



the pioneer

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INSIDE

WORLD 8
ELON MUSK SOFTENS STAND ON H-1B VISA PROGRAMME, CALLS FOR 'MAJOR REFORMS'

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AMRIT BHARAT USHERS IN 2025



Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

Manipur CM says sorry for the ethnic conflict; Opp asks to quit

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Tuesday apologised to the people of the state for the ethnic conflict occurring there since May 2023 and appealed to "forgive and forget" the past. He also said "Peace is being restored in Manipur, and the only solution lies in discussion and dialogue, which the Central government has already initiated," while addressing a news conference in Imphal. However he came under attack of the Opposition leaders who said the CM failed to safeguard lives and livelihood of people and should, therefore, resign. Nearly 250 people, so far, have died in the violence.

The CM's regret came couple of days after former Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla was appointed as Governor of Manipur. "This entire year has been very unfortunate. I want to say sorry to the people of the state for what's been happening today, since last May 3. Many people lost loved ones. Many people left their homes. I feel regret. I apologise. But now, I hope, after seeing the last three to four months progress towards peace, normalcy will be restored in the state in 2025," Singh said.

sporadic violence since May 3, 2023, between the majority Meiteis and the Kukis over quotas and economic benefits. The ongoing violence has killed over 200 people and displaced thousands.

The Centre has deployed forces in vulnerable zones bordering the hill and valley districts, leading to a dip in incidents of firing in peripheral areas.

The Chief Minister said 2,058 displaced families have been resettled in their original homes in Imphal West, Imphal East, Kangpokpi, and Churachandpur. To curb violence along the national highways, the government has deployed 17 and 18 additional companies of security personnel along NH-2 (Imphal-Dimapur) and NH-37 (Imphal-Silchar via Jiribam), respectively. "Whatever happened has happened... I want to appeal to all communities to forgive and forget our past mistakes and start life afresh by living together in a peaceful and prosperous Manipur," he said.

Singh said firing incidents have declined in the



Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh addresses a press conference PTI

state over the last 20 months since the ethnic conflict began in May 2023. "From May to October, 2023, 408 firing incidents were reported. From November 2023 to April 2024, there were 345 firing incidents, whereas from May this year till now, 112 firing incidents were reported," he said.

He said that of all the looted weapons, 3,112 have been recovered and 2,511 explosives have been seized during the period. The chief minister further said that 625 people have been arrested and 12,047 FIRs registered so far. More than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and adjoining hills-based Kuki-Zo groups since May last year.

Meanwhile, Manipur, which has been witnessing prolonged ethnic violence between majority Meitei and tribal Kuki communities, accounted for about 77 per cent of the total violence in the entire northeastern region in 2023, according to the latest annual report of the Ministry of Home Affairs. In 2023, Manipur witnessed an increase in violent incidents owing to the prevailing ethnic strife and the resultant increase in the casualties of civilians and security forces personnel as compared to 2022. The state accounted for about 77 per cent of the total violent incidents in Northeastern region in 2023, according to the MHA annual report. Among the total 243 violent incidents occurred in the Northeast, 187 took place in Manipur.

Pak opens Shaheed Bhagat Singh Gallery at Poonch to tourists

PTI ■ LAHORE

Pakistan's Punjab government has opened to tourists the Bhagat Singh Gallery at the historical Poonch House here, where the independent freedom fighter's trial was conducted some 93 years ago.

The gallery houses historical documents, including pictures, letters, newspapers, details of trial and other memorial articles related to his life and freedom struggle. Punjab Chief Secretary Zahid Akhtar Zaman inaugurated the gallery on Monday.

"Tourists will have access to the gallery under an agreement between the



departments of industry, commerce and tourism of the Punjab government," Zaman said, adding that the historical building of Poonch House has been restored to its original form.

"The gallery showcases Bhagat Singh's struggle for independence," he said. Pakistan's Punjab Archives Department in 2018 for the first time had displayed some records of the legendary freedom fighter's case file, including his execution certificate, letters, photographs and newspaper clippings and other material.

The gallery was inaugurated by British rulers on March 23, 1931 in Lahore, after being tried under charges for hatching a conspiracy against the colonial government. The case was filed against Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru for allegedly killing British police officer John P Saunders.

Congress to file cases against Delhi CM, says Sandeep Dikshit

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Former MP and senior Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit on Tuesday lashed out at Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) supremo Arvind Kejriwal, calling him a "pathological liar" and said he will file defamation cases against Delhi chief minister Atishi and AAP Rajiya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh over their allegation against him of taking money from the BJP.

"A few days ago, the Delhi CM said that we took money from the BJP. After this Press conference, I will file a criminal and civil defamation case against (CM) Atishi and Sanjay Singh. I will ask for Rs 10 crore and out of that money, I will donate Rs five crore to Yamuna cleaning and the remaining half will be donated to clean the polluted air in Delhi," he said.

They used to say that they have increased sewage treatment by 1.5 times in Delhi. "When the Congress lost the elections, the sewage treatment capacity was at 604 MGD and it remains the same today. The former chief minister lies that he has increased sewage treatment work," Dikshit alleged.

The Lieutenant Governor took a review in 2023 and it was found that the pollution effluent going into Yamuna has doubled in the last seven



Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit. Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

to eight years, he said. The Congress leader said they have also claimed that they have saved money in construction of flyovers. Dikshit is son of former Delhi chief minister Sheila Dikshit who served as CM from 1998 till 2013. In 2013, Dikshit lost to Arvind Kejriwal in the New Delhi constituency in the election that witnessed a Congress rout.

"The initial estimate of Madhuban to Mukarba Chowk flyover by Sheila Dikshit's government was Rs 422 crore, but we built it at Rs 297 crore. The former government estimated the construction of Mangolpuri to Madhuban Chowk at Rs 423 crore, we built it at Rs 323 crore," Dikshit said, adding that they have given five to seven examples.

LG confront Atishi's temples demolition 'act'

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In yet another round of confrontation between the AAP-led dispensation and the Raj Niwas, chief minister Atishi on Tuesday raised concerns over the order for the demolition of multiple religious structures including temples and Buddhist places of worship in the city, and urged Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena to reconsider the orders.

Meanwhile, the Lieutenant Governor's office refuted the allegations saying neither are any temples, mosques, churches or any other place of worship being broken/demolished, nor has any file to this effect come. In a statement, the Lieutenant Governor's office said the chief minister is playing cheap politics to divert attention from her's and her predecessor Chief Minister's failures. The latest exchange of letters comes amid growing political tensions between Atishi and the Lieutenant Governor. Earlier, in a separate letter, Atishi had criticised the LG's office for acting as a proxy for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Delhi.

In a letter addressed to Saxena, Atishi said that the Religious Committee had decided to demolish several temples and Buddhist structures across Delhi, including those held dear by the Dalit community and demolition of these structures would hurt the



religious sentiments of communities. Atishi wrote, "It has been decided by the Religious Committee - on your directions, and with your approval - to demolish multiple religious structures across Delhi. Atishi, in her letter, said, "It has been brought to my attention that the Religious Committee has ordered the demolition of numerous religious structures all across Delhi, in a meeting on 22nd November. Until last year, all decisions of the Religious Committee would be sent to you, via the CM and the Minister (Home), Delhi. As elected representatives who are constantly in touch with the people of Delhi, we would ensure that no religious sentiments were hurt." However, in an order issued last year your office stated that demolition of religious structures is a matter related to 'public order', and does not fall under the purview of the elected government and will be

directly under the purview of the Hon'ble LG. Since then the work of the Religious Committee has been directly monitored by you. All files of the Religious Committee are routed from the Home Department to the LG, completely bypassing the CM and Minister (Home), the letter said.

She further said, "It has been decided by the Religious Committee on your directions, and with your approval to demolish multiple religious structures across Delhi. As you can see the list of religious structures to be demolished includes many temples, and Buddhist places of worship that are revered by the Dalit community. These included temple situated near Nallah Market at West Patel Nagar, temple at Dilshad Garden, satue at Sunder Nagri, temple at Seema Puri, temple at Gokal Puri and temple in side of New Usmanpur MCD flats near.



Punjab farmer to comply with SC, as per condition

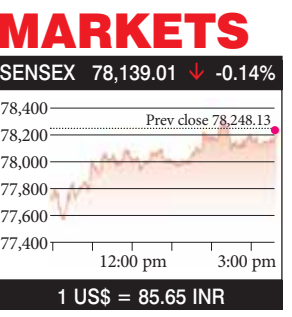
PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Punjab Government on Tuesday informed the Supreme Court that farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who has been on an indefinite fast for over a month, has agreed for medical aid given the Centre accepted his proposal to hold talks. A vacation bench of Justices Surya Kant and Sudhanshu Dhulia took note of a plea moved by Punjab government seeking an additional three days to comply with SC's December 20 order.

"...As per the negotiators there is a proposal given by the farmers to the Central government that in case they get an invite for a talk, Dallewal is ready to take medical help as desired," Punjab advocate general Gurinder Singh said, "therefore, the state government was seeking some more time and work positively towards compliance of the

directions." The bench said, "We will not comment on what's going on as far as negotiations or your law and order is concerned. If something happens, which is acceptable to both sides and all stakeholders concerned, we will be equally happy. At the moment, we are only concerned with the compliance of our orders. If you want more time, we in peculiar circumstances are inclined to grant you some time." Singh agreed with the bench on the point that no comments should be made on the negotiations at this stage and sought some time. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre and Haryana government, said he did not have any instructions on this issue. Punjab AG said the intervenors and negotiators had tried complying with the court directives by engaging with the farmers in a dialogue.

the pioneer wishes its readers **HAPPY NEW YEAR 2025** As the offices of The Pioneer will remain closed on Jan 1, the next issue of the newspaper will be available on Jan 3, 2025.



WEATHER

AQI 283
MAX 17.7°C(-3)
MIN 9.6°C(+3)

India ready to support its citizen in Yemen



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India on Tuesday said it is extending all possible help to explore relevant options in the case of an Indian nurse facing death sentence in Yemen.

Nimisha Priya, hailing from Kollengode in Kerala's Palakkad district, has been reportedly handed capital punishment for allegedly murdering a Yemeni citizen. Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) official spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said New Delhi is extending all possible help in the matter.

"We are aware of the sentencing of Nimisha Priya in Yemen. We understand that the family of Priya is exploring relevant options," Jaiswal said. "The government is extending all possible help in the matter," he added. Jaiswal was replying to a media query.

Reports said Priya was handed capital punishment by a trial court in 2020 and Yemen's Supreme Judicial Council upheld the verdict in November 2023. Yemen's President Rashad al-Alimi has reportedly approved Priya's death sentence. She is in prison since 2017. Priya was arrested for the alleged murder of Yemeni national Talal Abdo Mehdi in July 2017. A trial court in Sana'a sentenced her to death in 2020 and her appeal was dismissed by Yemen's Supreme Judicial Council in November 2023.

Anji Khad bridges the Kashmir-Kanniyakumari gap

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

seamlessly connect Kashmir to rest of India. The final nod to launch the train services will be given by the Commissioner of Railway Safety after the inspection. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to inaugurate the first Vande Bharat train from Delhi to Srinagar. The much-awaited inspection visit will likely be scheduled in the second week of January 2025.

With the launch of the Vande Bharat train services the accessibility to the beautiful Kashmir Valley will improve further. The Vande Bharat Sleeper train will cover a distance of over 800 kilometers, in under 13 hours.



Last week, Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw also posted videos of the load tests with freight trains and trucks on the Anji Khad cable-stayed bridge on X (earlier Twitter). According to official sources, a freight train loaded with 3,300 tons of weight was brought to the cable bridge



from the Reasi railway station (while later 57 dumpers (trucks) were placed on an additional route built along the railway track with each dumper loaded with 9 tons of boulders, totaling 513 tons. The freight train and dumpers were on the cable bridge for nearly two hours

with a combined weight of over 33,500 tons. After two hours, all the dumpers were removed completing the necessary safety protocol. The most challenging task between the 17 km long Katra Reasi section was the completion of T-33 tunnel. The last leg of the 17 km long section of the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla rail link was completed on December 13.

"Historic milestone; final track work on the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link is complete. The ballastless track work for the 3.2 km-long Tunnel T-33, located at the foothills of the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine and connecting Katra to Reasi,

was completed", Railways Minister said in a statement. Considered an engineering marvel, next to the world's highest rail bridge over the Chenab River in Reasi's Kouri village, the cable-stayed rail bridge has 96 cables. The total length of cable strands is 653 km weighing 848.7 MT. The bridge connects the T2 tunnel on the Katra side and the T3 tunnel on the Reasi side and has a single-line railway track and a 3.75 metres wide service road. The bridge is 725 metres long, including a 473 metres long asymmetric cable-stayed bridge balanced on the axis of a central pylon of height 193 metres from the top of the foundation.

CM launches 4 transformative missions to propel growth

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has laid the foundation for the nation's development on the empowerment of the poor, youth, farmers, and women (GYAN). Under the leadership of Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav, the Madhya Pradesh government has crafted separate blueprints for the comprehensive development of these four pillars, with a resolution to shape the state's holistic growth by 2025. These efforts include the Poor Welfare Mission, Youth Power Mission, Farmer Welfare Mission, and Women Empowerment Mission, which will be launched by Chief Minister Yadav in January. Yadav firmly believes that strengthening these four pillars will script a golden chapter in the development of Madhya Pradesh.

Pradesh. Yuva Shakti Mission initiative aims to equip the younger generation with skills in emerging technologies, entrepreneurship, and sports, preparing them for the evolving job market and fostering leadership qualities. Women Empowerment Mission is focused on providing financial independence, educational opportunities, and entrepreneurship incentives to women, this mission seeks to make women self-reliant and promote gender equality in the state. Farmer Welfare Mission emphasizes agricultural diversification, integrating allied activities like animal husbandry and fisheries, and promoting agri-entrepreneurship through financial support and technical guidance, transforming farming into a profitable venture. Poor Welfare Mission is designed to assist eco-

nomically weaker communities, this mission will break the vicious circle of poverty through financial aid, land rights, and social security measures. Together, these missions aim to pave the way for a prosperous and golden Madhya Pradesh. Yadav believes that the Yuva Shakti Mission will serve as a strong foundation for youth empowerment. The mission aims to cultivate qualities of education, skill development, and community service among the youth. It will also enhance their ability to utilize modern technology effectively. As a result, it will foster successful and capable leadership qualities in them. The role of modern technology is pivotal in the successful implementation of the Yuva Shakti Mission. To ensure that skill development courses are easily accessible and comprehensible

for young people, the government has launched online platforms. These platforms ensure that the mission's facilities are equally accessible to youth in both rural and urban areas. To further the mission's success, the government has also devised an effective strategy to leverage social media. Through these platforms, youth will easily receive information related to the mission, enhancing their awareness and engagement. The Youth Power Mission aspires to build a generation equipped with skills, leadership qualities, and a commitment to driving societal progress. The Women Empowerment Mission is designed to improve the socio-economic conditions of women in the state. The mission aims to ensure gender equality by providing women with opportunities equal to those

of men, fostering an inclusive society in the state. Under the mission, vocational training will be offered to women for education and skill development. This will enhance their employability, improve their career prospects, and lead to financial independence. The mission also aims to promote women's entrepreneurship by providing resources, guidance, and financial support to help them establish and efficiently run their businesses. To address gender-specific issues such as domestic violence and dowry harassment, the mission includes programs for social empowerment. It will raise awareness about women's rights and create a supportive environment. Additionally, one-stop centers will be established to offer women legal aid, counseling, and medical assistance.



Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav pays tribute to saint Balinath Bairwa during his birth anniversary celebration programme in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh on Tuesday. Pioneer photo

Fear of power outage during Rabi season averted

PNS ■ JABALPUR

An attempted theft of copper earthing strips from operational power transformers at the 132 KV Shamshabad substation in Vidisha district was thwarted by the courage and alertness of the substation's outsourced operators, Dharendra Rathore and Niranjan Vishwakarma, along with security personnel Deepak Paul. Their prompt action prevented a potential disruption to electricity supply in Shamshabad, Berasia, and Sironad areas during the critical Rabi season. The incident occurred when armed thieves attempted to steal the sensitive copper strips from two operational power transformers at the substation by cutting through the yard fence. Security personnel Deepak Paul, while on patrol, noticed suspicious activity

and alerted the on-duty operators. Together, the three tried to apprehend the thieves, who fled the scene under cover of darkness. Their swift response ensured the attempted theft was unsuccessful. Copper earthing strips play a vital role in the functionality of power transformers, each valued at approximately ₹4-5 crore. These strips are designed to channel high currents generated during faults, safeguarding equipment and personnel at the substation. Tampering with or removing these strips can result in severe transformer damage and endanger lives. Had the theft succeeded, the Madhya Pradesh Power Transmission Company would have faced significant financial losses and prolonged disruptions to electricity supply in the region. Replacing the transformers, which are

custom-made to specific norms, could take three to four months, impacting farmers and other consumers during the Rabi season. Recognizing their bravery and dedication, Managing Director of MP Transco, Engineer Sunil Tiwari, directed that Rathore, Vishwakarma, and Paul be honored. They were rewarded by Superintending Engineer M.P. Patel and Executive Engineer Sanjay Srivastava in a ceremony held at the 132 KV Shamshabad substation, attended by employees from the 220 KV substation Vidisha and the 132 KV substations in Berasia and Runaha. Their exemplary actions set a commendable standard of duty and vigilance, safeguarding critical infrastructure and ensuring uninterrupted power supply for the region.

Alert family foils burglary at police officer's residence

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

A miscreant attempting a burglary at the residence of a police officer in Radha Kunj Colony, Bhopal, was apprehended early Monday morning due to the vigilance of the officer's family, while two accomplices managed to escape. Awadhपुरi police have arrested the accused and launched an investigation into the incident. The incident occurred at around 3 a.m. when three thieves, arriving in a government vehicle, targeted the house of Manoj Singh, an Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) posted at Ashbagh police station. The ASI's daughter, waiting for her father to return home, became aware of suspicious activity outside the house. Hearing noises and noticing an unfamiliar presence in the veranda, the family immedi-

ately alerted the police via Dial-100. When they attempted to confront the intruder, he fled to the roof to hide. Police arrived promptly at the scene and apprehended the accused. However, two accomplices stationed outside managed to escape. The arrested individual was identified as Pawan Bijouria, an outsourced driver employed at the Registrar Medical Nursing Council office for the past three years. Bijouria resides in the Habiganj area of Bhopal. Preliminary investigations revealed that he had arrived in a government vehicle, a car bearing the registration number MP02-AB4331, which he had parked near the ASI's residence. According to Awadhपुरi police station in-charge Ratan Singh Parihar, the ASI's daughter first noticed the suspicious activity when she heard the sound of

Development journey to reach new heights under Modi's leadership

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav extended his warm greetings and best wishes to the citizens of Madhya Pradesh on the joyous occasion of Aagman: 2025. He expressed his heartfelt optimism for the year ahead, envisioning it as a period of accelerated growth and prosperity for the state and the nation under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Highlighting the remarkable achievements of 2024, Dr. Yadav referred to it as a symbol of comprehensive development, marked by significant strides in public welfare and infrastructure development. He assured citizens that the momentum of progress will continue in 2025, with a renewed focus on public-interest projects aimed at uplifting the standard of living and fostering inclusive growth across all sectors. The Chief Minister emphasized the importance of collective participation in the state's development journey. He reiterated the state government's unwavering commitment to prioritizing welfare schemes, economic advancement, and sustainable development initiatives to transform Madhya Pradesh into a beacon of progress and prosperity. Yadav also acknowledged the tradition of celebrating both the Indian New Year and the New Year according to the English calendar. He described this dual celebration as an opportune moment to renew individual and collective pledges towards the development of the state. He expressed hope that the people of Madhya Pradesh will wholeheartedly support and contribute to the ongoing development efforts.

Authorities are investigating whether the vehicle was taken without authorization and if Pawan's employment was verified through police checks. Additionally, they are examining his possible involvement in other thefts. The arrest has highlighted security lapses and the misuse of government resources. Police are focusing on tracing the two accomplices and determining whether the accused has a prior criminal record. The investigation aims to uncover any systemic issues that may have facilitated the misuse of a government vehicle in the commission of a crime. Awadhपुरi police have registered a case against the accused and seized the government car used in the incident. The swift response by the ASI's family and police prevented the theft and ensured the apprehension of one of the culprits.



Young women celebrate on the eve of new year 2025, in Bhopal on Tuesday. Pioneer photo

Narayan reviews progress of Public Welfare Campaign in State capital

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

A day after he called for doorstep surveys to identify beneficiaries under the ongoing public welfare campaign in the state capital, Municipal Commissioner Harendra Narayan, on Tuesday, interacted with officials and beneficiaries at service camps in various municipal wards. Narayan inspected the Chief Minister's Public Welfare Campaign camp held in Ward 47, where he obtained information about various public welfare scheme cases and their resolution. He issued a warning to the camp organisers for failing to provide accurate information regarding the PM Svanidhi scheme and instructed them to improve their performance. A total of 2,255 applications were received in the camps held on Tuesday in Wards 05, 47, and 77, of which 1,932 were resolved at the camp itself. A camp is scheduled for Wednesday in Ward 78 under Zone No. 17. Narayan also inspected the camp held in Ward 47 under Zone No. 06. He obtained

information about the cases related to various welfare schemes and their resolutions. Narayan spoke to beneficiaries and gathered information regarding their cases. He reiterated the importance of identifying eligible beneficiaries and resolving their cases promptly under the campaign. Nearly 760 applications were received in Ward 05 under Zone No. 01, of which 441 were resolved on-site. In Ward 47 under Zone No. 06, all 843 applications were resolved, and in Ward 77 under Zone No. 17, 648 applications were received, all of which were resolved at the camp. In total, 2,255 applications were received in the camps held on Tuesday, with 1,932 applications resolved on-site. A camp will be held on Wednesday in Ward 78 under Zone No. 17 as part of the Chief Minister's Public Welfare Campaign. The Municipal Commissioner is leading the drive to ensure 100% coverage of government welfare schemes within the jurisdiction of the civic body.

Manoj Shrivastava appointed State Election Commissioner

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

The Madhya Pradesh government has appointed retired Indian Administrative Services (IAS) officer Manoj Shrivastava as the State Election Commissioner. Shrivastava will assume the role from January 1, 2025, succeeding V.P. Singh, whose tenure concludes on December 31. Previously, on September 10, the state government constituted a commission to undertake a fresh delimitation exercise aimed at reassessing the number of districts and divisions along with their boundaries. Shrivastava had been appointed as a member of this Delimitation Commission. Ahead of his new appointment, Shrivastava tendered his resignation from the Delimitation Commission to take on his role as the Chief Election Commissioner. The order issued on Tuesday says, Shrivastava would remain on the post for six years or when he attains 66 years of age.

No temple existed at Chief Justice's bungalow, says MP High Court

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

The Madhya Pradesh High Court administration has strongly refuted claims regarding the alleged demolition of an ancient temple at the official residence of Chief Justice Suresh Kumar Kait. In a statement released on Sunday, the court termed the allegations as "entirely false, misleading, and baseless." The controversy emerged after D.K. Jain, president of the High Court Bar Association, reportedly sent complaints alleging that a Hanuman temple had been removed from the Chief Justice's bungalow without proper procedure. The allegations prompted a swift rebuttal from Registrar General Dharminder Singh, who clarified that no such temple ever existed at the premises. "It has come to the attention of the High Court that certain reports are being circulated alleging the removal of a Mandir (Lord Hanuman Mandir) from the Hon'ble Chief Justice's bungalow. These reports are entirely false, misleading, and baseless," Singh stated. He further emphasized that the Public Works Department (PWD) had confirmed that no temple was

present at the residence. The high court denounced the claims as an attempt to tarnish the judiciary's reputation and undermine public trust in the legal system. "The allegations being circulated in some sections of the media are fabricated and appear to be a deliberate attempt to mislead the public and malign the integrity of the judicial system," the statement read. Registrar General Singh cautioned that spreading such unverified information constitutes interference in the administration of justice and could be deemed contemptuous. "These attempts to create false narratives about the judiciary not only undermine the rule of law but also pose a serious threat to the sanctity of judicial independence," he said. The court urged media outlets and the public to refrain from disseminating defamatory and unverified information, reiterating its commitment to upholding justice with fairness and impartiality. "This baseless controversy serves no purpose other than to discredit the reputation of our judiciary, which remains steadfast in its dedication to justice," the statement concluded.

Refrain from celebrating New Year: Shahar Qazi to Muslim youth

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

He has appealed to the Muslim youth to completely refrain from celebrating New Year. Advising the Muslim community, he said that if you wake up at night or are unable to sleep, then sit at home and pray. Dancing and singing is not our culture

Bhopal Shahar Qazi Mushtaq Ali Nadvi has given a big statement regarding the celebration of New Year. He has appealed to the Muslim youth to completely refrain from celebrating New Year. Advising the Muslim community, he said that if you wake up at night or are unable to sleep, then sit at home and pray. Dancing and singing is not our culture. A video has been released by the Shahar Qazi. In this, he has described the celebration of New Year as Shirk (Islamically wrong). He said that we especially appeal to the Muslim youth that organizing New Year parties in hotels, playing loud songs in farm houses in the name of New Year party and making noise is against Muslim traditions. Such events should be completely avoided. The Shahar Qazi has

released a video and appealed to the Muslim youth not to celebrate New Year. Police Commissioner Harinarayanchari Mishra said that police personnel will be deployed with body cameras and breath analyzers at 50 major points, 700 personnel will be deployed at a total of 100 checking points in the city. Parties will be allowed only till 10 pm at all the venues. Crowds will not be allowed to gather after 10 pm at places like Boat Club, Saira Spata. Bhopal Police has made strict security arrangements for New Year's Eve. Checking will continue till 2 am. Additional police force will be deployed on the roads from 6 pm on Tuesday. During this time, vehicles will be checked. Which will continue continuously till around 2 am. Even after this, police will be present on the road. Along with this during this time, speed radar guns, interceptor vehicles will also keep an eye on the speed. Loud speakers will not be allowed to be played after 10 pm. Hotels, dhabas and restaurants will also close at their time.

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Cold wave, fog persist: Low visibility in many districts

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

This time, New Year will be celebrated in Madhya Pradesh amidst severe cold and fog. On Tuesday morning, fog affected many districts of Gwalior-Chambal, Ujjain, Sagar and Rewa divisions. Visibility was reduced to 20 meters. There is a cold-day alert in Ujjain-Ratlam today. At the same time, cold wave will also prevail in Shajapur, Neemuch, Mandsaur and Agar-Malwa.

Due to the activity of Western Disturbance, there was rain and cloudy weather in the entire state for two days. Hail also occurred in many districts. As soon as this phase ended, the effect of cold increased. Due to this, there has been a significant drop in day and night temperatures. In

many cities, the day and night temperatures remained the same. Today, dew was seen frozen on trees and plants in Raisen. The chill has increased here. Today, dew was seen frozen on trees and plants in Raisen. The chill has increased here. Effect of cold on the last night of the year

According to the Meteorological Department, the effect of cold will remain in the state on the last night of the year 2024. There will be severe cold in Malwa i.e. Ujjain division. Where there will be cold day and cold wave. Bhopal, Indore-Jabalpur will also be affected by cold.

On new year Gwalior, Sheopur, Morena, Bhind, Datia, Shivpuri, Guna, Ashoknagar, Niwari, Tikamgarh, Chhatarpur, Satna, Maihar, Rewa, Mauganj, Sidhi,

Due to continuing Western disturbances, the entire State has witnessed rain and overcast conditions over the last two days

Singrauli, Guna, Ashoknagar, Neemuch, Mandsaur will have light to moderate fog. Ujjain-Ratlam has a cold day alert and Neemuch, Mandsaur, Agar-Malwa, Shajapur would witness a cold wave.

On January 2 Neemuch, Mandsaur, Gwalior, Sheopur, Morena, Bhind, Datia, Shivpuri, Guna, Ashoknagar, Niwari, Tikamgarh, Chhatarpur, Satna, Maihar, Rewa, Mauganj, Sidhi and Singrauli will have light to moderate fog.

According to the Meteorological Department, the effect of cold wave and cold day may last for 20 to 22 days in January. In the first two days, the effect of cold wave will be seen in the districts of Gwalior, Chambal and Ujjain division. After this, the effect will increase in the entire state. In Barwani, people came out of their homes for morning walk even in the dense fog and severe cold in the morning. In Barwani, people came out of their homes for morning walk even in the dense fog and severe cold in the morning. After the rain stopped in MP, the effect of fog has increased. There was fog in many cities of the state on Tuesday morning. Visibility in Gwalior and Shajapur was 200 to 500 meters. That is, nothing was visible after half a km. Visibility

of 500 to one thousand meters was recorded in Bhopal, Damoh, Jabalpur, Sagar, Rajgarh. Visibility was up to 1 to 2 km in the remaining cities.

Here, the effect of cold has also increased at night. The mercury came down to 9.6 degrees in Bhopal. 9.5 degrees were recorded in Jabalpur. Indore had 14.3 degrees, Gwalior had 11.4 degrees and Ujjain had 13 degrees.

Rajgarh was the coldest at night. The mercury here was recorded at 5.6 degrees. Mandla had 6.7 degrees, Tikamgarh had 8.2 degrees, Pachmarhi had 8.5 degrees, Narsinghpur had 8.8 degrees, Nowgong had 9 degrees, Raisen had 9.1 degrees, Guna had 9.3 degrees, Umaria had 9.6 degrees, Malajkhanda had 9.7 degrees.



A view of a thick dense fog in Bhopal on Tuesday. Pioneer photo



BMC employees razed structures under Bhopal Metro Rail Project, at Alpana trisection in Bhopal on Tuesday. Pioneer photo

Awards galore: Madhya Pradesh celebrates excellence across sectors

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Under the visionary leadership of Chief Minister Mohan Yadav, Madhya Pradesh made several remarkable achievements in 2024, gaining national recognition in various sectors and playing a leading role in the implementation of central government welfare schemes. Madhya Pradesh secured first place nationally for auctioning the highest number of mineral blocks in the country. The Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board was honored as the best tourism board in the country. The state was awarded "Leader" status in the national startup ranking and National Startup Awards. The state's electricity distribution company received the "Government India PSU IT

Forum Award" for implementing digital systems. Burhanpur received national recognition for its excellence in banana processing under the "One District-One Product" initiative. The Ayushman Arogya Mandir Centre won first prize for achieving 104% operational performance. Madhya Pradesh won first prize at the Agri and Horti Expo for excellence in horticulture and food processing. The state received the prestigious "Global Tourism Award" in the "Best Sustainable State Tourism" category. Indore was awarded the "5th National Water Award" as the best district in the western zone for water conservation efforts. Madhya Pradesh was honored as the "Best Tourism State of

the Year" at the Travel and Tourism Conclave & Awards. The state's pavilion at the 43rd India International Trade Fair (IITF) was awarded a gold medal for its excellent presentation in the state category.

Madhya Pradesh secured second place in the "Best Performing State Award" for the implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban). Four individuals from Madhya Pradesh were awarded the Padma Shri for their contributions to art, culture, and sports. Master Avinish Tiwari from Madhya Pradesh received the prestigious Prime Minister's National Child Award for 2024. Madhya Pradesh is now home to 3,907 leopards, the highest in the country, and has become

the "Leopard State." Bhopal and Ujjain were included among the 150 "Eat Right" railway stations across the country. The Civil Lines Police Station in Dewas was selected by the Ministry of Home Affairs as one of the 10 best police stations in the country. Tawa Reservoir was designated as a Ramsar site. Chanderi's Pranpur village in Ashoknagar inaugurated the country's first "Craft Handloom Tourism Village," built at a cost of over 7 crores. Madhya Pradesh topped the nation in distributing loans under the PM Street Vendor Scheme, issuing loans to over 11.95 lakh vendors. The "Golghar Memorial" was inaugurated in Pari Bazaar, Bhopal, to promote traditional arts.

Madhya Pradesh achieved first place in manganese production in the country. The state ranked first in soybean production in India. Leader in Implementation of Central Government Schemes Madhya Pradesh also played a leading role in the implementation of various central government schemes, including PM Svanidhi Scheme, Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, PM Awas Yojana, Agriculture Infrastructure Fund, Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, SWAMITVA Scheme, Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyan, Ayushman Bharat Scheme, Fishermen Credit Card Scheme, National Animal Disease Control Program, Pradhan Mantri Adarsh Gram Yojana, National Livelihood Mission, and Swachh Bharat Mission.

Efforts will be made to make Ujjain a center of sculptures: Chief Minister

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav took a review meeting on the preparations of Vikramotsav-2025 and Vikram Trade Fair in the meeting hall of the Smart City Office in Ujjain on Tuesday. In the meeting, the Chief Minister said that the Vikram Trade Fair is an important effort towards strengthening the economy of the state. Samrat Vikramaditya is a unique example of justice, charity, good governance and bravery. He was a great ruler. He not only defeated the foreign invaders and drove them out of the country but has a special place in all areas of good governance. His courage, valour and efforts, his stories, the Vikram Samvat based by

The Chief Minister said in the meeting that instructions were given to prepare an action plan to make Ujjain a center of sculpture

him, are linked as an important chapter in his great history. The Chief Minister said in the meeting that instructions were given to prepare an action plan to make Ujjain a center of sculpture. The Madhya Pradesh government has started work in various fields to bring the various dimensions of Samrat Vikramaditya in front of the country and abroad. A grand event will be organized in Ujjain in the coming days on the occasion of the initiation of Vikram Samvat of Samrat Vikramaditya. A seminar will

be organized in the university on his Nyay Parampara. The government will provide platforms to investors in the Vikram trade fair. There are immense possibilities in the field of tourism in the state, these will be developed further. The number of religious tourists has increased tremendously in Ujjain. Chief Minister Yadav reviewed the preparations of Vikram Trade Fair and Vikramotsav. Collector Shri Neeraj Kumar Singh gave basic information about the Vikram Trade Fair organized last year through a

power point presentation. It was told that selection of the Government Engineering College campus for organizing the Vikram Trade Fair this year has been proposed. In the meeting, information was given about the proposed layout of the site for Vikram Trade Fair-2025, information about the proposed shops and other necessary arrangements regarding the event. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav said that in this year's trade fair, special promotion will also be given to auto expo and religious tourism. The Chief Minister said that the purpose of organizing the fair is that everyone meet each other, takes a pledge for a new life and happiness comes in everyone's life. MP Balyogi Umeshnath Ji Maharaj, Minister in charge

Gautam Tetwal, MLA Anil Jain Kaluheda, Satish Malviya, Jitendra Pandya, ADG Umesh Joga, Divisional Commissioner Sanjay Gupta, DIG Navneet Bhasin, Collector Neeraj Kumar Singh, Superintendent of Police Pradeep Sharma, CEO District Pranchayat Jayati Singh, Director of Vikramaditya Shodhpeeth Dr. Shriram Tiwari, Dr. Bhagwatilal Rajpurohit, Vice President of District Panchayat Smt. Shivani Kunwar, Vice Chancellor of Vikram University Prof. Arpan Bhardwaj, Municipal Corporation Commissioner Ashish Pathak, Bahadur Singh Bormunda, Rajesh Rathore of MPIDC, Vishal Rajoria and other dignitaries were present in the meeting.

337 Metric tonnes of Union Carbide chemical waste set for disposal

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Director Gas Relief and Rehabilitation, Swatantra Kumar Singh said that under the guidance and supervision of the Central Government's Oversight Committee, action is being taken to safely dispose of the remaining 337 metric tonnes of chemical waste from Union Carbide. He explained that the waste will be packed, loaded, and transported in 12 specialized containers designed according to CPCB standards, with stringent security measures in place. Each container is leak-proof, fire-resistant, and equipped with GPS tracking for real-time monitoring. Two trained drivers have been assigned per container to ensure safe transportation. The convoy will include police security, an ambulance, a fire brigade, and a quick response team to address any emergencies. The waste will be transported through a dedicated green corridor from Bhopal to Pithampur TSDF with operations set to commence soon.

Singh stated that the only facility in Madhya Pradesh for the disposal of chemical and hazardous waste is located in Pithampur, Dhar district. This plant is specifically designed for the safe incineration of waste generated by industrial units across the state. Established in compliance with the guidelines of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), the facility ensures the secure disposal of hazardous materials.

In 2015, a trial run for disposing of 10 metric tonnes of waste was conducted under CPCB supervision, adhering to all prescribed safety parameters. The current disposal of the remaining 337 metric tonnes of chemical waste is being carried out in accordance with orders from the Supreme Court and the High Court, as well as the recommendations of the Oversight Committee/Task Force Committee constituted by the High Court on June 19, 2023. "The state-of-the-art Treatment, Storage, and Disposal Facility (TSDF) at Pithampur has been safely incinerating waste from various organizations since 2006, similar to the storage and operational processes at UCIL. Across the country, 42 such facilities are in operation, treating and disposing of chemical waste in an environmentally safe manner. The Common Hazardous Waste Treatment, Storage and Disposal Facility (CHW-TSDF) at Pithampur, operated by PIWMPPL (Pithampur Industrial Waste Management Pvt. Ltd.), a sub-

sidary of Re-Sustainability Limited, is specifically designed to handle hazardous waste with precision and safety. The facility employs advanced technologies for incineration, landfill management, and emission control. It continuously monitors water and air quality during the waste disposal process, ensuring adherence to strict environmental standards. This cutting-edge facility offers innovative solutions for disposing of hazardous waste, reducing the risk of natural resource contamination, and maintaining environmental safety. It stands as a model for sustainable waste management practices. Director Singh highlighted that during and after the 2015 trial run of UCIL waste disposal conducted under CPCB supervision, emission levels were found to comply with the prescribed national standards. The results indicated that no harmful elements were detected in the air or water following the disposal process. The remaining residues from incineration were securely disposed of at the TSDF (Treatment, Storage, and Disposal Facility) through landfilling, utilizing a double composite liner system to ensure environmental safety. Singh emphasized that no adverse effects on the environment or public health were observed during or after the process. He further noted that this assessment was validated by CPCB and confirmed by the relevant officials. The Government of India has formally informed the Supreme Court of these findings through an affidavit, underscoring the safety and effectiveness of the waste disposal process.

Singh informed that Collector Dhar conducted a detailed investigation into the reports claiming a 98% decrease in crop production and fivefold increase in contamination of water in areas of Pithampur where waste was incinerated." The findings, as stated in the Collector's report, revealed that over the past 10 years in the Pithampur Circle village, the cultivation area for soybean and wheat crops has increased. In contrast, a decline in the cultivation of maize and gram was observed, attributed to reduced farmer interest in these crops. Overall, an 11.83% increase in the total crop area for these four crops was recorded. The report further detailed the land ownership distribution. Of the surveyed land, 14.857 hectares across 28 survey numbers were under private ownership, 13.032 hectares across 7 survey numbers were categorized as government land, and 3.478 hectares across 6 survey num-

bers were classified as diverted land. These findings were based on a comprehensive review conducted by the Collector. Singh addressed the claims published in a newspaper regarding polluted red water in a drain near the Pithampur plant area and allegations of skin infections and respiratory problems among locals. To investigate these concerns, a team comprising skin specialists from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Bhopal, research scientists from ICMR, and relevant departmental doctors was formed. A comprehensive health survey was conducted across 12 affected villages. According to the findings, the prevalence of skin diseases in these villages was recorded at 1.77%, and respiratory diseases (URT) at 1.14%. In comparison, national data provided by the Government of India shows a prevalence of 7.9-60% for skin diseases and 40-50% for respiratory conditions. These figures indicate that the reported cases are within normal levels. The report concluded that the claims made in the published news article were misleading and lacked factual basis, as evidenced by the investigation's findings. Director Singh reported that the Regional Director (Central) of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), Bhopal, collected five water samples from areas surrounding M/s Pithampur Industrial Waste Management Private Limited. Based on the analysis report received on 25-12-2024, some parameters—such as color, chloride, hardness, sulfate, fluoride, and total dissolved solids—exceeded the permissible limits set under the drinking water standard IS 10500 in two open wells. These wells are located near the landfill in village Tarpura and near Bukneshwar Temple (report WW24.25-188.189). The findings indicate that these elevated parameters generally reflect groundwater quality and do not appear to be linked to the TSDF operations. Furthermore, the presence of heavy metals in the samples was negligible, and no connection to UCIL waste was identified. This conclusion was confirmed by the scientists involved in the analysis. Singh stated that an Oversight Committee was established at the Central Government level in July 2010 to manage the disposal of UCIL waste. Chaired by the Union Minister for Environment, Forest, and Climate Change, the committee includes the State Government's Environment Minister and the Minister for Bhopal Gas Tragedy Relief and Rehabilitation.



Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav reviews the preparations of Vikramotsav-2025 during saint Balinath Bairwa jayanti celebration programme in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh on Tuesday. Pioneer photo

City boats to serve at Mahakumbh in Prayagraj

Bhopal: Six firefighting boats built in the state capital will help enhance safety measures at Mahakumbh 2025 by allowing firefighters and rescuers to promptly tackle emergencies during the religious event in Prayagraj. Built by city-based PS Traders, on a contract issued by the Uttar Pradesh Fire Service, the boats are currently being tested by a joint team of the Uttar Pradesh Fire Service and the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF). A company official said that the boats have been designed to take the water route while

responding to fire emergencies. The boats will be deployed at various ghats to minimise response times while assisting in firefighting and rescue operations. The boats, which can accommodate a maximum of ten people, will be dispatched to Prayagraj on successful completion of the testing exercise. Lasting over 40 days, the Mahakumbh begins on January 13. An estimated 400 million people are expected to attend the event held at the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati rivers.

Citizens seek employment, better roads, and services in 2025

KISHAN SINGH RANA/ANKUSH SINGH ■ BHOPAL

As Bhopal prepares to welcome 2025, citizens reflect on the challenges of the past year, expressing hopes for better employment opportunities, improved infrastructure, and a cleaner, more efficient city in the year ahead. Ashok, 45, who works for a finance company, says that the year passed by so quickly that he didn't even realise it. He says the removal of the BRTS has been the highlight of the year as it helped reduce traffic jams, but there's nothing particularly memorable from this year. Intikhab, 30, who works for a car dealership on Hoshangabad Road, believes that car sales in Bhopal have decreased this year. People's earnings have declined, and there have been significantly fewer car sales. While this is good from an environmental perspective, it does not augur well for his future in the profession. Twenty-somethings Rohan and Payal, who stepped into matri-

mony last month, are full of compliments for theatre artist Ashutosh Rana's performance earlier this year and hope that the city's cultural scene will continue to host such sterling performances. Madhav, 48, and his son Anurag, who were returning after having their new Bullet motorcycle blessed at Bhoj Mandir, said that the city should also have fairs like the Gwalior Mela, where buyers of new vehicles get a 50% road tax discount. This would provide relief to people. Krishna, preparing for the PSC exams, says that coaching institutes in Bhopal are taking advantage of students. They charge arbitrary fees, and after collecting the fees, change the teachers, which creates problems for the students. Vishnu, who runs a golgappa and chaat stall in the New Market area, says hawkers were repeatedly troubled by the anti-encroachment squad of the municipal corporation. He laments that the civic body has not provided designated spots for them to set up shop.

A group of students pursuing a PG at a government university said that whether the college is public or private, all of them charge hefty fees. However, when it comes to placements, nothing happens, and it feels like a waste. Ex-serviceman Shivcharan and his wife Sangeeta say that the roads in Bhopal are very dirty. The couple believes that Indore should be named the state capital. Sangeeta adds that on a recent visit to Delhi, she travelled in city buses for free, and now she wants the district administration to offer free travel to women in the state capital as well. Shaheen, who runs a medical store in Rohit Nagar, congratulates law enforcement on the large haul of MD drugs seized in the state capital. She says that determined government officials can bring down even the biggest mafias in a month. 60-year-old Anwar says that the Ijtama (an Islamic congregation) is a matter of pride for Bhopal. Such a big event is a matter of pride for the state government and its people.

Sanjeev, a farmer, says that the government hasn't paid attention to farmers this year. They faced difficulties in getting fertilisers and in getting good prices for their crops. Babita, 35, says that the whole city has been filled with dust and dirt. "Wherever you go, roads are being constructed, and government projects are going on. Those who have to use Hamidia Road spend more than half an hour stuck in traffic daily. In fact, people waste around two hours every day just in traffic." Shohrab, 34, a product distributor from Lalghati, says that the problem of stray dogs is increasing in the city. Hardly a day goes by without a report of stray dogs attacking people. This is becoming a serious issue for pedestrians, and there should be relief from this menace. 70-year-old Jameel says that while the city is growing, the number of parks is decreasing. Even the existing parks are poorly maintained. He lives in Chinar Fortune City, where two parks are in a bad condition.

Hariom Pandey, a student at Barkatullah University, says, "I passed the 12th grade, and it's been more than six months, but we still haven't received our scholarship money. Because of this, I faced difficulties in getting admission to college." Another student, Ishika, says, "Everything at the university has been delayed. Bad scheduling has resulted in problems for students throughout the year." Vinod Kumar Kesari says the sanitation standards in the city have witnessed significant improvements. "I believe that in 2025, Bhopal will become number one in cleanliness." Vikas Yadav laments the condition of the roads. He says that the district administration should focus on the issue to reduce accidents across the state capital. While Qaid Johar said that he hoped for better government medical facilities in the city, Abhishek Mishra rues that youth from the city have to travel to other states for employment. Mishra says that 2025 will see an enhancement in employment opportunities in the city.



Naxals violence declined by 48%: Ministry of Home Affairs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The latest report from Union Home Ministry, facing tough action from the security forces, the Naxals are making efforts to seep into new areas along inter-state borders but without any notable success. The Government's multipronged approach -- anti-Naxal operations by paramilitary and state police and simultaneous development initiatives in Maoist-affected areas -- has resulted in a 48 per cent reduction in violent incidents, from 1,136 in 2013 to 594 in 2023, the report said. A 65 per cent reduction was also noticed in the deaths of civilians and security forces, which came down from 397 to 138 in 2023 as compared to 2013, it said. Home Minister Amit Shah has said that the country would be free of Naxalism by March 31, 2026. The geographical spread of Left-Wing Extremist (LWE) violence has shrunk considerably. In 2023, 171 police stations in 42 districts reported such incidents, compared to 328 police

stations in 76 districts in 2013, the Union Home Ministry's report said. "The arc of violence has been considerably restricted with just 25 districts accounting 91 per cent of the LWE violence," it said. According to the Ministry's annual report 2023-24, the CPI (Maoist) continues to be the most potent among the various LWE outfits in the country, accounting for more than 90 per cent of total violent incidents and 95 per cent of resultant deaths. "Amidst increasing reverses, the CPI (Maoist) has been making efforts to expand to new areas along inter-state borders, albeit without any significant success," the report said. They wish to keep the population in their areas of influence marginalized to perpetuate their outdated ideology, it said. "Consequently, the process of development has been set back by decades in many parts of the country under LWE influence," it said. Various measures adopted by (state) governments and the developmental outreach by the Union government have

seen an increasingly large number of LWE cadres shunning the path of violence and returning to the mainstream. Continued operations and crackdowns in the "core Maoists' areas" have slightly increased the number of resultant deaths and casualties to security forces when compared with the corresponding period in 2022, the report said. Noting that improvised explosive devices cause the majority of casualties to security forces in anti-LWE operations, the Home Ministry issued a Standard Operating Procedure to promote best practices in IED management besides putting in place extensive counter-IED capacity building of CAPFs and state police forces, it said. "During the first half of 2024, the LWE situation has witnessed quantum positive jump (1.7 times) in security forces-initiated operations (59 to 103), which have consequently resulted in a more than five-fold increase in the neutralization of Maoists (30 to 159) as compared to the corresponding period of 2023," the report said.

The overall improvement in the LWE scenario can be attributed to a greater presence and increased capacity of the security forces across the LWE affected states, better operational strategy and better monitoring of development schemes, it said. In addition, beefing up intelligence coordination has also played a major role in planning action against the Naxals. Round-the-clock intelligence sharing through Multi Agency Centre (MAC) at the Central level and State Multi Agency Centre (SMAC) at the state level, setting up of Joint Command and Control Centre at Jagdalpur (Chhattisgarh) and Gaya (Bihar), and strengthening of technical and human intelligence have helped in action against Naxals, the report said. Besides, thrust on the generation of real-time intelligence and creation as well as strengthening of State Intelligence Bureaus (SIBs) in the LWE affected states for which central assistance is provided through the SIS have also helped security forces take action against Naxals, it added.

CBI cancels medal of officer caught accepting bribe

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Government has "forfeited" the Union Home Minister's medal for Excellence in Investigation awarded to CBI Inspector Rahul Raj in 2023 who was later caught by the agency red-handed, allegedly receiving Rs 10 lakh bribe and dismissed from the service, officials said. The action comes on the recommendation of CBI Director Praveen Sood who has cracked down on corrupt elements detected in the agency's internal vigilance process. Raj, a recipient of a prestigious medal in 2023, was caught "red-handed" on May 19 while allegedly accepting an illegal gratification of Rs 10 lakh from Malay College of Nursing chairman Anil Bhaskaran and his wife Suma Anil, an official alleged. The couple were also arrested. The CBI swung into action after inputs and surveillance by its internal vigilance unit indicated that one of the support teams constituted on the orders of the Madhya Pradesh High Court to examine the infrastructure in nursing colleges in the state was indulging in corruption. Officials in the know of developments said that CBI

Director Sood had made it clear in no uncertain terms that "internal vigilance is prerequisite to external action". They said that, following its policy of "zero tolerance to corruption and misdemeanours," the CBI dismissed its officer under Article 311 of the Constitution within days of his arrest. The CBI also recommended cancelling his medal, which the home ministry has accepted. "Union Home Minister's Medal for Excellence in Investigation-2023 awarded to Rahul Raj, Inspector of the Central Bureau of Investigation vide Ministry's notification No. 11024/05/2023-PMA dated 17/11/2023 published in...Gazette of India on November 17, 2023 is hereby cancelled and the medal forfeited under Rule-9 of the Rules governing the award of Union Home Minister's Medal for Excellence in Investigation," the notification issued by the Ministry on Monday said. Following its zero-tolerance policy towards internal corruption, three CBI officers were dismissed without enquiry under Article 311 of the Constitution while five were compulsorily retired under 56j rule in 2023-24, officials said.

DD to screen 4k restored version of Manthan on Jan 1

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

National broadcaster Doordarshan on Tuesday announced that it will ring in the new year by screening the 4K restored version of Shyam Benegal's film "Manthan" as homage to the veteran filmmaker. Benegal, the pioneer of the parallel cinema movement in Indian cinema in the 1970s and 1980s, died on December 23 at a hospital here due to chronic kidney disease. He was 90. Film Heritage Foundation (FHF), which restored the 1976 classic film for its premiere in the Cannes Classic section at the Cannes Film Festival earlier this year, shared the update on its official X page. According to FHF, "Manthan" will be broadcast on Doordarshan on Wednesday at eight pm. "To pay tribute to the late Shyam Benegal, Doordarshan will begin the new year with a screening of

'Manthan' (1976) restored by FHF with support from the Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation Ltd. (Amul) on Jan 1, 2025 at 8 p.M. On Doordarshan," the foundation said. "Manthan" was inspired by the groundbreaking milk cooperative movement by Dr Verghese Kurien that transformed India into one of the largest milk producers in the world. The Hindi film, titled "Churning" in English, was financed by 5 lakh farmers of Gujarat 48 years ago who contributed Rs 2 each. The opening credits of the movie read: "500,000 Farmers of Gujarat present." "Manthan" narrates the story of how a young veterinary doctor (Girish Karnad) fights against oppressive forces to establish a milk cooperative that empowers rural farmers. It also starred Smita Patil, Naseeruddin Shah, and Amrish Puri.

BJP accuses AAP of using kids for poll gains

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Tuesday accused Aam Aadmi Party leader Arvind Kejriwal of using children for political gains, charging him with practising "petty, cheap and dirty" politics. Addressing a press conference, BJP national spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia said Delhi's ruling party has not taken down a post, which shows some children raising pro-Kejriwal slogans, despite the National Human Rights Commission raising serious concerns on the matter. Such a depiction of children is a violation of the Juvenile Act and the Election Commission guidelines, he said. "Kejriwal and Chief Minister Atishi are not sparing even children. They are violating the dignity of children. Is it because Kejriwal knows that he is losing the elections in Delhi," Bhatia asked. He asked why Kejriwal was "playing with young and

impressible minds for his petty, cheap and dirty politics". The BJP, he claimed, will ensure that the "destroyer of children and a hater of children" is thrown out of power. He accused the AAP government of converting school toilets into classrooms for children and deliberately failing students in Class 9 and Class 11 to ensure higher pass percentages in Class 10 and Class 12. He added that people will celebrate "Happiness Utsav" -- a Delhi government initiative to commemorate the 'Happiness Curriculum' in its schools -- by teaching the AAP a lesson in the upcoming polls. The AAP government opened new school despite promising over 500 of them, and is behind the vacancy of almost 80 per cent post of teachers, he alleged. Bhatia dubbed Kejriwal's announcement of Rs 18,000 monthly honorarium to temple and gurudwara priests as yet another "false promise" by the AAP, claim-

ing the former chief minister knows that his "political life" is coming to an end. Until recently his government was opening liquor shops outside religious places, he said. The BJP spokesperson noted that the AAP government has also promised a similar amount to imams but has not paid them for 17 months. "There has been no bigger fraud and deceitful politician in India than him," he alleged. Asked about the Congress' charge that the BJP government at the Centre has disrespected former prime minister Manmohan Singh, the BJP leader hit back at the opposition party's "insult" of former PM P V Narasimha Rao, saying it did not even allow his cremation in the national capital. There has been a bitter war of words between the Congress and the ruling BJP over arrangements at Singh's funeral and over the setting up of a memorial to the ex-PM.

Three Crore applications disposed in governance drive

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Nearly three crore service delivery applications were disposed of during a recently concluded campaign aimed at further ensuring ease of governance mainly at the grassroots level, a senior government official said on Tuesday. He said through the nationwide "Prashasan Gaon ki Ore" campaign conducted from December 19-24, the government has tried to implement Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision and made the eco-system transparent, faster by simplifying procedures and processes at every level. "Through various citizen centric initiatives, including redressal of public grievances, disposal of service delivery applications, the government expanded the outreach of service delivery mechanisms and made them more effective,"

said Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) Secretary V Srinivas. He said the emphasis is on projecting the immense potential of technology to bring citizens and government closer, as a powerful tool to empower citizens as well as a medium to optimise transparency and accountability in day-to-day functioning. The Prashasan Gaon ki Ore campaign was conducted in 700+ districts across India, said Srinivas, a 1989 batch Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer of Rajasthan cadre. A total of 2,99,64,200 applications were disposed of under service delivery category and -- 18.29 lakh public grievances were redressed (14.84 lakh raised on state portals and 3.44 lakh on the Centre's CPGRAMS), he said. "The campaign represents a milestone for doorstep delivery

of services on a size and scale that makes it India's largest people centric campaign for good governance," Srinivas said. In Uttar Pradesh, the Prashasan Gaon ki Ore was conducted in all 75 districts, in Madhya Pradesh (55 districts), Rajasthan (50 districts), Bihar (in all 38 districts), in Assam (all 35 districts), in Maharashtra (in 33 of the 36 districts), in Gujarat (in 32 of the 33 districts), in Chhattisgarh (in all 33 districts), in Karnataka (in all 31 districts), in Odisha (all 30 districts), in Jammu and Kashmir (all 20 districts) and in Jharkhand (in 23 of 24 districts), he said. The campaign was spearheaded by the chief secretaries, principal secretaries of Administrative Reforms and district collectors across the nation, the senior bureaucrat said.

Gurugram Police resolve 97,896 complaints, 5,759 pending

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

The Gurugram Police have received a total of 1,03,655 complaints through various means, out of which 97,896 complaints have been resolved by the district police and 5,759 pending complaints are being investigated this year so far, police said. According to the police, these complaints were received by the Gurugram Police through various channels including a total of 693 complaints received in the Police Commissioner's Office, Gurugram through various commissions (NHRC, HHRC, NCW, HSWC, NCPDR, HCPCR, out of which 664 complaints have been resolved and 29 complaints are being investigated.

Similarly, a total of 1642 complaints were received in the Gurugram Police Commissioner's Office, through the office of the Director General of Police, Haryana, out of which 1635 complaints have been resolved, and 07 complaints are being investigated. A total of 8390 complaints were received in the office of Commissioner of Police, Gurugram all these 8,390 complaints have been resolved by the police. Likewise, a total of 12,559 complaints through e-mail were received all these complaints have been resolved by Gurugram Police, the police said. The city Police have also received a total of 919 complaints during public hearings in the police commissioner's office, out of which 829 complaints have been resolved.

Suvendu Adhikari threatens Mamata with jail

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Bengal Opposition Leader Suvendu Adhikari on Tuesday said that his party would institute a commission on atrocities against women in Sandeshkhali when it comes to power and send Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to jail for the alleged offences she had committed. Adhikari, who was addressing a "reply rally" at Sandeshkhali a day after the CM held her own, stated, "Mamata Banerjee has accused the BJP of misleading the villagers and asked the women not to fall into the trap of 'mischievous' people. I must say that the biggest mischievous person is Mamata."

Quad celebrates 20 years of cooperation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and other Quad member nations on Tuesday reaffirmed the grouping's steadfast commitment to work towards a free, open and peaceful Indo-Pacific amid China's increasing military muscle-flexing in the region. The foreign ministers of the member nations of the grouping made the pledge in a joint statement commemorating the 20th anniversary of "Quad cooperation". India, the US, Australia and Japan came together 20 years ago to extend assistance in response to the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami, and that coalition subsequently took form of the Quad. In the last few years, the Quad has rolled out a number of initiatives addressing some of the most pressing needs and challenges of the Indo-Pacific region, including in areas of maritime securi-

ty, infrastructure and connectivity. India is scheduled to host the next Quad Summit that is likely to take place in the second half of 2025. The foreign ministers of the four nations said the Quad will work together in responding to the future needs of the Indo-Pacific. "As four partners, we share a vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific that is peaceful, stable and prosperous, underpinned by effective regional institutions," the joint statement said. The Quad foreign ministers also talked about the centrality of 10-nation grouping Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the Indo-Pacific. "We reaffirm our unwavering support for ASEAN's centrality and unity as well as mainstreaming and implementation of the EAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific," the ministers said. "We respect Pacific-led regional architecture, foremost the Pacific Islands Forum. We are also steadfast in our support for

the Indian Ocean Rim Association, the region's premier organisation," they said. The Quad foreign ministers also referred to the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami and how the four countries came together to respond to the challenges. "The tsunami was one of the worst disasters in history, claiming the lives of nearly a quarter million people and displacing 1.7 million across 14 countries," they said. "Together our four countries contributed over 40,000 emergency responders, working with other partners across the Indo-Pacific region to support millions of people affected by the catastrophe." In the statement, the ministers further noted that the foundational commitment of the four nations to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief remained strong. "We continue to work side-by-side to prepare for and respond quickly and effectively to disas-

ters across the region," they said. "In 2024, our four countries collectively supported disaster preparedness and life-saving relief efforts across the Indo-Pacific and we continue to build on those efforts to identify new ways to respond rapidly to humanitarian crises and disasters," they added. The ministers also briefly highlighted the Quad's focus on addressing complex challenges in the Indo-Pacific. "What began as an emergency response to a catastrophe has grown into a full-fledged partnership delivering positive outcomes for the people of our region," the statement noted. It said the Quad countries now work together and with partners across the Indo-Pacific to address complex challenges -- from fighting climate change, cancer and pandemics, to bolstering quality infrastructure, counter-terrorism efforts, critical and emerging technologies, and cyber security.

Fake cancer and diabetic drugs seized in Kolkata raid

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A joint investigation conducted by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) and the Drugs Control Directorate, West Bengal at the premises of a wholesale firm in Kolkata recently led to the seizure of spurious drugs estimated to be worth Rs 6.6 crore. The investigation has led to the arrest of a woman identified as the proprietor of the wholesale firm who was taken into custody by the Drugs Inspector of CDSCO, East Zone, the Union Health Ministry said in a statement. The raid, carried out at the firm 'Care and Cure For You' in Kolkata resulted in the seizure of a large quantity of anti-cancer, anti-diabetic, and other drugs suspected to be spurious.

The drugs, labelled as being manufactured in various countries including Ireland, Turkey, the USA, and Bangladesh, were found without any supporting documents to prove their legitimate importation into India, it said. In the absence of such documentation, these drugs are deemed to be spurious, the ministry said. The investigating team also discovered several empty packing materials, further raising concerns over the authenticity of the seized products, the statement said. The total market value of the drugs seized is estimated at approximately Rs 6.60 crore, it said. To ensure proper investigation, samples of the drugs have been sent for quality testing. The remaining seized quanti-

ty is being kept in safe custody by the CDSCO, the statement said. A court granted judicial custody of the arrested proprietor for 14 days and permitted further interrogation. Further investigation into the matter is ongoing. "The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare remains committed to ensuring the safety and well-being of the public. The seizure and ongoing investigation underscore the government's zero-tolerance policy towards the circulation of counterfeit and substandard drugs in the market," the statement stated. The CDSCO and state authorities will continue to work in close coordination to combat the threat posed by spurious drugs and to safeguard the interests of consumers, it stated.

Unnao startup honours Jimmy Carter with peanut butter tribute

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Thousands of miles away from his home in Georgia where he breathed his last, former US president Jimmy Carter will live on -- in the form of two new varieties of peanut butter dedicated to the "champion of peanut farming" from Unnao-based startup Nutty Village. Carter, who was elected in the wake of the Watergate scandal and the Vietnam War, died at his home in Plains, Georgia on Sunday at the age of 100. Nutty Village has decided to honour Carter for his "commitment to agriculture", Aman Kumar, who started the com-

pany in 2020, told PTI. "As a tribute to the former president of the United States of America, considered a champion of peanut farming and rural development, we will be dedicating our upcoming range of coffee-flavoured peanut butter and barbeque-flavoured peanut butter in his honour," the 29-year-old entrepreneur said. The two new flavours -- coffee and barbeque -- are being added to the existing dark chocolate, jaggery and unsweetened varieties. Carter was the third American president to visit India. A village in Gurugram district, Daulatabad Nasirpur, was named Carterpuri at the sug-

gestion of the then Indian prime minister Morarji Desai. According to The Carter Center, he was the only one with a personal connection to India as his mother, Lillian, had worked there as a health volunteer with the Peace Corps during the late 1960s. Kumar said the Nutty Village's tribute acknowledges Carter's life-long commitment to agriculture and sustainable development. Nutty Village, co-founded with Sushant Berma, was inspired by small farmers around Ganga, who cultivate peanuts but struggle to receive fair prices due to dependence on intermediaries and lack of market linkages, he



said. "Observing this challenge, we designed a solution to empower these farmers by ensuring better price realisation through direct market access." "Nutty Village works with around 50 farmers and purchases groundnuts from 5-6 farmers for its peanut butter. It is working with the women self-help groups to do both the primary and secondary processing to make peanut butter, creating livelihood opportunities as well at the grassroots level," added Kumar, who has a Master's in Social Entrepreneurship from Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS). Peanut farmers also benefit from

the almost triple purchase price Nutty Village offers them, he said. Fourteen-fifteen villages in Unnao district have around 10,000 farmers who grow peanuts, 2,000 of whom use organic farming techniques. Manish Singh, a 36-year-old farmer from Unnao, said, "We first met Aman when he wanted to discuss how we could all work together for better profits. He brought us seeds and we worked on figuring out the best farming methods. Chandkali, a 60-year-old member of a self-help group, said being involved in the secondary processing of the peanuts gets her good money.

UP Politics 2024: A Year of tumult, transformation, and tough battles

BISWAJEET BANERJEE
LUCKNOW

As the curtain falls on 2024, Uttar Pradesh stands as a microcosm of India's shifting political winds. This year has been nothing short of a roller-coaster for the state, often described as the cradle of Indian politics. The BJP, once dominant, found itself grappling with a severe blow in the Lok Sabha elections, only to stage a dramatic recovery in the assembly by-elections. On the other side, the Samajwadi Party (SP) surged ahead during the national polls but faltered in maintaining its momentum when it came to the state elections, reflecting the ever-changing allegiances of the electorate.

The year began with Uttar Pradesh brimming with anticipation. It was the first general election after the completion of the Ram temple in

Ayodhya, a project deeply intertwined with the BJP's identity. Yet, the saffron party, which had been riding high on its Hindutva and development narratives, faced unexpected challenges. The Lok Sabha elections dealt the BJP a crushing defeat in the state, reducing its tally from 62 to 33 seats. This marked one of the party's most significant electoral setbacks in recent years, with defeats in key constituencies like Ayodhya, Kannauj, and Amethi. The opposition INDIA alliance, spearheaded by the SP, capitalized on this vulnerability, securing 43 seats and emerging as the dominant force in the state.

The BJP's losses in Ayodhya and Amethi were particularly symbolic. Ayodhya, considered the centerpiece of the BJP's Hindutva agenda, rejected its candidate, Lallu Singh, in favor of SP's Avdhesh



Prasad. Voter dissatisfaction over local issues, coupled with resentment over the demolition of small temples during the construction of the Ram

temple, played a significant role in this outcome. Similarly, in Amethi, Congress candidate Kishori Lal Sharma defeated BJP stalwart Smriti

Irani by a significant margin, signaling a shift in public sentiment despite Irani's high-profile campaigning. However, just as questions

began to surface about the BJP's future in Uttar Pradesh, the party made a resounding comeback in the assembly by-elections held later in the year. Contests were held for nine seats, and the BJP won six, with ally RLD securing one. This recovery was driven by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's assertive leadership and a well-coordinated campaign strategy. Yogi's slogan, "Batenge To Katenge" (If divided, they will be cut), struck a chord across caste divisions, consolidating Hindu votes and neutralizing the opposition's efforts to build alliances based on caste arithmetic.

The Kundarki constituency, with its Muslim-majority population, became a symbol of the BJP's ability to transcend traditional vote banks. BJP candidate Ramveer Singh campaigned aggressively in Muslim-dominated areas, presenting a message of inclusivity that resonated even in a

fragmented field. This success, combined with victories in other critical seats, underscored the party's adaptability and resilience.

For the SP, which had basked in the success of the Lok Sabha elections, the by-poll results were a reality check. Akhilesh Yadav's strategy of focusing on a coalition of backward classes, Dalits, and minorities (PDA) had worked well in the national elections but failed to replicate the same impact in the state contests. The loss in Kundarki and other key seats highlighted the limitations of this approach against the BJP's aggressive narrative and organizational strength.

Meanwhile, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) continued its downward spiral, unable to reclaim its traditional vote bank, which is increasingly gravitating towards newer players like Chandrashekhar

Azad's Azad Samaj Party. Mayawati's party appeared adrift, further diminishing its relevance in the state's political landscape.

The turbulence of 2024 has set the stage for an intriguing contest in the years to come. Uttar Pradesh remains a battleground where strategies are tested, alliances are forged, and leaders are defined. For Yogi Adityanath, the year ended on a high note, solidifying his position as a Hindutva icon and a key player in the BJP's national politics. For Akhilesh Yadav, the challenge lies in translating his Lok Sabha successes into sustained gains at the state level. As Uttar Pradesh heads towards the 2027 assembly elections, the lessons of this year will shape the strategies of all political players, ensuring that the state remains at the heart of India's political drama.

Ayodhya, Varanasi, Mathura packed with devotees for New Year celebrations

PTI ■ AYODHYA /MATHURA /VARANASI

As the New Year approaches, Uttar Pradesh's iconic religious destinations -- Ayodhya, Varanasi and Mathura -- are experiencing an overwhelming influx of devotees.

With enhanced security measures and detailed crowd management plans in place, these holy cities are prepared to accommodate the huge number of pilgrims flocking to temples and sacred sites for a spiritual start to 2025.

Ayodhya is witnessing a massive surge in devotees ahead of the New Year, particularly with the newly consecrated Ram temple attracting thousands eager to seek blessings from Lord Ram.

The hotel accommodations in Ayodhya and nearby Faizabad are fully booked and the temple trust has extended the "darshan" hours to manage the expected crowd.

"We are ready to welcome the devotees and all our rooms have been reserved through January 15," said Ankit Mishra, the owner of a hotel. While the Hindu New Year is



celebrated around March-April, many devotees opt to visit on the first day of the English calendar year for a glimpse of Ram Lalla. "They wish to start the year with blessings from the deity," explained Ramakant Tiwari, a local priest. This New Year marks the first since the Ram temple's consecration, making it a particularly significant occasion. Ayodhya Senior

Superintendent of Police (SSP) Rajkaran Nayyar confirmed robust security arrangements across key religious sites like the Ram temple, Hanumangarhi and Guptar Ghat. Varanasi is also bracing for an unprecedented number of visitors this New Year. To handle the influx, the Kashi Vishwanath Temple has banned "sparsh (touch) darshan" from December 31 to

January 1. The visitors will be allowed to view the deity from a distance to avoid overcrowding. The police have implemented extensive security measures, with 45 duty points across major locations, including Assi Ghat and Sankat Mochan Temple. Kashi Zone Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Gaurav Bansal said the NDRF, Water Police and PAC

teams have been deployed at key points. With an estimated five to seven lakh visitors, the temple area has been divided into five sectors and 12 quick reaction teams are on standby to handle any emergency.

Mathura-Vrindavan is also seeing an enormous crowd of devotees. The temple authorities have urged the elderly, sick and children to avoid visiting during peak time. "We advise the devotees to assess the crowd before visiting to prevent inconvenience," said Munish Sharma, the manager of Banke Bihari Temple.

The temple has implemented a strict one-way entry and exit system to prevent jostling. To manage the influx, the security personnel have been increased and heavy vehicles have been banned from Vrindavan. E-rickshaws have been introduced to transport the visitors to the temples. The police have set up barriers and deployed officers to ensure smooth movement and safety, with special parking arrangements for the visitors arriving from different routes.

ISKCON devotees pray for safety of Hindus in Bangladesh

PTI ■ KOLKATA

ISKCON devotees on Tuesday joined in prayers in Kolkata for the safety of Hindus and a peaceful 2025 for the minority community which has been facing attacks in Bangladesh since the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government.

Hundreds of followers of ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) chanted 'Hare Krishna' and sang songs to express solidarity with the Hindus in Bangladesh. Holding placards seeking the safety and security of Hindus and a peaceful 2025 in the neighbouring nation, the devotees joined in the prayers at the Albert Road centre on the eve of the new year, led by ISKCON Kolkata spokesperson Radharam Das.

"We are praying to God that the Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh can live in peace every day in 2025," Das said. Maintaining that life has been terrible for Bangladeshi



Hindus in 2024, he said "We hope that they will get justice and peace in 2025."

Bangladesh's minority Hindus, who constitute only about 8 per cent of the 170 million population, have faced hundreds of attacks in 50-odd districts of the country since the fall of Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government on August 5.

Das had earlier demanded that the interim government in Bangladesh take strong action against the fundamentalists fomenting trouble in

that country and arrest them so as to build confidence among the minorities.

They have also demanded the immediate release of jailed Hindu spiritual leader Chinmoy Krishna Das and other monks arrested in Bangladesh.

Das is scheduled to be produced before a Bangladesh court on January 2. The ISKCON Kolkata spokesperson said that he is hopeful that Das and the other three monks in jail in Bangladesh will get justice.

Amity University contributes to biological payload aboard Spadex

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI/NEW DELHI

It was a historic moment for Amity Universe as it launched its first Biological Payload from India into space by ISRO through PSLV C60 Spadex Mission, from Satish Dhawan Space Centre, SHAR, ISRO, Sriharikota, on Monday night. This was part of POEM-4 and the payload is Callus of Spinach (*Spinacia Oleracea*). According to a statement from the university, the colour changes and the lateral growth will be studied through onboard cameras and sensors. "This experiment is a first step towards space grown food which will be helpful in future for manned missions and Bhartiya Antariksh Station. This important scientific research is headed by Dr. A. W. Santhosh Kumar, Dr. Sneha Gokani, Dr. R. Selvakumaran and Dr. Ravi Shankar from Amity University," the statement said. Before the Gaganaut is placed



in space, this biological payload will study the effect of microgravity of growth and morphology of plant Callus. To support human exploration in space, we need to provide fresh food as well and hence cultivation of plant needs to be addressed through a series of experiments. Sharing his views, Dr. Ashok K. Chauhan, Founder President of Amity Education Group, remarked that this historic launch signifies Amity University's unwavering commitment to scientific innovation and its contribution to make India, a Viksit Bharat. "The launch underscores the role of academic institutions in



addressing challenges related to space exploration and ensuring the success of future space missions," said Dr. W. Selvamurthy, President, Amity Science, Technology & Innovation Foundation (ASTIF). Amity Plant Experimental Module in Space (APEMS) is a cutting-edge experimental module designed to monitor how plants adapt to space conditions, such as gravitational stress, and regulate their growth direction in response to stimuli like gravity and light. It aims to explore the potential for food and nutrition sustainability during prolonged space missions.

Odisha universities allotted Rs 676.70 crore under PM-USHA scheme

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR/BERHAMPUR

The Union government has approved Rs 676.70 crore for infrastructural development of various universities and colleges in Odisha under Pradhan Mantri Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (PM-USHA), state Higher Education Minister Suryabanshi Suraj said here on Tuesday. Speaking to reporters here, Suraj said that of Rs 676.70 crore, the state would bear Rs 268 crore (40 per cent) while the Centre would provide the remaining Rs 408.70 crore (60 per cent). The fund has been approved under different components, including Multi Disciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERU), Grants to Strengthen Colleges (GSC) and Gender Inclusion and Equity Initiatives (GIEI), and Management Monitoring Evaluation and Research (MMER), he said.



He said Rs 100 crore each has been approved for Berhampur University; Maharaja Sriram Chandra Bhanja Deo University, Baripada; Ravenshaw University, Cuttack; and Sambalpur University, under the MERU component of the scheme. Similarly, under the GSC component, Vikram Dev University, Jeypore, Odisha State Open University, Sambalpur, Kalahandi University, Bhawanipatna, Rajendra University, Bolangir

and Gangadhar Meher University, Sambalpur would get Rs 20 crore each for development of infrastructure, Suraj said.

The education ministry has also sanctioned Rs 5 crore each for 24 colleges under the GSC component, while five districts -- Kandhamal, Mayurbhanj, Bhadrak, Nabarangpur and Sambalpur -- would get Rs 10 crore each for carrying out gender inclusion and equity initiatives, he added. Under the PM-USHA scheme,

provisions have also been made for the development of classrooms, laboratories, libraries and hostels and making the infrastructure accessible to persons with disabilities, he said. Besides, the higher educational institutions can procure software and hardware to enhance digital education, the minister said.

To attract more women students, the higher educational institutes can offer skill development, career buildings and self-defence training under the gender inclusion and equity initiative component of the central scheme. With the implementation of the scheme, the NAAC ranking of the higher educational institutes would improve in coming years, he hoped. The minister said that the government is working to implement the National Education Policy 2020 to make the educational institutions multi-disciplinary and students compatible with global standards. Meanwhile, Berhampur

University vice chancellor Geetanjali Dash said, "We are happy as the central government approved the much-needed project for overall development of the university." "The fund will help the university have better infrastructure and increase research output, putting the university on the map as a top-tier institution," she said, adding, the fund will be utilised over the next five years. Describing MERU as a big gift from the central government to the Berhampur University, which will celebrate its foundation day on January 2, local MP Pradeep Kumar Panigrahy thanked Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan for giving his nod to the release of much-needed fund to the university. "We hope the university will use the fund to meet the goals in research, ranking and infra-structure and to make the institute competitive on the international level," the MP said.

SpaDeX mission: Spacecraft placed in right orbit, ISRO eyes another feat

PTI ■ SRIHARIKOTA, (ANDHRA PRADESH)

Two spacecraft that would aid ISRO in demonstrating space docking, a critical technology for future space missions, got separated successfully and were placed into the desired orbit late Monday, the country's space agency said. "PSLV C60 Spadex mission is accomplished with respect to Spadex A&B satellites," said Mission Director M Jayakumar. Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) chief S Somanath said the rocket has placed the satellites in the right orbit of 475 km circular orbit, after over 15 minutes of flight. "So, as far as we are concerned, the rocket has placed the spacecraft in the right orbit and the SpaDeX satellites have moved one behind the other, and over the period of time, it will pick up further distance, travel about 20 km away and then the

rendezvous and docking process will start. "And we hope that the docking process can happen in another week and the nominal time is going to be approximately January 7," he said in his address from the Mission Control Centre.

In this mission, the very important part is the POEM-4 with 24 payloads from startups, industries, academia and also from ISRO centres, he said. These are scheduled to be fired on Tuesday morning. Scientists would work through the night to ensure that the POEM-4 reaches the desired orbit level to perform the operation, Somanath said. Later, talking to reporters at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Somanath said the PSLV-C60 mission placed the two SpaDeX satellites weighing 220kg in a circular orbit and 475 km as against the projected 470 km and this mission also has the

POEM-4 which has 24 payloads to perform research and development. "They are payloads and are not satellites. They are going to be attached to the fourth stage (of the PSLV rocket) for conducting experiments over the next two months. The upper stage of the PSLV rocket will be brought down to a lowered orbit to 350 km and that process is currently going on. After that, we will have many activities to continue," Somanath, also the Secretary, Department of Space, said.

On the Space Docking Experiment, he said the scientists would have many operations from December 31 at the ISTRAC Bengaluru and he expected that the docking condition "possibly on January 7". "So, we will be able to see that from the Control Centre, ISTRAC, Bengaluru. All those activities of docking, including telecasting of the onboard



images from the camera of the docking processes," he said. Somanath, flanked by SpaDeX Project Director N Surendran, Jayakumar and Directors of the various Centre said ISRO was "very proud" of this accomplishment and expressed hope that the SpaDeX mission's objective can be achieved in the coming days.

"Really important mission for us, this you know, with the space sector reforms, and expansion of space activities. Then we have human space flight programmes, building space stations etc. This (Monday's) mission is so critical for us to work on future missions like the Chandrayaan-4, missions to the Moon as

well," he said. "I believe this is not the first SpaDeX and there will be many more SpaDeX varieties including complex versions of docking systems in the coming days," he said.

"We had two launches of the PSLV from the same launch pad that is the first launch pad in December. So, after the first launch (on December 5 for PSLV-C59/Proba-3 mission), the Satish Dhawan Space Centre team was quick in raising to the occasion (for Monday's mission)," he said. Surendran said, "I would like to congratulate the PSLV team for the successive successful launch of PSLV in a month, it is a record, we have also placed our twin babies in a perfectly circular orbit, as per our requirement." I am happy to say that our solar panels are successfully deployed and the spacecraft are on their journey and holding their wings towards the dock-

ing and it is expected to happen around January first week," he said.

As you are aware the space sector is going through a phase to enable private players to meet the growing demands, as per the policy guidelines, SpaDeX was assembled and integrated here for the first time, he said. Dubbed as a prelude to the ISRO setting up its own Space Station by 2035, the PSLV-C60 mission would also make India join an elite club in achieving this feat which is expected to take place in the coming days.

The 44.5-metre-tall rocket carried two spacecraft -- Spacecraft A and B, each weighing 220 kg which would help in space docking, satellite servicing and interplanetary missions. After the culmination of the 25-hour countdown which commenced on Sunday, the rocket lifted off at 10 pm from

the First Launch Pad at this spaceport, emanating thick orange-coloured fumes and thunderous sound in the island, located about 135 km east of Chennai.

According to ISRO scientists, the two spacecraft-Spacecraft A (SDX01) or the 'Chaser' and Spacecraft B (SDX02) or the 'Target' would be merged together later at an altitude of about 470 km after travelling at the same speed and distance. By mastering the docking technologies, ISRO is set to enhance its operational flexibility and also expand its mission horizons. This technology is essential for some of India's space ambitions like Indian on the Moon, getting samples from the Moon (Chandrayaan-4 mission), and building and operating the Bhartiya Antariksh Station. The others to achieve this technological feat are China, Russia and the US.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

A wish list for 2025

As we reflect on the year that has passed and welcome the new one, let us resolve to make this a year of progress and unity

As we welcome year 2025, the world stands at the cusp of opportunities and challenges. The new year offers a chance to reflect, reset, and reimagine the future. Amidst the advancements and setbacks of recent years, 2025 should be a time for hope, action and collaboration. Here is a wish list for a better world and an earnest appeal to global and Indian leaders to strive for transformative change. The urgency of addressing climate change cannot be overstated. We hope for concrete actions to reduce carbon emissions, promote renewable energy, and protect biodiversity. Let 2025 be the year when words transform into impactful deeds. The pandemic underscored the disparities in healthcare access. A global commitment to equitable healthcare systems, and increased investments in public health are essential. Bridging the digital divide, improving infrastructure and making quality education accessible to marginalised communities should be a universal priority. As AI and other technologies advance, their application should focus on solving pressing global issues—from poverty to climate resilience—rather than exacerbating inequalities.

The crises we face are interconnected and so must be our solutions. A concerted effort is required under the UN to bring an end to wars raging in Ukraine and West Asia. The untold misery of Gaza people must end. All involved must work to deescalate tensions and bring about a lasting peace in the region which has seen enough misery and human tragedy. Policies should reflect empathy and foresight, ensuring that no one is left behind. India, with its diversity and potential, holds a unique position in shaping the global future. As we

step into 2025, Indian leaders must focus on rural development, job creation and support for small businesses to bridge economic disparities. They should invest in vocational training and innovation to prepare the youth for a competitive global market. Ambitious climate targets must be implemented, alongside enhanced urban planning for sustainable cities and promotion of water and energy conservation. Transparency, accountability and citizen participation must remain central to policy-making, fostering trust and unity. The fringe elements must be brought to mainstream and efforts must be stepped up in places like Manipur to bring about a lasting peace. The government and the citizens alike must work to have a country which is as per the wishes of our Constitution makers—a country which ensures dignity, liberty and freedom for all and no section of society is alienated. The people on the fringe—tribals and dalits need to be given their due and efforts must be made in that direction. The minorities must not feel alienated and targeted. They deserve their due respect and dignity. All religious issues must be settled amicable as per the law. The democratic institutions must be strengthened and parliamentary democracy must work for the people in the right earnest. Wishing all our readers a very happy new year!

PICTALK



Devotees look at a sand sculpture themed on 'clean Mahakumbh' ahead of Mahakumbh 2025, in Prayagraj

A turning point in Taliban politics

The assassination of Maulvi Khalil-ur-Rahman Haqqani, a key leader in the Haqqani network, has sent shockwaves across Afghanistan and the region



NISHAKANT OJHA

The assassination of Maulvi Khalil-ur-Rahman Haqqani, the Taliban's Minister for Refugees and a senior figure in the Haqqani network, has exposed significant fractures within the Taliban leadership and deepened the complexities of regional geopolitics. Claimed by the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP), the attack not only highlights the Taliban's internal divisions but also reshapes the broader strategic landscape, especially for India. On December 11, 2024, Khalil Haqqani was killed in a high-profile suicide bombing in Kabul. This incident underscored the Taliban's failure to ensure internal security and revealed growing tensions between its Kandahar faction, led by Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada, and the Haqqani network, headed by Sirajuddin Haqqani. These tensions have been fueled by the Haqqanis' perception of neglect or even sabotage by the Kandahar faction. In response to this crisis, Sirajuddin Haqqani convened an emergency meeting in Gardez with key network leaders to address security breaches and the escalating threat posed by ISKP. This development points to potential fragmentation within the Taliban, which carries significant implications for regional stability and India's security.

A fragmented Taliban could destabilize Afghanistan, creating fertile ground for extremist groups like ISKP. This faction's hostility toward both the Taliban and regional actors, including India, raises the specter of increased attacks targeting Indian interests. The resultant instability might also spill over into Pakistan, indirectly affecting India's border security, particularly in Jammu and Kashmir. Another concern lies in the potential strengthening of the Pakistan-Taliban nexus. Pakistan's historical ties to the Haqqani network could enable it to leverage this faction against Indian activities in Afghanistan, including infrastructure and



development projects. Such a scenario could escalate cross-border terrorism, particularly in Jammu and Kashmir, and erode India's strategic influence in Afghanistan. Indian investments in key infrastructure projects like the Zaranj-Delaram Highway and the Chabahar Port route may face heightened risks amidst this instability. India also faces an increased terror threat as ISKP may collaborate with groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), which are active in Pakistan. Such alliances could intensify attacks on Indian targets, while prolonged conflict in Afghanistan might radicalize vulnerable populations across the region, including within India. Regionally, these developments complicate India's diplomatic landscape. Iran, for instance, might shift its focus to countering Afghan instability, potentially undermining its collaboration with India on projects like Chabahar Port. Similarly, a stronger Pakistan-Haqqani alliance could align with China's ambitions under the Belt and Road Initiative, further sidelining India in the region. Globally, Pakistan's backing



FOR INDIA, THE ASSASSINATION OF KHALIL HAQQANI SIGNIFIES A CRITICAL MOMENT TO RECALIBRATE ITS APPROACH. INDIA MUST BOLSTER ITS INTELLIGENCE CAPABILITIES AND BORDER SECURITY, PARTICULARLY IN SENSITIVE AREAS LIKE JAMMU AND KASHMIR

of the Haqqani network provides it with a lever to influence Afghan politics but risks alienating the Kandahar faction and exacerbating internal Taliban conflicts. ISKP's growing power, meanwhile, poses a direct challenge to South Asian security, threatening to destabilize the region and affect India's geopolitical interests. For India, the assassination of Khalil Haqqani signifies a critical moment to recalibrate its approach. India must bolster its intelligence capabilities and border security, particularly in sensitive areas like Jammu and Kashmir. Strengthening partnerships with Iran, Central Asia, and Russia could counterbalance Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan. Coordinating with international allies to combat ISKP and other extremist groups will also be vital. Furthermore, India must protect its investments in Afghanistan through global partnerships and maintain diplomatic efforts via multilateral platforms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the United Nations. The killing of Khalil Haqqani has revealed the fragile balance within the Taliban and underscored the potential

for regional destabilization. For India, this evolving scenario demands vigilance, proactive diplomacy, and strengthened security measures to safeguard its interests amid shifting geopolitical realities. For India, the implications are profound, ranging from the potential rise of terrorism to a weakening of its strategic foothold in Afghanistan. The escalating instability could embolden extremist groups like ISKP, Lashkar-e-Taiba, and Jaish-e-Mohammed, increasing the risk of attacks targeting India. To address these challenges, India must adopt a multi-pronged strategy. Enhancing intelligence capabilities, securing its borders, and deepening ties with Iran, Central Asia, and Russia are crucial steps. Engaging multilateral platforms to combat the ISKP threat and protect investments is equally vital. The situation demands vigilance and proactive measures to safeguard India's interests in an increasingly volatile region, ensuring its strategic and security objectives remain intact amidst shifting dynamics. (The writer is an eminent expert on counter terrorism in West Asia; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

AUSTRALIA DEFEATS INDIA

Madam —India's hopes for the World Test Championship final took a major hit with a big loss to Australia in the Boxing Day Test at Melbourne, when Australia beat India by 184 runs in the fourth Test of the Border-Gavaskar series to take a 2-1 lead in the 5-match series. The match played at the Melbourne Cricket Ground saw Australia take seven wickets after tea on day five to secure a famous win. Despite a valiant effort from Yashasvi Jaiswal, India's batting collapse on the final day sealed their defeat. Meanwhile, Australia has bettered their chances to face South Africa in the WTC Final at Lord's next year with the win. The Proteas have booked their spot in the WTC final after a thrilling two-wicket win over Pakistan on Sunday. Interestingly, the Australian last wicket fought hard for adding more than 60 runs, whereas after the final day tea break India's last seven wickets tumbled for just 34 runs in 20.3 overs.

Wicket had no devils. This fragile nature of the Indian team is very discouraging. Fighting till the last ball - spirit is missing. And we are now blaming the third umpire for Jaiswal's out to malign the Aussies victory and India's shocking performance. But the true cricket lovers are completely agreeing with the Indian skipper Rohit Sharma about Jaiswal's controversial dismissal at the post-match press conference: 'Look, I really don't know what to make of that because the technology didn't show anything. With the naked eye, it seemed that he did touch something. I don't know how the umpires want to use the technology, but in all fairness, he did touch the ball.' Now it is the time to assess Team India's performance. Actually, Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and Ravindra Jadeja passed their prime sometime ago but they won't gracefully retire like Ashwin. Please drop them out to build a future team. We only do hero worshiping—only to be disappointed by our so-called heroes. Indian fans and media need to immediately stop making celebrities of hero worship. Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

Elon Musk stands with immigrants



A rift has emerged among the supporters of US President-elect Donald Trump over the contentious issue of immigration. The faction spearheaded by billionaire Elon Musk and fellow entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy contrasts sharply with Trump's MAGA (Make America Great Again) base, which firmly endorses his stringent anti-immigration policies. Amid the simmering row, the President-elect seems to be aligning with

Musk and other supporters in the tech industry over the immigration visa issue. Those who claim to be 'natives' of the country themselves have foreign roots. It is meritocracy that has thrived in that country over the centuries and that has made America the world's most powerful nation by attracting top talents in many fields from across the globe. However, many people may claim that the next century belongs to China or some other country, the fact is that behind all modern day tech innovations and inventions have all been the products greatly attributable to the 'American Dream.' That dream will keep the United States of America as the land of opportunities for a long time to come. That is what will attract the best brains from across the world to sail the oceans to reach the shores of America and create new ideas and innovations that the world will need to use. N Sathasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

STOP POLITICAL BLAME GAME

Madam—It is indeed a matter of concern to one and all that rape being predominantly a social issue is playing in the hands of political parties to settle political scores over the other parties. The recent incident in Anna University abjectly exposes again the lapses in handling such a serious issue by the government, university authority, the police department and also the political parties. As a matter of fact, for most of the political parties addressing rape and prevalence of drugs, especially in the educational institutions, it is not in their active agenda. BJP sits muted on the shabby happenings in Manipur but cries foul over such incidents taking place in the states ruled by other parties. Manipur has even seen women being paraded nude in public. Such incidents must have taken place during the tenure of the other parties also, who are now out with fierce protest programmes. Every criminal claims support of some political party or the other to escape punishments. The existing system of dealing with such shabby incidents needs reconsideration to

make them more foolproof. More than deterrent acts combined efforts of all institutions and socially conscious individuals, irrespective of political lenience should make sustained efforts to tide over this menace. A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

JIMMY CARTER PASSES AWAY

Madam —The 39th president of the United States has died at age 100. Jimmy Carter was a peanut farmer and US Navy lieutenant before going into politics, eventually serving one term as governor of Georgia and as president of the United States from 1977 to 1981. He was the only former US president to reach 100 years old. He championed the human rights at the centre of US foreign policy, Carter forged a still-standing peace treaty between Egypt and Israel. He will always be remembered for his key policy decisions making and action-driven blueprint into the execution. Dimple Wadhawan | Kanpur Nagar

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

New year resolutions: Small steps, lasting change

A meaningful new year vow isn't about dramatic reinvention; it is about mindful reflection, small adjustments and cultivating habits that truly last

On every new year eve a lot of people take a vow to make a new beginning. Families come together, friends exchange greetings, and bold resolutions quietly take shape. "I'll wake up at 5 a.m.," someone might vow, or "This year, I'll get back in shape." However, by February, alarms are snoozed, fitness goals abandoned, and life returns to its familiar rhythm.

Why do resolutions often fail? They are usually ambitious yet unrealistic, conceived more in the excitement of the moment than with a long-term perspective. A meaningful New Year doesn't demand grand reinvention; it thrives on small, deliberate adjustments—holding on to what works, letting go of what doesn't, and fostering habits that last. The New Year feels unique due to the "fresh start effect," a concept psychologists use to describe how temporal milestones—such as January 1, birthdays, or even a new week—create a mental reset. These milestones give the illusion of starting afresh, prompting us to buy planners or sign up for gym member-



ships. But enthusiasm alone doesn't guarantee success. Without reflection and structure, even the most well-intentioned plans falter. Reflection is the starting point—not the kind that dwells on failures but one that evaluates life with curiosity. What brought joy or progress last year? Perhaps it was reconnecting with family, starting an evening walk routine, or improving time management. What left you feeling drained? Overcommitting to work, excessive screen time, or trying to please everyone might top the list. Psychologists recommend "self-distanced reflection," where you analyse your life as if observing someone else's. Why did this person abandon their plans? Why did they agree to activ-

ities they didn't enjoy? This detached perspective helps pinpoint habits to retain and those to discard. Even with clarity, life is seldom linear. Setbacks are inevitable, but resilience—the ability to adapt and recover—makes all the difference. Resilience isn't innate; it can be nurtured through practices like gratitude, mindfulness, and reframing challenges. Gratitude shifts focus to what's working. Recognizing small positives rewires the brain to spot opportunities over obstacles. Mindfulness, on the other hand, anchors the mind in the present—whether during a heartfelt conversation or a quiet morning.

These practices reduce stress and enhance focus. Reframing failure is equally crucial. Unmet resolutions aren't defeats; they're feedback. Adjusting goals is far more effective than abandoning them altogether. Strong relationships are another cornerstone of happiness. This insight resonates deeply in India, where family bonds and social networks are integral. However, maintaining

these connections in today's fast-paced world requires conscious effort. Being present is challenging in a world of constant notifications, endless emails, and overflowing to-do lists. Yet studies show that mind-wandering—even toward pleasant thoughts—correlates with reduced happiness. The richest moments are those we fully engage in, whether during a family meal, a morning walk, or a simple act of kindness. Adaptability is another essential skill. Life rarely unfolds as planned, and the ability to pivot determines how well we navigate change. After reflection and building resilience, action must follow. Instead of sweeping declarations like "I'll meditate for an hour daily" focus on creating systems. Systems grounded in routine, rather than fleeting motivation, are more sustainable. The New Year isn't magical. It's a psychological cue to pause and reassess, but its real value lies in how you use it. Progress, not perfection, is the key to a fulfilling year. (The writer is author and DGP and head, Haryana State Narcotic Control Bureau; views are personal)



O P SINGH



FIRST COLUMN

EMPOWERING ADOLESCENTS WITH SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE

Spirituality can help adolescents face life's challenges with resilience



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

We all know that as per the laws of nature, we live our lives through various stages such as infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age. Of these life stages, the most adventurous and interesting stage is adolescence which represents an inner emotional upheaval, a struggle between the eternal human wish to cling to the past and the equally powerful wish to get on with the future. It's indeed a very critical phase in the life of every human being because, in this phase, there is intense growth not only physically but also morally, cognitively, emotionally and intellectually.

Hence, in this stage of life, parents elders or peers must provide adolescents with proper guidance, and support and create an environment to facilitate their holistic development. The primary goal of every adolescent is to achieve complete independence, for which they often seek a lot of space and freedom. They start to think more rationally and abstractly as they form their moral code. In the process, they may often become assertive, rebellious, non-conformist, self-opinionated and aloof. Therefore, they need to be guided and supported with great sensitivity and maturity.



To attain a well-integrated maturity, a series of factors need to be addressed for adolescents, like they need to acquire self-certainty, be ready to try out new roles, strive for achievement, acquire a self-identity, balance their rights with responsibilities and identify personal goals and ideals. One should understand that while dealing with the problems of adolescents, one should try and step into the young person's world and treat them with discerning respect rather than suspicion. It always helps when we share their joys and sorrows and genuinely address their questions whilst engaging them in moral and spiritual discipline.

It is so unfortunate that in the formative stage of adolescence when children need a strong sense of direction & guidance, there is no source for them to get it. The family is no longer the strong institution it used to be. Hence, under this scenario, adolescents try to find support from other means such as their peer group, TV, internet, books etc.

Tempted by the glamour and gloss that is promoted by the media, there is a constant conflict that adolescents go through to measure up to their peer group's values and to cope with the ideals and the reality of life. Unfortunately, in the absence of proper guidance, it is natural that many adolescents are pulled into crime, abuse and drug addiction. While family, educational institutions and social groups do have a major role to play in guiding and supporting adolescents, spirituality lends a deeper and stronger basis for forming a clear identity and value system upon which the edifice of a strong character can be raised.

Since spirituality touches on the core goodness of every human being, it is the most potent tool for guiding all sections of society. The process of empowering adolescents begins with the practice of treating them with respect and facilitating their growth in such a way that they can realise their hidden potential. So, instead of looking at them as helpless or ignorant beings who need to be chastised and controlled, spiritual treatment calls for accepting them as potential carriers of higher wisdom, pure values, fresh ideas and skills that need to be channelised in the proper direction. Such a growth process is driven by their inner self, gently guided by wisdom and love rather than a forced development compelled by insecurity, fear and false expectations. Remember! If adolescents are motivated to explore spirituality at their age they will be equipped with excellent powers to cope with any life situation and excel in their chosen roles, thereby living a quality life.

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

Capitalising on 'China Plus One': Will India step up?



UTTAM GUPTA

As global trade dynamics shift under Donald Trump's policies, India stands to gain from the move by multinational companies to diversify supply chains beyond China

Releasing a report the 'Trade Watch', on December 25, 2024, NITI Aayog CEO BVR Subrahmanyam has suggested that trade policies under US President-elect Donald Trump could result in a potential economic boom for India, driven by significant trade diversion in global trade. He said 'Whatever Trump has announced so far, which is likely to come up... there are opportunities. We are the man at first slip. The ball is coming in our direction. Whether we hold the catch or drop it is for us to decide. There will be huge disruption, and if we prepare for it, there will be a massive boom due to trade diversion.'

This comes after Trump announced additional tariffs on imports from its biggest trading partners - 25 per cent on Canada and Mexico if they fail to check illegal immigration and drug trade. He also announced a general 10 per cent tariff by the US on all imports and a 60 per cent tariff on imports from China. Meanwhile, the US has also announced restrictions on the export of computer chip-making equipment, software, and high-bandwidth memory chips to China. Trump has also threatened to impose 100 per cent tariffs on BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) countries if they try to undermine the US dollar. The US is the biggest importer in the world with a mammoth import valued at US\$ 3200 billion during CY 2022. During that year, its import from China alone was US\$536.3 billion which works out to 16.7 percent of total goods imports.

US goods imports from Canada and Mexico were US\$436.6 billion and US\$454.8 billion or 13.6 per cent and 14.2 per cent respectively. In sharp contrast, US goods imports from India during 2022 were US\$85.5 billion or a meagre 2.6 per cent of its total goods import. Now, if Trump executes his threat of imposing a 60 per cent additional tariff on imports from China, this will lead to an exorbitant increase in the cost of the latter's goods to American consumers thereby rendering them uncompetitive vis-a-vis similar goods coming from other exporting countries such as India. This should help India capture a big slice of the US import basket currently served by China. This should be possible even if Trump imposes a 10 per cent additional tariff on all its imports including from India. As for Trump's threat to impose 100 per cent tariffs on BRICS countries (India is one of them) in the event of the latter putting into action their so-called 'de-dollarization' plan (De-dollarization is a process of moving away from the world's reliance on the U.S. dollar as the chief reserve currency), this is theoretical.

At the 16th summit held on 22-24 October 2024 in Kazan, BRICS leaders, including Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese leader Xi Jinping, publicly voiced their commitment to jointly introduce an alternative payment system that wouldn't be dependent on the U.S. dollar. The feasibility of implementing this idea anytime soon is suspect. Second, the US is also hell-bent on taking measures that will undermine the capabilities of China to



AN OVERARCHING REASON BEHIND INDIA 'DROPPING THE CATCH DESPITE THE MAN AT FIRST SLIP AND THE BALL COMING IN OUR DIRECTION' IS A HIGH-COST DOMESTIC ENVIRONMENT WHICH MAKES OUR PRODUCTS UNCOMPETITIVE IN THE EXPORT AS WELL AS DOMESTIC MARKET

boost the production of its goods such as electronics (including smartphones), automobiles etc in which it has a comparative advantage. So, it has imposed restrictions on the export of computer chip-making equipment, software, and high-bandwidth memory chips to China.

As a result, China not have much surplus to send to the US (and other countries), and India will have more space to boost its export of electronics, automobiles etc. Third, European Union (EU) countries have also imposed tariffs on Chinese EVs (electric vehicles) and solar equipment. Moreover, the multinational companies (MNCs) headquartered in the US and EU countries are shifting their factories away from China, thanks to growing geopolitical uncertainties, the ongoing trade war between the United States and China, cyber-security, and rule-of-law concerns, rising labour costs in China etc. This opens up opportunities as these MNCs can relocate their production bases to India. All of this reinforces a case for 'China Plus One', a potent business strategy that involves diversifying manufacturing and sourcing away from China aimed at reducing the risk of over-reliance on China for manufacturing and sourcing.

Is India ready to capitalise? None other than NITI Aayog's 'Trade Watch' report says that even as many Asian countries such as Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, and Malaysia have emerged as bigger beneficiaries of the 'China Plus One' strategy - enabled by factors such as cheaper labour, simplified tax laws, lower tariffs, signing Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) - lead-

ing to substantial surge in their exports especially in high-growth sectors, India has lagged. Although India has achieved production gains, they have not significantly contributed to domestic value addition, unlike its peer economies.

In India's high-tech sector, while exports surged by 350 per cent between 2017 and 2023, domestic value-added output fell by 18 per cent. In manufacturing, by contrast, during this period, even as domestic value-added grew at 26 per cent, it still trailed behind merchandise export growth of 44 per cent. In electronics, India's share in US imports has grown from 0.2 per cent in 2017 to 2.1 per cent in 2023, courtesy of, the government's push toward high-tech exports. However, competitors like Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Thailand dominate, with each holding a substantially higher market share in US electronics imports.

An overarching reason behind India 'dropping the catch despite the man at first slip and the ball coming in our direction' is a high-cost domestic environment (this is despite a host of incentives given under the Production Linked Incentive or PLI schemes to industries) which makes our products uncompetitive in the export as well as domestic market. It also explains why our industries demand high protective tariffs and government yields; for instance, it has on the table a proposal for a 25 per cent hike in steel import duties. It is also a major factor behind India's reluctance to join major multilateral trade agreements, such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and Comprehensive and

Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) etc which help the country to better integrate into the global economy and benefit from expanded trade opportunities by facilitating access to markets of their member countries duty-free or at close to zero tariffs. Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) contribute nearly 40 per cent of exports. But, India not being a part of such trade alliances, they are denied an opportunity to boost exports. At the same time, they suffer due to high protective tariffs on the import of basic materials such as steel. A 25 per cent hike in import duties on steel products - asked by the Ministry of Steel - will impart a deadly blow to the MSMEs.

There are four major reasons as to why costs in India are high. First, businesses in basic materials and feedstock such as copper, zinc, aluminium, oil and gas, chemicals, petrochemicals etc are natural monopolies enabling them to set high prices. Second, tax rates are pretty high particularly when it comes to petroleum products which are still taxed under the pre-GST regime. By increasing movement costs, these increase the cost of all goods across the board.

Third, power tariffs are exorbitant thanks to excessive State controls on power distribution companies. Finally, industries operate in highly interest-rate environments. India can catapult itself to the position of fully leveraging the 'China Plus One' strategy only if it effectively addresses the present high-cost syndrome.

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

De-dollarisation: A bold step toward economic equity or a path fraught with uncertainty

The global economy stands at a crossroads as the concept of 'de-dollarisation' gains momentum, sparking debates about the future of international trade and finance

The global economy is currently rife with discussions surrounding a potential 'de-dollarisation,' which pertains to the anticipated transition away from the supremacy of the US dollar in international trade and finance.

Advocates argue that it could stabilise economies, reduce inflation, and ultimately relieve financial pressure on everyday individuals. However, is this change truly the solution to the world's economic problems, or does it introduce a new set of challenges?

De-dollarisation refers to the reduction of dependence on the US dollar in the realms of global trade, investments, and reserves. For many years, the dollar has held its posi-



RACHNA LAKHPATRI

tion as the leading reserve currency globally, influencing markets and moulding economic strategies across nations. Nevertheless, numerous countries have begun to challenge this reliance on the dollar. The drive towards de-dollarisation arises from a combina-

tion of elements: an increasing yearning for financial independence, the unpredictability of US policies, and the necessity for a differential system that is more resilient against sanctions and market instability. Several nations, particularly those within economic alliances like BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), have put forth the concept of establishing a new shared currency to facilitate trade and lessen their dependence on the dollar. Undoubtedly, a significant appeal of a unified currency lies in its potential to mitigate inflation. By minimising the volatility of exchange rates and reducing reliance on fluctuations in the dollar, it could offer a pathway to sta-

bilise prices for traded goods through a singular global currency unit. Countries that rely on importing oil or other essential items ought to engage in negotiations for fixed prices, free from the influence of market fluctuations driven by the volatility of the dollar rate. Inflation, frequently influenced by fluctuations in local currency, could, in principle, be mitigated within a cohesive framework. The reasoning is straightforward: when trade and pricing frameworks are synchronised with a single currency, fluctuations in the dollar will likely exert a diminished impact from external shocks. Having more stable prices for essential items would alleviate the financial strain on



families. A unified currency could simplify many aspects of daily life for the average person. Crossing border lines may appear quite effortless, as there will be no need for currency exchange. Global enterprises will thrive in an environment where stable financial conditions enable

them to provide savings to their customers. Nevertheless, the transition to a unified currency faces several challenges. A cohesive monetary system requires exceptional coordination among countries with diverse economic priorities, growth rates, and fiscal strategies.

Creating confidence and setting up governance frameworks for the currency would present a significant challenge. Critics contend that a unified currency could unfairly benefit more robust economies, putting smaller or developing countries at risk. Without the ability to modify their currency values, nations may find it challenging to address specific economic crises effectively. In the immediate term, this may unsettle global financial systems, leading to instability as markets adjust. Although the dollar's strength might not be flawless, it serves as a stabilising force in a tumultuous global economy. The ideas of de-dollarisation and the potential rise of

a unified currency represent daring approaches to addressing enduring economic challenges. The outcome of lower inflation and an improved quality of life hinges on the ability of nations to collaborate effectively and create frameworks that prioritise fairness and stability. However, the journey towards this transformation is set to be long and complex. The discussions it has ignited suggest a more equitable economic future. Whether they evolve into genuine transformation is something only time will reveal—or if the world navigates towards fresh financial horizons is yet to be determined.

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

South Korean court issues warrants to detain impeached President Yoon, search his office

AP ■ SEOUL

South Korean court issued warrants on Tuesday to detain impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol and search his office and residence over his short-lived declaration of martial law. The country's anti-corruption agency said it is investigating whether his declaration amounted to rebellion. But experts still say there is little chance of detention or searches unless Yoon is formally removed from office.

The Seoul Western District Court issued warrants to detain Yoon and to search the presidential office and residence in central Seoul, according to a statement from the Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials, which is leading a joint investigation with police and military authorities.

Under South Korean law, the leader of a rebellion can face the death penalty or life imprisonment if convicted. Yoon has presidential immunity from most criminal prosecution, but the privilege does not extend to allegations of rebellion or treason. Yoon's powers have been sus-

ended since the opposition-controlled National Assembly voted to impeach him on December 14 over his imposition of martial law, which drew hundreds of troops and police officers into Seoul streets. Yoon has argued his decree was a legitimate act of governance, calling it a warning to the main liberal opposition Democratic Party, which he has called "a monster" and "anti-state forces" that has used its legislative majority to impeach top officials, undermine the government's budget, and which he claims sympathises with North Korea.

The Constitutional Court is to determine whether to dismiss Yoon as president or reinstate him. Experts said Yoon is likely to ignore the warrants. He's ignored repeated requests by investigative authorities to appear for questioning, and the presidential security service has blocked attempts to search his office and residence citing a law that bans raids on sites with state secrets.

A lawyer for Yoon rejected the anti-corruption agency's request for warrants on Monday, arguing it lacked legal authority to investigate rebel-

lion charges. The anti-corruption agency said it has no immediate plans on how to proceed with the warrants. "Unless Yoon voluntarily lets them detain him, there is no way to detain him," said Choi Jin, director of the Seoul-based Institute of Presidential Leadership. "Should investigators have hand-to-hand fights with the security service?" Choi said that investigators were still likely to visit Yoon's residence to show they are strictly and fairly carrying out their work.

Park Sung-min, president of Seoul-based political consulting firm MIN Consulting, said the push for an arrest warrant is likely an attempt to pressure Yoon to cooperate with investigations. Former President Park Geun-hye, who was thrown out of office in 2017 following an impeachment over a corruption scandal, also refused to meet with prosecutors while in office. She underwent questioning by them and was arrested after the Constitutional Court removed her from office. Yoon's imposition of martial law lasted only six hours but



Supporters of impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol stage a rally near the presidential residence in Seoul, South Korea. The letters read 'Oppose Impeachment', and 'Arrest Lee Jae-myung'. AP/PTI

triggered huge political turmoil, halting high-level diplomacy and rattling financial markets. Despite Yoon's deployment of troops and police, enough lawmakers managed to enter the assembly chamber to overturn it unanimously. Yoon's defence minister, police chief and several top military commanders have already been arrested over their roles in the

martial law enactment. Yoon has claimed he wasn't trying to stop the functioning of the assembly, saying that the troops were sent to maintain order, and also denied planning to arrest politicians. But comments by now-arrested commanders of military units sent to the assembly have contradicted this claim. Kwak Jong-keun, the commander of the Army Special Warfare Command, testified at the National Assembly that Yoon called on troops to "quickly knock down the door and drag out the lawmakers who are inside". Kwak said he did not carry out Yoon's orders. The country's political crisis deepened last Friday, when the Democratic Party and other small opposition parties voted to impeach acting President Han Duck-soo as well over wrangling over his refusal to fill in three justice seats at the Constitutional Court. Observers say adding more justices could affect the court's ruling on Yoon's impeachment. The deputy prime minister and finance minister, Choi Sang-mok, has become South Korea's new interim leader.

Elon Musk softens stand on H-1B visa programme, calls for 'major reforms'

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

After vowing to "go to war" to defend the H-1B visa programme, tech billionaire Elon Musk has softened his stand on the issue by calling for reforms in the "broken" system used to bring skilled foreign workers to the US. Musk, along with Indian-American tech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy, has been tapped by Trump to lead his Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). Last week, Musk argued that foreign workers were needed for tech companies like Musk's SpaceX and Tesla.

"The reason I'm in America along with so many critical people who built SpaceX, Tesla and hundreds of other companies that made America strong is because of H-1B," Musk last

week wrote on X. Musk, however, appeared to retract his earlier statement in response to a post by an X user who said America needed to be a destination for the world's most "elite talent" but argued the current H-1B system was not the solution. "Easily fixed by raising the minimum salary significantly and adding a yearly cost for maintaining the H-1B, making it materially more expensive to hire from overseas than domestically. I've been very clear that the programme is broken and needs major reform," Musk on Sunday said in a post on X.

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise.

Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China. The tech industry has long called for more H-1B visas to attract highly skilled workers to the US. Musk, who was once on an H-1B visa and whose electric vehicle company Tesla has hired workers using the programme, defended the tech industry's need to hire foreign workers. "Anyone - of any race, creed or nationality - who came to America and worked like hell to contribute to this country will forever have my respect. America is the land of freedom and opportunity. Fight with every fibre of your being to keep it that way!" he wrote on X on December 28. Musk's statement also received

backing from president-elect Donald Trump whose first administration restricted the programme in 2020, arguing that it allows businesses to replace Americans with lower-paid foreign workers. However, Trump recently said: "I've always liked the visas, I have always been in favour of the visas. That's why we have them." Musk has been consistently posting on X in favour of the programme. "There is a permanent shortage of excellent engineering talent. It is the fundamental limiting factor in Silicon Valley," Musk wrote on December 25 on X. Several of Trump's supporters and immigration hardliners have been increasingly pushing for scrapping the H-1B visa programme amid debate over immigration.

Indian-origin 'unsung heroes' on King Charles' 2025 New Year Honours List

PTI ■ LONDON

Community leaders, campaigners, academics and medics are among over 30 Indian-origin professionals to be recognised in King Charles' 2025 New Year Honours List released in London in time for New Year's Eve. Ranil Malcolm Jayawardena, a Conservative member of Parliament of Sri Lanka and Indian heritage, has been conferred a Knighthood for political and public service along with recently resigned England men's football team manager Gareth Southgate, for services to the game. London Mayor Sadiq Khan and former West Midlands Mayor Andy Street are also among those receiving Knighthoods among more than 1,200 recipients on the 2025 honours list released on

Monday night across all sectors, with particular commendation to role models in sport, healthcare, academia and voluntary service. "Every day, ordinary people go out and do extraordinary things for their communities," UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer said. "They represent the very best of the UK and that core value of service which I put at the centre of everything this government does. The New Year Honours List celebrates more of these unsung heroes, and I thank them for their incredible contribution," he said. The list, released annually by the Cabinet Office in the name of the British monarch, includes Commanders of the Order of the British Empire (CBEs) for Satwant Kaur Deol for services to further education, Charles Pritam Singh

Dhanowa OBE for services to Competition Law, and surgeon Professor Sneha Khemka for services to healthcare, science and innovation and technology. Others of Indian heritage receiving CBEs include Leena Nair, Global Chief Executive Officer of Chanel, for services to the retail and consumer sector; Mayank Prakash, President of the British Computing Society, for services to the advancement of technology professionals; and Purnima Murthy Tanuku OBE, chief executive of the National Day Nurseries Association, for services to early years education. Among the 2025 Indian-origin Officers of the Order of the British Empire (OBEs) include cardiologist Professor Sanjay Arya for services to black and minority ethnic doctors and

healthcare in north-west England; Nandini Das, Professor of Early Modern Literature and Culture and Tutorial Fellow at Exeter College, University of Oxford, for services to interdisciplinary research in the humanities and to public engagement; Tarsem Singh Dhaliwal, CEO of Iceland Foods, for services to the Welsh economy, retail and charity; Jasmine Dotiwala for services to broadcasting, music, equality, diversity and inclusion; Monica Kohli, President of Women's International Shipping and Trading Association UK and Chair of the Indian Maritime Association UK, for services to promoting diversity in the maritime industry; and Soumya Majumdar from the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) for services to law and order.

Chinese hackers remotely accessed workstations, documents: US Treasury

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Chinese hackers remotely accessed several US Treasury Department workstations and unclassified documents after compromising a third-party software service provider, the agency said on Monday. The department did not provide details on how many workstations had been accessed or what sort of documents the hackers may have obtained, but it said in a letter to lawmakers revealing the breach that "at this time there is no evidence indicating the threat actor has continued access to Treasury information".

The hack was being investigated as a "major cybersecurity incident", it added. "Treasury takes very seriously all threats against our systems, and the data it holds," a department spokesperson said in a separate statement. "Over the last four years, Treasury has significantly bolstered its cyber defence, and we will continue to work with both private and public sector partners to protect our financial system from threat actors." In Beijing, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson gave China's standard response to hacking allegations.

"We have repeatedly stated our position on such groundless accusations that lack evidence," Mao Ning said at a daily briefing. "China consistently opposes all forms of hacking, and we are even more opposed to the dissemination of false information against China for political purposes." The incident comes as US officials are continuing to grapple with the fallout of a massive Chinese cyberespionage campaign known as Salt Typhoon that gave officials in Beijing access to private texts and phone conversations of an unknown number of Americans.

Bangladesh's interim govt to announce 'proclamation of July uprising'

PTI ■ DHAKA

The interim government in Bangladesh has announced that it will prepare a "proclamation of July uprising", a day after it distanced itself from a proposed declaration with an identical title by the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement that led to the ouster of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League regime on August 5. Alam said the government took the initiative to prepare the proposed charter to "consolidate the people's unity, anti-fascist spirit and desire for state reform developed through the July uprising". The Anti-Discrimination Students Movement along with the National Citizens Committee, another grouping led by the students, two days ago in a surprise development said it would announce the procla-

amation of the July uprising on Tuesday afternoon at Dhaka's Central Shaheed Minar. However, the students' platform hurriedly called an emergency meeting around 1:30 a.m. on Tuesday and told the media that instead of the proclamation they would rather stage a "march for unity" at the same venue and time. "The Mujibist '72 constitution will be buried (in the proclamation) in the very place where the one-point declaration was made during the July uprising," the platform's convener Hasnat Abdullah told a press conference on December 29. Abdullah at that time said that "Indian aggression was initiated through the principles of the 1972 constitution (and) the proclamation will make it clear how the Mujibist constitution

destroyed the aspirations of the people and exactly how we want to replace it". The platform leader said the proclamation was expected to declare "irrelevant" the deposed premier's "Nazi Awami League" in Bangladesh as well. "We believe the way our revolution was embraced by all anti-fascists, this proclamation will also contain everyone's hopes and aspirations," said Sarjis Alam, anti-discrimination students' movement leader and National Citizens' Committee chief organiser. The 1972 constitution was framed a year after the emergence of independent Bangladesh by representatives elected in the 1970 elections in line with their "mandate" as "constituent assembly" members with Awami League under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman gain-

ing an absolute majority. The party won 160 of the 162 general seats and all seven women's seats in then-East Pakistan. However, Pakistan's then-military junta under General Yahya Khan eventually launched a sudden army crackdown leading to the Liberation War. The interim government visibly distanced itself from the "proclamation" with Yunus' press secretary saying "the government has nothing to do with it" and "wants to see it (proclamation) as 'private initiative'". Awami League has not been seen in the public sphere since the August 5 ouster of the regime as many of its leaders have been arrested or are on the run at home and abroad, limiting their activities on social media platforms occasionally.

Cities welcome New Year in celebrations tinged with local traditions

AP ■ WELLINGTON

Cities around the world are readying to ring in the New Year with celebrations highlighting local cultures and traditions, after a year roiled by ongoing conflict and political instability. Countries in the South Pacific Ocean will be the first to welcome 2025, with midnight in New Zealand striking 18 hours before the ball drop in Times Square in New York. In New Zealand's largest city, Auckland, thousands were expected to throng the downtown or climb the city's ring of volcanic peaks for a fireworks vantage point — and a light display recognizing Auckland's Indigenous tribes. It follows a year marked by protests over Maori rights in the nation of 5 million. Two hours later in Australia, more than 1 million people are expected at Sydney Harbor for the traditional fireworks. British pop star Robbie Williams will lead a singalong and Indigenous ceremonies and performances will acknowledge the land's first people. Asia gets ready for the Year of the

Snake: Much of Japan has shut down ahead of the nation's biggest holiday, as temples and homes underwent a thorough cleaning, including swatting floor mats called "tatami" with big sticks. The upcoming Year of the Snake in the Asian zodiac is heralded as one of rebirth — alluding to the reptile's shedding skin. Stores in Japan, which observes the zodiac cycle from January 1, have been selling tiny figures of smiling snakes and other snake-themed products. Other places in Asia will start marking the Year of the Snake later, with the Lunar New Year. In South Korea, celebrations were cut back or cancelled as the country observes a period of national mourning following the Sunday crash of a Jeju Air flight at Muan that killed 179 people. **West's rivals exchange goodwill:** Chinese state media covered an exchange of New Year's greetings between leader Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin in a reminder of growing closeness between two leaders who face tensions with the west. Xi told Putin that their countries will "always move forward hand in hand", the official Xinhua News

Agency said Tuesday. China has maintained ties and a robust trade with Russia since the latter's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, helping to offset Western sanctions and attempts to isolate Putin. **Midnight Mass, with bubbles:** Rome's traditional New Year's Eve festivities have an additional draw: the start of Pope Francis' Holy Year, the once every quarter-century celebration projected to bring some 32 million pilgrims to the Eternal City in 2025. On Tuesday, Francis will celebrate a vespers at St. Peter's Basilica, followed by Mass on Wednesday, when he is expected to once again appeal for peace amid wars raging in Ukraine and the Middle East. Meanwhile, in the United States, the Cathedral of Saint Paul in Minnesota will host an 11 p.m. Mass followed by a champagne reception with toasts. January 1 is a day of obligation for Catholics, marking the Solemnity of Mary, and many



churches will hold vigil Masses on Tuesday afternoon and evening. **Paris recaptures the Olympic spirit:** Paris will cap a momentous 2024 with its traditional festive countdown and fireworks extravaganza on the famed Champs-Élysées. The Summer Olympics and Paralympic Games hosted in the French capital from July to September transformed the city into a site of joy, fraternity and astonishing sporting achievements, and marked another major mile-

stone in its recovery from deadly Islamist extremist attacks in 2015. **Britons will brave wintry weather:** London is due to ring in the New Year with a pyrotechnic display along the River Thames and a parade through the city centre on Wednesday featuring 10,000 performers. The fireworks will explode against the backdrop of the London Eye, the massive Ferris wheel across the river from Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament. With a storm bringing bitter weather to other parts of the United Kingdom, however, festivities in Edinburgh, Scotland — including the Hogmanay Street party, garden concert and castle pyrotechnics show — were already cancelled. **Rio to see 2 million revellers:** Rio de Janeiro will throw Brazil's main New Year's Eve bash on Copacabana Beach, with 10 ferries offshore bearing 12 straight min-

utes of fireworks. Thousands of tourists in six cruise ships will witness the show up close. Rio's City Hall was closely guarding its plans for a display of lights and sounds. More than 2 million people are expected at the Copacabana, hoping to squeeze in to concerts by superstar Brazilian artists such as pop singer Anitta and Grammy-award winner Caetano Veloso. **American traditions old and new:** In New York City, the organization managing Times Square has tested its famous ball drop, and inspected 2025 numerals, lights and thousands of crystals, as part of a tradition going back to 1907. This year's celebration will include musical performances by TLC, Jonas Brothers, Rita Ora, and Sophie Ellis-Bextor. The party, covering multiple blocks around the city's main tourism and theatre hub, is expected to draw large crowds despite rain and chilly weather. Meanwhile, Las Vegas will bid farewell to 2024 with old — and some new — traditions. Its annual eight-minute pyrotechnic show will be on in the Las Vegas Strip, with 340,000 people anticipated as

fireworks are launched from the rooftops of nine casinos. Nearby, the massive Sphere venue will display for the first time countdowns to midnight in different time zones. **Country music, football and a midnight race:** In Pasadena, enthusiastic Rose Parade spectators were to camp out on the cold streets and ring in the New Year hoping for prime spots for the iconic Southern California tradition. The parade precedes the Rose Bowl football game between the Ohio State Buckeyes and the Oregon Ducks on January 1. Thousands are to participate in a midnight 5K race following the parade route. Some 200,000 people will flock to a party in Nashville, Tennessee, featuring a five-hour show by some of country music's biggest stars. At midnight — an hour after New York's — a 16-foot tall music note weighing 400 pounds will drop as fireworks light the sky. Celebrations will echo around the globe as the New Year arrives in different time zones, with American Samoa among the last to welcome 2025 a full 24 hours after New Zealand.

US, Boeing investigators examine site of deadly South Korean plane crash

AP ■ SEOUL

A team of US investigators including representatives from Boeing have examined the site of a plane crash that killed 179 people in South Korea while authorities were conducting safety inspections on all Boeing 737-800 aircraft operated by the country's airlines.



aircraft operations. John Hansman, an aviation expert at MIT, said the crash was most likely the result of a problem with the plane's hydraulic control systems. He said that would be consistent with the landing gear and wing flaps not being deployed "and might indicate a control issue which would explain the rush to get on the ground".

Russian missiles, drones attack on Ukrainian targets

AP ■ KYIV

Russia launched an aerial attack on Ukraine on Tuesday, striking the capital and other regions with multiple missiles and drones. Ukraine's air force reported a ballistic missile threat at 3:00 a.m. (0100 GMT), with at least two explosions heard in Kyiv minutes later.



A Ukrainian serviceman cries upon seeing his daughter after returning from captivity during a POWs exchange between Russia and Ukraine, in Ukraine.

sought to overwhelm its air defences with combined strikes involving large numbers of missiles and drones. Russian attacks come as uncertainty looms over the course of the nearly three-year conflict.

On Monday, President Joe Biden announced that the United States will send an additional USD billion in weapons to Ukraine as his administration works quickly to spend all the money it has available to help Kyiv fight off Russia before Trump takes office.

throughout the year. Early Tuesday, Russia's Defence Ministry said that air defences shot down 68 Ukrainian drones over several regions early Tuesday.

the city of Sevastopol, Mikhail Razvozhayev, said that Russian defenses downed four aerial drones attacking the city and sank two uncrewed boats near the shore. Meanwhile, Ukraine's Military Intelligence Directorate, known under its acronym GUR, claimed that one of its naval drones on Tuesday shot down a Russian helicopter with a missile, marking the first time when an aerial target was destroyed by an uncrewed vessel.

China Russia ties advancing to higher levels, says President Xi

PTI ■ BEIJING

China and Russia are moving forward hand in hand along the "right path" of non-alliance, non-confrontation and their relations have been advancing towards "higher levels," Chinese President Xi Jinping said on Tuesday in his New Year message to his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin.

technology is progressing in an orderly manner, the Russian president according to China's state-run Xinhua news agency. Both leaders exchanged greetings ahead of the January 20 swearing-in of President-elect Donald Trump who threatened to impose punitive tariffs on Chinese exports to the US besides hardening American policy towards China and hinted at a strategic shift of warming up to Putin to end the Ukraine war.

eral relations and major international and regional issues of common concern. "The political mutual trust and strategic coordination between the two sides have been advancing toward higher levels under the strategic guidance of the two leaders," Xi said.

Pak govt, Imran's PTI to meet to resolve political differences

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The Pakistan government and opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) negotiators are scheduled to meet for a crucial in-camera meeting to resolve sticky political differences, a report said on Tuesday.

ation of a judicial commission to investigate the violent events of May 9, 2023, and the November 26 crackdown on PTI workers in Islamabad, as well as the release of all political prisoners, including 72-year-old Khan. Former National Assembly Speaker and PTI leader Asad Qaiser reiterated these demands and said the party was firm on the need for a commission to investigate the May 9 and November 26 incidents. He also stressed the need for Khan's release.

डिलिजेंट बिजनेस प्राइवेट लिमिटेड (अंतरिक्ष वैली) 34/C-8, सेक्टर-8, रोहिणी, नई दिल्ली, 110085

यह सूचित किया जाता है कि डिलिजेंट बिजनेस प्राइवेट लिमिटेड (अंतरिक्ष वैली) द्वारा बनाए गए आवासीय परिसर में निम्नलिखित यूनिट/प्लेट का आरक्षण/बुकिंग निधारित भुगतान न करने और संपर्क में न रहने के कारण रद्द कर दिया गया है:

डिलिजेंट बिजनेस प्राइवेट लिमिटेड ने उपर्युक्त ग्राहकों से संपर्क करने के लिए सभी प्रयास किए हैं, लेकिन वे ग्राहकों से संपर्क स्थापित करने में असफल रहे इस कारणवश, यह नोटिस सार्वजनिक किया जा रहा है। उपर्युक्त बुकिंग रद्द होने पर संबंधित व्यक्ति या पार्टी के लिए कोई दावा या कानूनी अधिकार नहीं होगा। सभी ग्राहकों से निवेदन है कि वे अपने द्वारा जमा की गई राशि को डिलिजेंट बिजनेस प्राइवेट लिमिटेड से 15 दिन के अंदर प्राप्त करें। आपका ध्यान आकर्षित करने के लिए धन्यवाद।

डिलिजेंट बिजनेस प्राइवेट लिमिटेड (अंतरिक्ष वैली) 34/C-8, सेक्टर-8, रोहिणी, नई दिल्ली, 110085

PUBLIC NOTICE It is for general information that I Sudesh W/o Shri Ranvir Singh residing at 18, Goodwill Apartment, Sector-13, Rohini, North West Delhi-110085 declare that name of mine and my husband has been wrongly written as Sudesh Kumari and Shri Ranvir Singh in driving licence No-P08102007548548. The actual name of mine and my husband Sudesh and Shri Ranvir Singh respectively which may be amended accordingly.

PROVISION OF ELEPHANT INTRUSION DETECTION SYSTEM E-Tender Notice No. N_11_HQ_IDS 2024-25. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: Tender No. N_11_HQ_IDS 2024-25. Brief Description of Item: Provision of Elephant Intrusion Detection System for detection of elephant movements with tracking and Level crossing alerts to increase Safety and capacity enhancement over N.F Railway in Rangiya Division.

PUBLIC NOTICE NOTICE is hereby given that Surendra Mohan Sharma claims to be owner and in possession of First Floor, Prop No. 4, Raj Block, Naveen Shahdara, Shahdara, Delhi 32 (herein after called the said property) by virtue of Sale Deed Dated 10.06.2013 Regd. vide Doc No. 2901/17 Relinquishment Deed executed by Kiran Issar, Suman Sharma and Archana Thapar in favor of Surendra Mohan Sharma (Legal heirs of Murari Lal Sharma) Regd vide doc. No. 2024/231/8999 & said Surendra Mohan Sharma has agreed to sell the said Property to Maman Aggarwal & said Maman Aggarwal agreed to create a mortgage in favour of our clients IDFC First Bank Ltd, ITO Branch, any person's having claim against the said Property, or any part thereof, by way of sale, exchange, mortgage (equitable/registered or otherwise), gift, trust, inheritance, lien or otherwise now or hereafter, are hereby intimated to notify the same in writing to us with supporting documentary evidence at the address mentioned below within 7 days from the date hereof, failing which the claim or claims, if any, of such person or persons will be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned and our client shall proceed with the disbursement of loan and subsequent creation of mortgage in respect thereof.

PUBLIC NOTICE Notice is hereby given that the Certificate(s) for the under mentioned Equity Shares of SRF Limited, Regd. Office: The Galleria, DLF Mayur Vihar, Unit No. 236 & 237, 2nd Floor, Mayur Vihar Phase 1 Extn, Delhi - 110091, Corporate Office: Block-C, Sector 45, Gurugram, Haryana-122003, have been lost / misplaced and the holder(s) or purchaser(s) of the said Equity Shares have applied to the Company to issue duplicate Share Certificate(s). Any person who has a claim in respect of the said Shares should lodge the same with the Company at its Corporate Office within 15 days from this date else the Company will proceed to issue duplicate certificate(s) to the aforesaid applicants without any further intimation. Folio No.: SRF0033658, Name of Shareholder: Ved Parkash Chachra, No. of Shares: 264, Distinctive Nos. From / To: 308308726 / 308308988 Certificate Nos. From / To: 1125553 / 1125553 Date: 1/1/2025 Name of Shareholder(s): Place: New Delhi Rachna Mehta

ELECTRICAL GENERAL WORKS IN KATIHAH DIVISION Tender Notice No. EL_GEN_25_24-25. Dated: 27-12-2024. E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work: Name of Work: Electrical General work in connection with "At New Jalpaiguri - Construction of one coach length sick Line-2 coach Holding (Extension-1)". Approx. Value: ₹67,12,799.31/-; Earnest Money: ₹1,34,300/-; Last Date & time for closing of tender at 15:00 hrs and opening at 15:30 hrs. on 28-01-2025. For complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available upto 15:00 hrs. on 28-01-2025 in the website www.reps.gov.in

PUBLIC NOTICE It is to inform to the public at large that Mrs. Bimla had acquired Double Storey Built-up Property No. NW/198-A, area measuring 25 sq. yards, Kharsa No. 3/17, situated in the area of Vill. Khayla, colony known as Vishnu Garden, New Delhi vide Regd. IGPA Dt. 24.05.2011 along with ATS & Will executed by Mrs. Gurabachan Kaur and Now Mrs. Bimla is the undisputed owner of the said property.

डिलिजेंट बिजनेस प्राइवेट लिमिटेड (अंतरिक्ष वैली) 34/C-8, सेक्टर-8, रोहिणी, नई दिल्ली, 110085

I, Ajay Dubey S/o Dinesh Chandra Dubey R/o B/1606, Apex The Florus, Sector-18, Vasundhara, Ghaziabad (U.P) have changed my daughter's name from Arshi Dubey to Aarshi Dubey for all future purposes.

डिलिजेंट बिजनेस प्राइवेट लिमिटेड (अंतरिक्ष वैली) 34/C-8, सेक्टर-8, रोहिणी, नई दिल्ली, 110085

PROVISION OF ELEPHANT INTRUSION DETECTION SYSTEM Tender Notice No.: N_10_HQ_IDS 2024-25; dttd.: 26-12-2024. E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work: Tender No.: N_10_HQ_IDS 2024-25; Name of work: Provision of Elephant Intrusion Detection System for detection of elephant movements with tracking and Level crossing alerts to increase Safety and capacity enhancement over N.F Railway in Katihah and Alipurduar Division. Advertised Value: ₹37,42,86,759.66/-; Earnest Money: ₹20,21,500/-; Date & time of closing of tender at 15:00 hrs. on 24-01-2025. For complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available in website www.reps.gov.in

PROVISION OF ELEPHANT INTRUSION DETECTION SYSTEM E-Tender Notice No. N_11_HQ_IDS 2024-25. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: Tender No. N_11_HQ_IDS 2024-25. Brief Description of Item: Provision of Elephant Intrusion Detection System for detection of elephant movements with tracking and Level crossing alerts to increase Safety and capacity enhancement over N.F Railway in Rangiya Division. Tender Value: ₹33,36,79,441.05/-; Earnest Money: ₹18,18,400/-; Date & Time of closing of Tender: 15.00 hrs. on 24-01-2025. The complete information of the tender document of above e-tender will be available in the website www.reps.gov.in

CHANGE OF NAME I, Khusbu D/o JC-303758P Sub(DMT) Raj Kumar, R/o-Vill-Bagpur PO- Sahpau, Teh-Sadabad, Dist- Hathras, U.P. 281307, have changed my name from Khusbu to Khushboo, vide affidavit dated 31/12/2024 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(1181)C I, Gaurav S/o JC-303758P Sub(DMT) Raj Kumar, R/o-Vill-Bagpur PO- Sahpau, Teh-Sadabad, Dist- Hathras, U.P. 281307, have changed my name from Gaurav to Gaurav Kumar, vide affidavit dated 31/12/2024 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(1182)C I, JC-356836H Nb/Sub Vitthal Eknath Dange R/o- At- Nele, Post- Kidangaon, Teh-Dist-Satara, Maharashtra- 415015, have changed my daughter's name from Shraddha Vitthal Dange to Shraddha Vitthal Dange, vide affidavit dated 31/12/2024 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(1183)C I, hitherto known as Arora Prabhjot S/o- Iqbal Singh, R/o-175, 3rd Floor, Ambika Vihar, Paschim Vihar, West Delhi, Delhi- 110087, have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Prabhjot Singh.

PD(1184)C I, Ajay Dubey S/o Dinesh Chandra Dubey R/o B/1606, Apex The Florus, Sector-18, Vasundhara, Ghaziabad (U.P) have changed my daughter's name from Arshi Dubey to Aarshi Dubey for all future purposes.

PD(1179)A It is for general public information that I, SREENIVASULU K alias KADIYALA SREENIVASULU S/O ANJAPPA K born on 21 July 1981, R/o 146/801, SEKHON VIHAR PALAM, DELHI CANTT, NEW DELHI-110010 inform that I have changed my name from SREENIVASULU K to KADIYALA SREENIVASULU vide affidavit dt 31 Dec 24, which may be amended accordingly.

PD(1180)A

PUBLIC NOTICE To be known to all that, by birth my name is Kumari Pawan, in all my educational documents, Aadhar card, Pan Card etc. my name is written as Pawan Rana, I hereby declare that Kumari Pawan and Pawan Rana are same and one person. I. Me hereby further declare that my father's name is Sham Sher Singh, however in my documents his name is written as Shamsher Singh Rana, I hereby declare that Sham Sher Singh and Shamsher Singh Rana are same and one person and names of my father. I hereby also declare that my mother's name is Bhawari Devi, however in my passport her name is written as Bhoori Devi and in some of documents her name is also spelled as Bahora Devi, I hereby declare that Shamsher Singh, Bhoori Devi and Bahora Devi are same and one person and names of my mother. PAWAN RANA Wo Late Sanjay Chaudhary Do Late Sham Sher Singh

PUBLIC NOTICE It is to notify that we are going to discard the patient medical records of Sitarum Bhartia Institute of Science and Research from January 2019 to December 2019. If any person requires any information regarding this record can apply and contact the Medical Record Department within 30 days of this publication. After that hospital has right to destroy the record according to the MCI guidelines. Sd/- Sitarum Bhartia Institute of Science and Research

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION KINDLY VISIT : www.haryanaeprocurement.gov.in or www.etenders.hry.nic.in

FORM 6 INVITATION FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST FOR HI TECH FERROUS & NON FERROUS INDIA PRIVATE LIMITED OPERATING IN METAL INDUSTRY (PROCESSING OF GHD WIRES) AT BAWAL, HARYANA AND MURAD NAGAR, GHUZIBAD (Under sub-regulation (1) of regulation 38A of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (Insolvency Resolution Process for Corporate Persons) Regulations, 2016)

RELEVANT PARTICULARS 1. Name of the corporate debtor along with PAN & CIN/ LLP No. HI TECH FERROUS & NON FERROUS INDIA PRIVATE LIMITED CIN: U28112UP2009PT037895 PAN: AACCH2669D

PUBLIC NOTICE It is to inform to the public at large that Mrs. Bimla had acquired Double Storey Built-up Property No. NW/198-A, area measuring 25 sq. yards, Kharsa No. 3/17, situated in the area of Vill. Khayla, colony known as Vishnu Garden, New Delhi vide Regd. IGPA Dt. 24.05.2011 along with ATS & Will executed by Mrs. Gurabachan Kaur and Now Mrs. Bimla is the undisputed owner of the said property.

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Rupee falls 13 paise to all-time closing low of 85.65 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee depreciated 13 paise to close at fresh record low of 85.65 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, ending the year with a sharp 3 per cent loss on significant foreign fund outflows and a strong greenback in global markets. Forex traders said the rupee has been under continued pressure amid the Federal Reserve's cautious stance on rate cuts and the "Trump factor" driving up the dollar index (DXY) and US 10-year bond yields. Additionally, slowing domestic macroeconomic growth, widening trade deficit and persistent foreign fund outflows have further fuelled the rupee's depreciation. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at

85.54 and touched the lowest level of 85.66 against the greenback during intra-day trade. The unit ended the session at 85.65 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a fall of 13 paise over its previous close. On Monday, the rupee dropped 4 paise to 85.52 against the US dollar. The domestic unit has depreciated against the greenback by almost 3 per cent from 83.16 on December 29, 2023, to 85.65 on December 31, 2024. The local currency breached the crucial 84-level on October 10, surpassed 85-dollar mark on December 19 and even touched the lifetime low of 85.80 intraday on December 27, recording the steepest single-day fall in nearly two years. According to Anuj



Choudhary - Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, the rupee is expected to trade with a negative bias on elevated crude oil prices, overall strength in the US dollar and month-end dollar demand from importers. Moreover, persistent selling pressure by foreign funds added further strain on the currency. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded Rs 1,893.16 crore in the capital markets on net basis on Monday, according to exchange data. In 2024, foreign investors significantly scaled back their investments in Indian equities, with net inflows amounting to a little over Rs 5,000 crore, as elevated domestic valuations, coupled with geopolitical uncertainties prompted investors to adopt

a more cautious stance. In 2023, Rs 1.71 lakh crore net investment was made in the domestic equity market. "However, any intervention by the RBI may support the rupee at lower levels. Volumes may remain thin due to the New Year holiday. USD/INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 85.40 to 85.85," Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan - said. India's external debt rose to USD 711.8 billion as of September this year, up 4.3 per cent over June 2024, as per the data released by the Finance Ministry. At the end of September 2023, the external debt stood at USD 637.1 billion. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading lower

by 0.11 per cent at 108.01. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, surged 0.57 per cent to USD 74.41 per barrel in futures trade. On the domestic equity market front, the 30-share benchmark index Sensex closed 109.12 points, or 0.14 per cent lower, at 78,139.01 points. The Nifty settled on a flat note at 23,644.80 points. On the domestic macroeconomic front, India's current account deficit (CAD) moderated marginally to USD 11.2 billion or 1.2 per cent of GDP year-on-year in the July-September quarter of 2024-25, according to Reserve Bank data. The CAD, an indicator of the country's external payment scenario, was USD 11.3 billion or 1.3 per cent of GDP during the second quarter of 2023-24.

Reliance spends USD 13 bn on acquisitions in five years

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries Ltd has spent USD 13 billion on acquisitions in the past five years across new energy, telecom, retail and media business to script a pivot away from core oil and petrochemicals business to clean energy and consumer facing verticals. Last week, Reliance bought oncology platform Karkinos Healthcare for Rs 375 crore, adding another stack to its diagnostic and digital healthcare ecosystem, Morgan Stanley said in a report. "Over the past five years, RIL has announced USD 13 billion in acquisitions with 14 per cent in new energy, 48 per cent in technology, media and telecommunications (TMT), 9 per cent in retail, and increasingly more in healthcare," it said. Of this, USD 6 billion was in acquisition of companies and investment in media and education business and USD 2.6 billion in telecom and internet ver-



ticals. It spent USD 1.7 billion on acquisitions in new energy and USD 1.14 billion in retail, according to Morgan Stanley. RIL's biggest acquisition in the last five years has been buyout of local cable TV and internet service providers Hathway Cable and Datacom Ltd for USD 981 million. It spent USD 771 million on buying Norwegian-headquartered solar panel maker REC Solar Holdings and another USD 767 million on buying search and database firm JustDial, the report said.

Last week, it acquired a 100 per cent stake in Karkinos Healthcare, increasing its exposure to the diagnostic and healthcare ecosystem following previous investments like HAGI, Netmeds and Strand Life Science. Karkinos provides technology driven, innovative solutions for early detection, diagnosis and management of cancer, according to Morgan Stanley. It acts like a care partner during a patient's cancer treatment. Other investors in the com-

pany have included Tata Group, Rakuten, Mayo Clinic, and Hero Enterprise. "RIL aims to leverage its technological expertise and vast distribution networks to create more integrated healthcare system-digital health platforms, telemedicine services and advanced healthcare delivery models," the brokerage said. Karkinos was incorporated in India on July 24, 2020 and is in the business of providing technology-driven, innovative solutions for the early detection, diagnosis, and management of cancer. It had a turnover of about Rs 22 crore in the 2022-23 fiscal year. Karkinos has cancelled the existing outstanding 30,075 equity shares held by the erstwhile shareholders of the company. Its previous prominent investors included Ewart Investments Ltd (100 per cent subsidiary of Tata Sons), Reliance Digital Health Ltd (a subsidiary of Reliance Industries), Mayo Clinic (US), Sundar Raman (Director at

Reliance Foundation Youth Sports and former COO of Indian Premier League since 2008), and Ravi Kant (ex-MD of Tata Motors). "The company is focused on providing end-to-end services relating to early detection and effective treatment of cancer at substantially lower than prevailing rates, while still generating healthy profitability. In order to meet this vision, Karkinos started partnering with hospitals to provide oncology services (testing, radiation therapy, etc.). The company has partnered with around 60 hospitals till December 2023. It is through a subsidiary setting up a 150-bed multispecialty cancer hospital at Imphal, Manipur. Going forward, its source of income was said to be via Advanced Cancer Care Diagnostics and Research (ACCDR), Distributed Cancer Care Network (DCCN), tie-ups with corporates for early diagnosis of cancer, and cancer care hospital.

Sensex declines 109 pts in final session, ends 2024 with over 8 pc gains

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended lower in the final session of 2024 on Tuesday amid persistent foreign fund outflows and weak trends in the global markets. Falling for the second straight day, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex declined 109.12 points or 0.14 per cent to settle at 78,139.01. Intra-day, it tanked 687.34 points or 0.87 per cent to 77,560.79. The NSE Nifty dipped marginally by 0.10 points to settle at 23,644.80. In the entire 2024, the Sensex jumped 5,898.75 points or 8.16 per cent, and the Nifty surged 1,913.4 points or 8.80 per cent. The BSE benchmark Sensex hit its record peak of 85,978.25 on September 27 this year, and the NSE Nifty also reached the lifetime high of 26,277.35 on the same day. From the 30 blue-chip pack, Tech Mahindra, Zomato, Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys,



ICICI Bank, Bajaj Finance, Hindustan Unilever and HCL Technologies were the major laggards on Tuesday. Kotak Mahindra Bank, ITC, UltraTech Cement and Tata Motors were among the gainers. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 1,893.16 crore on Monday, according to exchange data. In Asian markets, and Shanghai settled lower while Hong Kong ended in the pos-

itive territory. Markets were closed in Tokyo and Seoul for New Year holidays. European markets were trading mostly higher. US markets ended lower on Monday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.46 per cent to USD 74.34 a barrel. The 30-share BSE benchmark tumbled 450.94 points or 0.57 per cent to settle at 78,248.13 on Monday. The Nifty declined 168.50 points or 0.71 per cent to 23,644.90.

After rough ride in 2024, Indian startups look for a promising new year

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian startup ecosystem experienced a roller-coaster ride in 2024, characterised by a slight-yet-concerning decline in funding activity and a shift in investor sentiment, alongside a silver lining with several startups achieving unicorn status. Despite facing global economic challenges, India's startups showcased remarkable resilience, adeptly navigating changing market conditions, while continuing to attract investments. According to data from Tracxn, Indian startups raised a total of USD 30.4 billion in funding throughout 2024, a 6.5 per cent decline from the USD 32.5 billion secured in 2023. Despite this dip, the Indian startup ecosystem demonstrated resilience, with several companies achieving unicorn status this year. Noteworthy entrants to the unicorn club include Rapido, Ather, Perfios, Porter, and Money View, high-

lighting ongoing innovation and investment interest in the sector. The overall funding trend reflects a cautious-yet-optimistic approach from investors, as they navigate a more selective funding environment, while still recognising the potential of high-growth startups in India. A slight shift towards early-stage investments was evident during the year, with seed and Series A rounds gaining traction, as investors sought to back innovative ideas with long-term potential. Businesses that could demonstrate robust underlying unit economics found greater favour this year, Dushyant Singh, Managing Partner at Playbook Partners, noted. Gig economy, retail, and enterprise applications stood out as top-performing sectors, according to Tracxn. Quick commerce emerged as a high-growth sector, with 40 active companies, including unicorns Zepto, Blinkit, and

Swiggy Instamart, and promising newcomers Dunzo, Swish, and Farmako. In July, the government announced the abolishment of the angel tax on investments in startups to provide a more conducive environment for growth. "By eliminating this tax, the government has provided a much-needed boost to investors and entrepreneurs, enabling greater liquidity and more flexible funding options for startups. However, fewer funding rounds, high operational costs, and infrastructure challenges remain ongoing factors that need attention," said Jeenendra Bhandari, Chairman, JITO Incubation and Innovation Foundation (JIIF). There was an encouraging rise in women entrepreneurs and founders from Tier 2 and 3 towns. Ninad Karpe from 100X.VC said the entrepreneurial culture has transcended its traditional boundaries. "The entrepreneurial culture has transcended its tra-



ditional boundaries, seeping into colleges, schools, and even Tier 2 and 3 towns. Founders from these regions are bringing fresh perspectives, solving hyperlocal problems, and creating opportunities that were previously untapped. "There's a noticeable rise in women entrepreneurs, signalling a positive shift in inclusivity and diversity within the startup ecosystem," he said. According to official data, India has more than 73,000 startups with at least one

woman director that have been recognised under the Startup India Initiative. Despite the positive trends, challenges persist. Global economic uncertainties have a direct impact on investor sentiment and funding availability. "While the number of deals has seen a quarterly increase of 10-20 per cent... Deal values have declined significantly. This reflects a cautious investment climate, with most funding rounds being either follow-

ups by existing investors or bridge rounds aimed at extending the runway rather than driving growth. The focus has shifted from valuation-driven funding to sustainability and profitability," FAAD Capital CEO Aditya Arora said. The growth in venture capital this year was mainly driven by increase in mid and late-stage investment, Singh seconded. Startups continue to grapple with rising operational costs, which can strain their financial sustainability. Several Indian startups have gained fame and achieved unicorn status despite not being profitable. Many startups still face challenges related to inadequate physical infrastructure, particularly in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities. This can hugely affect logistics, supply chain management, and overall operational efficiency. Moreover, navigating compliance requirements can be cumbersome for new businesses, diverting resources away from innovation and growth.

A fitting saying for the current situation of the Indian startup ecosystem could be: "In the midst of adversity, hope is the seed from which resilience grows." Despite a rough patch in recent years, the Indian startup landscape has shown remarkable buoyancy. The increasing trend of Indians returning from abroad to establish businesses is also expected to invigorate the ecosystem with global expertise, Bhandari believes. Cautious optimism in 2024 is expected to continue into 2025, broader market recovery may still be two years away, with significant improvements anticipated by 2026, Arora said. "In the interim, the ecosystem is expected to witness an increase in SME IPOs, unlocking real value for investors and startups alike," he said. The rise of artificial intelligence, machine learning, and blockchain technologies is expected to attract significant investment. Startups leveraging

these technologies will likely be at the forefront of funding conversations. Deloitte's Chirag Agrawal said AI is enabling efficient operations and supporting data-driven decision-making. AI-focused startups are attracting significant investments, particularly in high-impact areas such as healthcare, finance, and sustainability, he said. For 2025, India's entrepreneurial ecosystem is poised for continued growth, driven by technological advancements, government reforms, and a favourable macroeconomic environment. "Emerging trends include significant investments in Deep Tech, Electric Vehicles, Clean Tech, Defence Tech, and Space Tech. These sectors are expected to attract substantial funding, particularly in AI, sustainable technologies, and space commercialization, positioning India as a global leader in these high-potential areas," he said.

Gold set to extend record run; may hit Rs 90,000 in 2025 on global cues

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold, a safe-haven bet, is likely to continue its record-smashing journey in the New Year, rising to Rs 85,000 per 10 grams and even Rs 90,000 level in domestic markets if geopolitical tensions and global economic uncertainties continue. Experts believe that precious metals remain strong performers in 2025 as well, buoyed by geopolitical tensions, central bank purchases, and a pivot towards lower interest rates by major central banks. The outlook for gold in 2025 remains positive, though the pace of growth may moderate compared to 2024, LKP Securities VP Research Analyst - Commodity and Currency, Jateen Trivedi told PTI. "Domestic gold prices are expected to reach Rs 85,000 as modest targets, with a best-case scenario of Rs 90,000 and silver expected to deliver bit higher gains towards Rs 1.1 lakh on modest and even hit Rs 1.25 lakh, if geopolitical tensions persist or escalate," he said. He noted that interest rate

cycles are also pivotal as a global shift toward lower interest rates would inject liquidity into markets and weaken the US Dollar, bolstering gold prices. However, the US Federal Reserve's cautious approach to rate cuts may temper the pace of price increases. Additionally, sustained gold purchases by central banks, driven by diversification strategies and concerns over currency stability will provide strong support to bullion, Trivedi added. Several factors have shaped the demand demand and supply



dynamics of gold in 2024, including a turbulent geopolitical landscape. The ongoing Russia-Ukraine war and tensions in West Asia have spurred safe-haven demand for bullion, thus impacting its prices this year. "Gold and silver markets have been directly impacted by a turbulent geopolitical environment. These geopolitical crises have typically caused an immediate 2-3 per cent spike in prices, reaffirming investors' preference for precious metals as a shield against uncertainty," Trivedi said.

However, Commtrendz Research co-founder and CEO Gnanasekar Thiagarajan told PTI that gold prices are struggling to keep up the momentum as the geopolitical uncertainty and economic uncertainty premium have started fading away. "Market participants are now taking into consideration US President-elect Donald Trump's tariff era, economic policies and their potential future impact on the Fed's mandate to bring inflation down to 2 per cent. Higher inflationary expectations could undermine the appeal for bullion. Furthermore, we would not be surprised to see the Fed opt for a cut from May onwards, as it could allow for a clearer picture to be formed on the new administration's actual economic policies rather than comments made potentially to gain negotiation leverage with foreign counterparts," he stated. The outlook is bearish for gold in the first half of 2025, with the possibility of testing USD 2,455 (MCX: 73,000-73,500), he said.

The rupee is expected to depreciate further, which could arrest the fall in local prices relative to international prices in the coming year, he added. In the domestic markets, the government's decision in July this year to cut gold import duty by 6 per cent led to a sharp 7 per cent correction in gold prices, equivalent to Rs 5,000 per 10 grams. The price drop spurred physical demand for gold during the festive and wedding seasons. The reduction not only made gold more affordable but also boosted increased buying, supporting robust consumption by the jewellers and consumers. "Gold jewellery consumption grew by 17 per cent in 2024, primarily driven by volatility in gold prices, along with festive and marriage-related demand. Additionally, the sharp 900 basis points reduction in import duty announced in the Union Budget of July 2024 spurred demand for jewellery, bars, and coins," Rahul Kalantri, Vice President of Commodities at Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

INBRIEF

RECPDCL HANDOVERS SPV TO POWER GRID CORPORATION



Gurugram: REC Power Development and Consultancy Limited (RECPDCL), a wholly owned subsidiary of REC Limited, the Maharatna CPSU under the aegis of Ministry of Power, has handed over a project specific SPV (Special Purpose Vehicle), viz. Rajasthan IV 4A Power Transmission Limited to Power Grid Corporation of India Limited on 30th December, 2024 at Gurugram. Power Grid Corporation of India Limited emerged as the Transmission Service Provider (TSP) through Tariff-Based Competitive Bidding (TBCB) process conducted by RECPDCL, the Bid Process Coordinator, for development of the transmission project on Build, Own, Operate & Transfer (BOOT) basis. The transmission scheme is planned for evacuation of 3.5 GW of RE power from Rajasthan Renewable Energy Zone, which covers establishment of 765/400 kV, 2 X1500 MVA S/S near Ghoror (Uttar Pradesh), Augmentation of Barmer - I Pooling Station, 283.05 Kms of 765 kV line and 43.28 Kms of 400 kV line along with associated works. The estimated cost of the project is Rs. 5378.03 Crores.

Indian Grandmaster R Vaishali wins World blitz finals qualifier

PTI ■ NEW YORK

Indian Grandmaster R Vaishali surprised herself with a stellar performance to enter the quarterfinals of the World Blitz Championship here, even as recently-crowned rapid champion Koneru Humpy made an early exit. Following Koneru Humpy's stellar performance in Rapid, which earned her the gold medal and a prize of USD 60,000, it was Vaishali's turn to impress her fans. She triumphed in the women's section, scoring 9.5 points out of a possible 11 with three draws.

"I'm very happy with today's performance. Tomorrow will be a big day. Honestly, it (performance) was completely unexpected. I was not expecting the result like how it went today. Tomorrow, I have to be ready and prepare well and then see," she said.

Russian Kateryna Lagno came closest to Vaishali, scoring 8.5 points, while the remaining six qualifiers finished with an identical eight points. Despite meeting the points criteria, Humpy was

eliminated due to the worst tiebreaker, finishing ninth.

In the Open section, 10 players were tied for first place, including world number one Magnus Carlsen. The Norwegian scored when needed and drew six of his 13 games, finishing among the co-leaders at the end of the qualifiers. Russian Ian Nepomniachtchi won the qualifier with 9.5 points, benefiting from the best tiebreak, while Fabiano Caruana of the United States finished second, ahead of Carlsen, who was placed third.

Surprisingly, none of the Indians made the top eight, despite some early promising performances. Arjun Erigaisi played brilliantly at the start, securing victories in the first five rounds but faded away to finish with a sub-par seven points. R Praggnanandhaa was the best-placed Indian, with 8.5 points, but a last-round loss to Russian Daniil Dubov cost him a spot in the quarterfinals.

In the women's quarterfinal, Vaishali will face Chinese Grandmaster Zhu Jiner.



Vaishali's back-to-back victories against GMs Nana Dzagnidze of Georgia and Valentina Gunina of

Russia in rounds 7-8 provided the necessary boost for the Indian player to top the event with ease.

The 23-year-old Indian played a dramatic match against Gunina, where she found herself under

extreme time pressure and played 23 moves with hardly any time to think.

"You have nothing to think, you keep playing your moves. That was a very bad time management in that game (by me). She (opponent) was ahead on the clock and on the board, she was a full pawn up but I kept playing," said Vaishali, who virtually had seven seconds for each of her 23 moves.

"Towards the end, I offered a draw with the rook-knight 3 versus 3. I think she wanted to play but her clock fell and that's how I won the game."

Vaishali said there were many players stronger than her in Blitz and that she was just lucky to have led the field by one full point.

"I don't think I'm a great blitz player, honestly. There are many more strong players here. I think, today, I was lucky in many games and it just worked out."

Talking about the knockout round, Vaishali said: "I haven't thought about it at all. The last few days I've been sick, not gone out much," she said, adding that she would any day

prefer classical games to Rapid chess.

"I prefer classical any day... Rapid is fun to play but lots of emotions. Like, so many games you are playing in a day and it's hard to deal with sometimes. I think that's the major difference (between classical and Rapid)."

Indian standings:

Open: R Praggnanandhaa (8.5) - 23; Raunak Sadhwani (8) 46; Arjun Erigaisi (7) 64; Aravindh Chithambaram (7) 68; V Pranav (7) 67;

Women: R Vaishali (9.5) 1; K Humpy (8) 9; Divya Deshmukh (7) 18; Vantika Agarwal (7) 19; D Harika (7) 22.

Qualifiers: Open: 1-8; Ian Nepomniachtchi, Volodar Murzin (Both Fide); Fabiano Caruana, Hans Niemann Moke, Wesley So (all USA); Magnus Carlsen (Nor); Duda Jan-Krysztof (Pol); Alireza Firouzja (Fra).

Women 1-8: R Vaishali (Ind); Lei Tingjie, Wenjun Ju, Zhu Jiner (all Chn); Kateryna Lagno, Valentina Gunina (Both Fide); Carissa Yip (Usa) Bibisara Assaubayeva (Kaz).

Former US Open Champion Emma Raducanu withdraws from Auckland tennis classic

AP ■ AUCKLAND

Former U.S. Open champion Emma Raducanu has withdrawn from the Auckland tennis classic, saying a back injury she has been nursing in recent weeks had not improved as much as she hoped.

The 22-year-old British player was seeded sixth for the tournament and was due to play her opening match of the new season on Tuesday against Robin Montgomery of the United States.

"I've tried my best to be ready. I love Auckland and the fans here. But unfortunately I've picked up a back niggle and I won't be ready in time," Raducanu said.

Second-seeded Elise Mertens of Belgium also withdrew on Tuesday from the tournament which is a tune-up for the Australian Open beginning Jan. 12 in Melbourne.

"I am sorry not to play my



singles due to an injury," Mertens said. "I wish the tournament all the best and hope to be back next year." In a pre-tournament news conference on Monday Raducanu expressed optimism for the new season. She finished her 2024 season on a high, winning all three of her singles for Britain at the Billy Jean King Cup.

"So that's like a good stepping stone after three surgeries the year before," Raducanu said. "And I think this year I'm just ready to push on and build on and I've really kind of taken measures and steps to do that with my team and how I'm operating and how I'm feeling about things. So, I'm looking forward to this year." Raducanu's career has been

regularly hampered by injuries and she recently hired fitness coach Yutaka Nakamura to join her team. Nakamura accompanied her to Auckland.

The 2021 U.S. Open champion returned to tennis last year after undergoing surgery on both wrists and an ankle.

But she was sidelined for several weeks late in the season by a foot injury. Raducanu fell out of the top 300 during her injury struggles but fought her way back to 56th through 2024. The Auckland event would have marked the first time in almost two years she has been seeded in a tournament.

"I haven't been seeded in a while," Raducanu said. "It doesn't really make a difference though. I feel like everyone and the depth of the women's game right now is so strong that literally anyone can win any tournament."

Gauff, Fritz qualify the US for the United Cup mixed teams tennis quarterfinals

AP ■ PERTH

The top-seeded pair of Coco Gauff and U.S. Open finalist Taylor Fritz of the United States are into the United Cup mixed teams tennis quarterfinals.

Fritz beat Borna Coric 6-3, 6-2 Tuesday as the American team needed to win only one match to top Group A. For good measure, Gauff beat Donna Vekic 6-4, 6-2 in the later women's singles.

The world No. 3 lost to Vekic at the Paris Olympics but Bencic was no match for Gauff on Tuesday.

"Really happy with how I played today," Gauff said. "She's a great player. The Olympics loss hurt so I definitely was thinking about it just as motivation to do better and I'm happy to send my team through."

The U.S. Beat Canada in its opening match. The Perth quarterfinals were



set for Wednesday, with the U.S. Taking on China, which qualified as the best runner-up, and group winners Kazakhstan and Germany playing each other.

In Sydney, Italy also moved into the quarterfinals Tuesday with a 3-0 win over France at Ken Rosewall Arena. Flavio Cobolli claimed a 6-3, 6-7 (8), 6-2 upset singles win over

France's Ugo Humbert. Jasmine Paolini beat Chloe Paquet 6-0, 6-2 to give Italy its winning margin before also winning the mixed doubles.

Winners of the past two Davis Cups and runners-up two years ago to the U.S. In the inaugural edition of the season-opening mixed teams' event, Italy won Group D without world No.



IOA chief PT Usha recognises golf body headed by Harish Reddy

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Olympic Association has given recognition to the Indian Golf Union (IGU) led by Harish Kumar Reddy while declaring the other body, headed by Brijinder Singh, void.

A letter signed by IOA president PT Usha issued on Monday stated that the National Olympic Committee had "reviewed the facts" and "examined the procedural adherence" before recognising the body headed by Reddy.

Slovakia beats Kazakhstan 5-4 in overtime at the world junior hockey championship

AP ■ OTTAWA

Maxim Strbak scored 2:55 into overtime to lead Slovakia to a 5-4 win over Kazakhstan at the world junior hockey championship.

Slovakia held a 4-2 lead with less than five minutes remaining in regulation and Kazakh forward Asanali Sarkenov was assessed a 5-minute major and a game misconduct for cross-checking Slovak forward Frantisek Dej.

Kazakhstan scored twice while short-handed, sending the game into overtime. Davlat Nurkenov scored at 16:37 of the third period and Kirill Lyapunov tied it with just 29 seconds left.

Dalibor Dvorsky and Juraj Pekaric each scored twice for Slovakia, which twice held a three-goal lead. Goaltender Samuel Urban allowed four goals on 17 shots.

Sarkenov and Artur Gross also scored for Kazakhstan. Vladimir Nikitin, a prospect



with the Ottawa Senators, made 37 saves, including four in OT, for Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan earned its first point in the tournament after opening with two lopsided losses, moving ahead of last-place Switzerland in Group B. The teams meet Tuesday with a spot in the quarterfinals on the line on the final day of preliminary round action. Slovakia finished the preliminary round with five

points on a regulation win, an overtime win and two losses. The Slovaks were guaranteed to finish third in Group B and advance to the quarterfinals.

In Group A, Latvia secured a berth in the quarterfinal round by beating Germany 4-3 in overtime.

Eriks Mateiko had two goals for Latvia, including the winner at 3:23 of OT. Bruno Osmanis and Oliveris Murnieks also scored.

Verona wins 3-2 at 10-man Bologna in Serie A

AP ■ ROME

Benjamin Dominguez scored a brace for Bologna but a red card for Tommaso Pobega and a late own-goal by Santiago Castro sent the host team crashing to a 3-2 defeat against Verona in Serie A.

Dominguez scored in the 20th and 58th minutes, either side of a Verona double from Amir Sarr and Casper Tengstedt. But Pobega's red card, shown for striking an opponent in an off-the-ball incident early in the second half, hampered the home side and with three minutes left on the clock, a free kick from Ondrej Duda hit Castro to wrong-foot his own goalkeeper and give Verona all three points.

The result was a blow to Bologna's hopes of securing a European place and leaves it in seventh place, four points behind Juventus.

Verona moved four points clear of the relegation zone. Como beats Lecce 2-0 Nico Paz missed a first-half penalty earlier Monday but made amends in the second period



with the goal that sent Como on its way to a 2-0 win over Lecce in Serie A.

The 20-year-old Argentine international saw his weak spot kick saved by the legs of Wladimiro Falcone after half an hour but he was on target in the 50th minute when he side-footed home from just outside the box.

Patrick Cutrone, who hit the bar early in the game, got a second goal with 10 minutes remaining when he seized on a rebound in the box and slotted home.

It was Como's first league win over Lecce since 1994 and lifts it into 15th place, two points and one spot above its opponent.

Mhatre becomes youngest to score 150 in List A cricket

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Mumbai's Ayush Mhatre Monday set a new world record for the youngest player to score 150+ in List A cricket during the Vijay Hazare Trophy match against Nagaland here, bettering compatriot Yashasvi Jaiswal's effort.

At 17 years and 168 days, Mhatre broke the previous record set by India batter Jaiswal, who was 17 years and 291 days when he achieved the feat while playing for Mumbai against Jharkhand in 2019.

Mhatre, who made his debut for domestic giants Mumbai earlier this season, clobbered 11 sixes and 15 fours to make 181 off only 117 balls while powering his side to an imposing 403 for seven in their 50 overs.

Mhatre, who hails from the Virar suburb in Mumbai, has been a regular fixture for the domestic heavyweights across formats ever since he broke into the squad earlier this season.



He was a part of the Irani Cup-winning Mumbai side which defeated Rest of India to win the trophy after a gap of 27 years in October. On his Ranji Trophy debut, Mhatre scored a fine 71-ball 52 but Mumbai lost the season opener to Baroda in an away game.

With the defending champions looking to bounce back after the loss in the first Ranji game, Mhatre led the charge with a brilliant 176 off 232 balls, which was studded with 22 fours and four sixes against Maharashtra. Mumbai won the game by nine wickets. He had a couple of quiet outings against Tripura and

Odisha but slammed his second first-class ton — 116 off 149 balls with 12 fours and three sixes — against Services and went on to represent India in the U-19 Asia Cup.

The right-handed batter carried his form by scoring fifties (54 and 67 not out) against Japan and UAE, but fell for a single digit score in the tournament's final which India lost to Bangladesh. Having missed Mumbai's Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy title triumph, Mhatre returned to the premier domestic 50-overs competition with a 78 in a high-scoring contest against Karnataka.

Dismal Manchester United loses again at home as Ipswich upsets Chelsea in Premier League

AP ■ LONDON

Alexander Isak scored for the sixth straight Premier League game as Newcastle beat Manchester United 2-0 at Old Trafford to condemn Ruben Amorim's side to its worst home run in the top tier since the 1970s. Relegation-threatened Ipswich beat Chelsea 2-0 to win at home for the first time this season, and Aston Villa and Brighton drew 2-2.

Newcastle's commanding display marked the first time since February 1979 that Man United has lost three home league games in a row. It was also the first time since 1962 that United has lost five league matches in the same calendar month.

Isak started the misery for home fans with his eighth goal in six matches. The Sweden striker put Newcastle ahead with a header

after four minutes and Joelinton doubled its lead 15 minutes later when he rose above Lisandro Martinez to head in a second. Isak had another effort disallowed after half an hour and Sandro Tonali hit the woodwork seconds later as Newcastle threatened to run riot. Amorim withdrew Joshua Zirkzee for Kobbie Mainoo before halftime but United looked toothless — and clueless — in what was a dismal display.

"We suffered a goal and then it was hard to come back," Amorim said. "They were the better team, plain and simple."

The defeat was the fifth in eight league games since Amorim joined from Sporting Lisbon in November and left United in 14th place, seven points above the relegation zone. Newcastle is fifth and starting to entertain the possibility of a top-

four finish.

"There is still a long way to go but the team is improving," Joelinton said. "Time will tell how good we are but we are enjoying football right now. We have to be humble and keep our feet on the ground." Ipswich savors home win Chelsea started the day with the best away record in the league after leader Liverpool but it was trailing at Portman Road after just 12 minutes thanks to a mistake from goalkeeper Filip Jorgensen.

The Scandinavian replaced Robert Sanchez in the Chelsea goal but he was adjudged to have fouled Liam Delap in the box and Delap got up to convert the penalty with aplomb.

Chelsea pushed forward in search of an equalizer but it was Ipswich that doubled its lead early in the second half.

A poor pass from Axel Disasi allowed Delap to stretch the



Chelsea defense and his pass set up Omari Hutchinson to score against his former club.

It was the first time this season that Chelsea has lost two games in

a row. It remained in fourth place after missing a chance to go above Arsenal and Nottingham Forest into second.

Ipswich moved up to 18th place

in the 20-team division.

It was the first home win in the Premier League for promoted Ipswich since 2002 and coach Kieran McKenna praised his side. "It was everything it needed to be," McKenna said. "We defended, outstanding organization throughout the game."

"There has been hope in the performances in general, we have been competing in almost every game. If you do that, you always have a chance."

Brighton scores late to salvage 2-2 draw at Villa Aston Villa was unbeaten in its last eight games at Villa Park but went behind after just 12 minutes against a lively Brighton side.

With the Villa defense all at sea, Simon Adingra gathered a loose ball and curled a right-footed shot past Emiliano Martinez. Villa came roaring back and got

an equalizer in the 36th through birthday boy Ollie Watkins. The 29-year-old Watkins, who returned to the side to replace the suspended Jhon Duran, converted a penalty after Morgan Rogers was adjudged to have been fouled.

It was Rogers who put Villa in front early in the second half and once again Watkins was involved. His cute chip released Rogers, who chested the ball down and scored his sixth goal of the season.

However, Tariq Lamptey fired home with eight minutes left to give Brighton a share of the points. The result leaves Villa in ninth and Brighton in 10th.

"We've been in that position a few times this season and we've failed to see it out," a disappointed Watkins told the BBC's Match of the Day program.

Indian cricket has depth to fill Rohit, Virat's void: Lehmann

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Indian cricket has produced a generational superstar in Yashasvi Jaiswal and will remain in good health even when Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma decide to call time on their careers, feels former Australia head coach and two-time World Cup winner Darren Lehmann. The 54-year-old, who played 27 Tests and 117 ODIs during his decade-long career, is also captivated by Jasprit Bumrah's skills, claiming to have never seen any player have more impact in a single series.

Talking about impending retirements of Rohit and Kohli following their poor show in the ongoing series where India trail 1-2, Lehmann was empathetic and practical about the transition in Indian cricket.

"Look whenever they decide to give it away and whatever happens in next few days they have been great players for India

over a long period of time," Lehmann, a member of 1999 and 2003 ODI World Cup-winning teams told PTI.

"Now actually we see younger players starting to step up for India and play well at next level. There is so much depth in Indian cricket I won't worry too much," Lehmann was pretty matter of fact.

"Whenever these two guys decide to retire, there are so many talented youngsters that Indian cricket will be in good stead." Having watched Jaiswal emerge as the flagbearer of Indian batting in the series, Lehmann made a bold prediction about the southpaw, who has scores of 161, 82 and 84 in this series.

"Oh, superstar. One of the best I have seen," Lehmann said quickly, before the question was finished.

"He (Jaiswal) and Harry Brook are two next generation players. They are the ones that people will sit back and say they are good players. He played very well in



Melbourne and was outstanding in Perth. He has come up leaps and bounds on this tour," the beefy left-hander of yesteryears said. But Lehmann reserved his highest praise for Bumrah, equating him with all-time greats such as Wasim Akram and Glenn McGrath.

"I presume he (Bumrah) is the next captain when Rohit finishes. He did a really good job in Perth. He is the best bowler I have ever seen live.

"I have seen Wasim Akram, Glenn McGrath and all but I have not seen a bowler have impact like him in a single series like Jasprit Bumrah has since Mitchell Johnson in 2013-14 Ashes win.

"This is very similar as Bumrah already has 30 wickets. He has been outstanding to watch. He will do well when he gets a chance to lead India."

Talking about transition, Lehmann noted that Australia's batting could be a concern, rather than the bowling, even though

Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood, Scott Boland, and Michael Neser are all in their early to mid-30s.

"I am not so worried about bowling as lot of good kids are coming up. Lance Morris, Xavier Bartlett from Brisbane Heats, so there are plenty of them. Spinners are okay but it is the batting that is being tested at the moment," said Lehmann.

"There will be some changes with greats retiring but fast bowling will be good enough. How long Cummins and Starc survive time will tell, but hopefully, they will get to till next Ashes."

Lehmann has had a decent reputation as a coach but when asked if he would consider coaching the Indian national team, the answer was negative.

"It would have been an honour to work with Indian national team but I am done with international cricket. I just want the young guys to get better," Lehmann signed off.



Travis Head explains 'finger on ice' celebration after dismissing Pant

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Australia batter Travis Head has explained his unusual celebration after dismissing Rishabh Pant in the Boxing Day Test, stating it signifies "finger on the ice," a quirky gesture that he first showed during the tour of Sri Lanka.

After batting through an entire session, Yashasvi Jaiswal and Rishabh Pant appeared poised to guide India to a draw on the final day of the Boxing Day Test.

However, Head turned the game on its head by dismissing Pant, which triggered a dramatic Indian collapse and paved the way for a 184-run Australian victory, giving the hosts a 2-1 lead in the five-match series.

Pant mis-timed a pull shot and was caught at long-on, after which Head celebrated the moment with his distinctive gesture of folding the fingers of his left hand into a circle and dipping the forefinger of his right hand into it.



"Finger on the ice. I started in Sri Lanka. I put my finger on the ice and be ready to go for the next one," Head told "Triple M Radio" after the Melbourne Test.

"I didn't expect to be bowling. I thought Galle would be my next bowling. I'll go put it down in a little cup of ice, be ready to go up there next," he added, referring to Australia's upcoming tour of the island nation.

Head's celebration quickly gained attention and went

viral on social media. After the match, Australian captain Pat Cummins was asked about it and he offered a lighthearted explanation.

"I can explain it. It's his finger so hot he's got to put in a cup of ice. Yeah that's what it is," Cummins told reporters.

"So, that's normally the running joke. It was in the Gabba or somewhere he got a wicket as well and just straight to the fridge, grabs a bucket of ice, puts his finger in and just walks in front of Lino (Nathan Lyon)...Just like that (he) thinks it's very funny. "So that's what it would have been, nothing else."

However, Head's celebration didn't sit well with former India cricketer Navjot Singh Sidhu, who demanded "stringent action" against the Australian player, calling it "obnoxious".

"Travis head's obnoxious behaviour during the course of the Melbourne test doesn't auger well for the gentleman's game...Sets the worst possible example when there are kids, women, young & old watching the game.

"...This caustic conduct did not insult an individual but a nation of 1.5 billion Indians...Stringent punishment that would serve a deterrent for the future generations needs to be slapped on him so that no one dares follow suit !!!" Sidhu posted on X.

The two teams will play the pivotal final Test at the Sydney Cricket Ground, starting January 3.

Deepti jumps to fifth spot in ICC ODI rankings

PTI ■ DUBAI

India off-spinner Deepti Sharma climbed a spot to enter the top 5 in the latest ICC women's ODI ranking for bowlers following her match-winning performances in the recently-concluded series against the West Indies at home.

Deepti, who is fifth now, has 665 rating points and is marginally behind fourth-placed South Africa's Marizanne Kapp (677 rating points).

The 27-year-old made headlines, taking eight wickets in two matches, including 6/31 in the last game as India completed a clean sweep in the three-match series in Vadodara.

Among batters, Jemimah Rodrigues (537 rating points) is closing in on a top-20 as she has jumped four spots to 22nd thanks to scores of 29 and 52 during the series.

The big-hitting Richa Ghosh (13 not out and 23 not out) has moved seven spots to 41st (448 rating points), with



Chinelle Henry's half-century in the third ODI leading to a 21-spot leap to 65th (349 rating points).

However, charismatic India opener Smriti Mandhana (720 rating points), who scored two half-centuries in the series, has dropped one place to third and trails South Africa's Laura Wolvaardt (773) and Chamari Athapaththu (733).

Skipper Harmanpreet Kaur has dropped three places to 13th.

Hayley Matthews' seventh ODI century in Vadodara has helped the West Indies opener climb six places to seventh in the ICC Women's Batting Rankings.

Warner wants Australia's seniors to follow Konstas' mindset against India

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Lavishing praise on young Sam Konstas, former opener David Warner has urged Australia's senior players to adopt a similar aggressive approach when facing Indian pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah, who has been a dominant force with the ball in the ongoing series.

The 19-year-old Konstas played some stunning scoops and laps off Bumrah en route to a 65-ball 60 on his Test debut during the fourth Test at Melbourne, which the Aussies won by 184 runs on Monday.

"It was very special. People are going to criticise him as well. That's the nature of the beast, that's the way he is going to play," Warner told AAP.

"When someone like Bumrah is bowling to you, you have to try and execute somehow. They put a third-man in and fine leg to him and bowled him through the gate (in the second innings). He will look back on that and go 'what a great experience in the Boxing Day Test'. He now gets to come here for New Year's Test."

Konstas had scored 107 off 97 balls against India for the Prime Minister's XI. He had also scored an unbeaten 73 at the MCG against India A, besides making two centuries in the Sheffield Shield and a record-breaking 50 on debut for the Sydney Thunder in the Big Bash League.

"What he did in the Prime Minister's XI shows he has that talent. But it also shows he is brave."

"Him being brave at the top of the order, you've got guys who have played 50 Tests, they could have been brave as well, they could have played different shots, they could have moved out of their crease and batted different."

Warner added that while players like Steve Smith had experimented with various approaches, it shouldn't take a newcomer's boldness to shift the momentum.

"Smudge (Steve Smith) tried a million different things. But it shouldn't take someone to come out there and be brave to get that momentum shifting. You have experience at the top of the order, experience in that whole line up," Warner said.

"Travis Head took the game away from them in Adelaide with that magnificent hundred. It shouldn't take that guy just to come and do that. It's the way the Australians played but other people can be braver as well."

Bumrah is a genius

Bumrah on Sunday became the second fastest Indian along with Ravindra Jadeja to complete 200 Test wickets and the first bowler ever to reach that milestone with a sub-20 average during the fourth day's play of the fourth Test.

The India speedster has taken 30 wickets at an average of just 12.83 this series, including nine wickets in Melbourne.

"You're also hoping Bumrah gets it off that handkerchief, he's a genius. He is averaging under 20. His record is incredible," Warner said.

Wayne Rooney fired as Plymouth coach

AP ■ LONDON

Wayne Rooney was fired as Plymouth Argyle coach on Tuesday after just seven months in charge of the struggling Championship team.

The 39-year-old former England and Manchester United striker was hired in May and departs with Plymouth last in the English second tier with four wins in 23 games this season.

His final game was a 2-0 loss to Oxford United on Sunday which extended Argyle's winless run to nine games.

"Plymouth Argyle can confirm that the club and head coach Wayne Rooney have mutually agreed to part ways with immediate effect," the club said in a statement.

"We would like to thank Wayne and his team for all



their efforts and wish them well for the future."

Rooney took charge at Plymouth following an 83-day tenure at Birmingham, which was relegated from the Championship after last season. He's also been the coach at MLS team DC United and Derby County.

"I would like to take this opportunity to thank the board of Plymouth," Rooney said in the club statement.

PCB retains Aaqib Javed on selection committee despite interim head coach role

AP ■ KARACHI

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has decided not to remove former Test pacer Aaqib Javed from the national selection committee, despite him accepting the position of interim head coach for both the white and red-ball national squads.

According to sources within the PCB, since Aaqib's role as head coach is temporary, he will remain a part of the selection committee.

However, one insider noted that Aaqib's influence as a selector had diminished, especially after he assumed the role of red-ball head coach following Jason Gillespie's resignation before the South Africa Test series. Since then, other selectors have gained more authority in decision-making.

"Aaqib's role as selector has been minimal in recent times with the team playing its test series in South Africa. As the other selectors, Azhar Ali, Asad Shafiq, Aleem Dar, Hasan Cheema have been more authoritative and had their



say on Shaheen Shah Afridi being sidelined for the two tests in SA after the white ball series," he said.

Earlier this year, the PCB had appointed South Africa's Gary Kirsten and Australia's Jason Gillespie as head coaches for the white and red-ball teams. Both were granted selection committee membership and given the final say in team selections.

"But after Pakistan fared poorly in the World T20 Cup followed by the two nil whitewash by Bangladesh in the test series at home, the PCB decided to bring revamp the selection committee by adding Aaqib, Azhar and Aleem to the mix and also stripped Kirsten and Gillespie of considerable powers they enjoyed including being members of the selection committee and final say in team selections," the insider said.

When Aaqib was appointed interim head coach for both white and red-ball formats, there was initial confusion among the other selectors regarding his authority. The board later clarified that Aaqib would remain a national selector while taking on the interim coaching role.

"The PCB has every intention of appointing one or separate coaches for the white and red ball formats by the time the Champions Trophy is completed," another insider said.

However, he also said that the chances of the PCB calling upon foreign coaches again are slim.

McDonald backs under-fire Marsh, remains optimistic about Starc's availability for Sydney Test

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Australia head coach Andrew McDonald conceded that Mitchell Marsh has fallen short of expectations with the bat against India but remained optimistic about Mitchell Starc's availability for the pivotal fifth Test in Sydney.

Starc's fitness remains the primary worry for the hosts after the pacer battled through sore ribs from day three of the Boxing Day Test but still managed to bowl effectively, including claiming the prized wicket of Virat Kohli on the final day.

"Any time you get through the game, it's always a good indicator that you've a chance at the next game," McDonald told reporters after the hosts picked up memorable victory at the MCG to take a 2-1 lead in the series.

"It didn't stop him (Starc). Clearly there was a little bit of discomfort early on in spells, but once he got warm it seemed as though he was pretty free.

"We'll see how everyone

recovers. Bowling last, it was a pretty attritional game, something that we're not used to in the last few years.

"Clearly Starc's carrying something of some description. We'll assess that.

"But other than that, it looks as though we got through pretty unscathed, but (with a) short turnaround recovery is important, and we'll assess what the team looks like in Sydney based upon the surface, as we always do."

Australia will regain the Border-Gavaskar trophy for the first time since 2014-15 if they win or draw the Sydney Test.

However, if India win the New Year's Test, they will retain the trophy, winning the series for a record-extending fifth-straight time.

Should Starc be unavailable for the series decider at his home ground, McDonald expressed confidence in Jhye Richardson or Sean Abbott stepping in to fill the void.

"Very confident. Richardson's



here for a reason. So if we weren't confident, he wouldn't be here. He's had a heavy week with us in the nets. All indications are he'd be capable of bowling 40-plus overs if he was called upon.

"Sean Abbott's there as well. We feel like, [the] SCG is his home ground, so he will be serviceable if called upon as well. It'll be about assessing our frontline quicks and then making decisions from there."

Starc's fitness issues, compounded by his heavy workload alongside skipper Pat Cummins, have also drawn attention to the limited role of Mitch Marsh as a fifth bowler.

Across four Tests, Australia's fifth bowling option Marsh has bowled only 33 overs, a statistic that underscores his underutilization.

Marsh's contributions with the bat have been similarly underwhelming, with just 73 runs at an average of 10.42 across four Tests (6, 47, 9, 5, 2, 4, 0). These lackluster returns have sparked criticism and calls for

his exclusion.

However, McDonald defended the all-rounder.

"He's in a good [head] space. Would you like better performances? There's no doubt about that. Over four Test matches, he hasn't been able to deliver at the level he would like and we would like."

"He's up and about though. We just won a Test match. No, there's no concern. And I think people have probably been reading too much into that.

"We haven't required him with the ball as often as what we would have thought. He bowled again today. There are no injury concerns there.

McDonald insisted that Marsh bowling just 33 overs is simply because the team didn't require him to roll his arm.

"I think to sort of head that down that angle is a little bit unfair. We just haven't required him at certain times for whatever reason, so that's more a tactical implementation, as opposed to a body."