis to be the most

improved batter in world cricket in the past three years and in becoming so, has firmed in favouritism to be the next Australian captain. "In his current form, Travis exemplifies the Australian way of batting, and I agree with Ricky Ponting and Ian Healy when they praise the way he is playing.

"Today, as the butterfly of his transformation soars, it's clear: Travis Head is the best batsman in the world."

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