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WORLD 8
SOUTH KOREAN ANTI-CORRUPTION AGENCY, POLICE DEBATE MEASURES TO DETAIN IMPEACHED PRESIDENT

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States dismiss HMPV scare, as cases rise



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amidst surge in the H u m a n Metapneumovirus (HMPV) in neighbouring China, India on Monday confirmed three cases of pathogen — two in Karnataka and one in Gujarat. However, the Government and health officials have assured that there is no need to panic as it is not a new pathogen, adding that regular flu shots or even the three Covid vaccine doses makes one immune to this infection. In Bengaluru, a three-month-old baby, who has been discharged, and an eight-month-old, who is recovering at a hospital, were the two cases. A two-month-old was also found infected in Ahmedabad in Gujarat with respiratory symptoms and subsequently tested positive for HMPV. All the cases have been detected in children, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)

said, adding that they were identified during routine surveillance for multiple respiratory viral pathogens. They had no international travel history, added the ICMR, ruling out exposure from other regions or countries. Even as the number of reported cases climbed to three in the country, health experts and government officials have emphasised that there is no need for alarm, as HMPV has been circulating globally and in India for years where most of the population are immune to it. It recently gained attention after its outbreak was reported in China. Union Health Minister JP Nadda on Monday said in a video message, that there is no need to panic as health experts have clarified that HMPV is not a new virus and it was first identified in 2001 and has been circulating in the entire world since many years.

Naxals blow up DRG vehicle, eight dead

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ RAIPUR

In their biggest strike on security forces in Chhattisgarh in two years, Naxals blew up a vehicle using an improvised explosive device weighing 60 to 70kg, killing eight District Reserve Guard (DRG) jawans and their civilian driver in Bijapur district on Monday. Police suspect the powerful IED was planted long back along the route used by DRG, a state police unit involved in anti-insurgency operations. The explosive device went off near Ambeli village under the Kutru police station area at around 2.15 pm when DRG

personnel from Dantewada district were returning in their Scorpio vehicle after an anti-Naxalite operation, Inspector General of Police (Bastar Range) Sundarraj P said. Eight DRG jawans travelling in the SUV and the driver of the vehicle were killed on the spot, located around 70km from district headquarters Bijapur, the official added. DRG draws its personnel mostly from local tribal population and ranks of surrendered Naxalites. Reinforcement was rushed to the spot and the bodies were being evacuated. A search operation was launched in the area by security forces to



Security personnel at the site following the death of eight jawans of District Reserve Guards (DRG) and a civilian driver after Naxals blew up their vehicle with an improvised explosive device, in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district

hunt down those responsible for the killings, the IPS officer informed. The DRG personnel targeted by Left-

wing extremists were involved in an anti-Naxalite operation carried out for three days on the borders of

Narayanpur, Dantewada and Bijapur districts in the Bastar region by joint teams of security personnel, the IG said. Five Naxalites were killed in the three-day-long operation and one DRG head constable also lost his life, he said. After the operation, DRG personnel from Dantewada were returning to their base in the vehicle when the attack occurred, Sundarraj added. "It seems the IED used in the attack weighed 60kg to 70kg. However, forensic experts are at the spot to gather exact details," Deputy Inspector General of Police (south Bastar) Kamlochan Kashyap said.

investigation suggests the IED was old and planted long ago as wires connected to it were buried deep in the ground and grass had grown on the layer of soil over the device, he said. Kashyap admitted there were lapses which led to the tragic incident, but did not elaborate further. During an inspection of the blast site, around 150-metre-long wire connected to the trigger of the command IED was recovered, officials said. Visuals from the spot, around 400km from state capital Raipur, showed a huge crater, more than 10-feet deep, splitting the concrete road after the blast.

Crop loss: 12 farmers die in State so far

Latest victims from Cuttack, Sambalpur dists

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Another farmer died after witnessing his devastated crops on Monday at Sumandi village under Usuma panchayat of Baranga block in Cuttack district.

The incident is the latest instance of an appalling crisis of deaths of 12 farmers in Odisha following last month's untimely and low pressure-induced-rainfall.

Family members of the deceased farmer, identified as Indrajit Chhatoi, said that he died of a heart attack upon returning home in the evening

after inspecting his fields. He had reportedly lost a large portion of his crops in the rains and was under financial pressure after incurring debts.

A 58-year-old farmer from Bairagipali village under the Jujumura block in Sambalpur district took his own life by consuming poison.

Unable to repay mounting debts, he succumbed during treatment at the District Headquarters Hospital in Sambalpur.

The deceased farmer, identified as Ratnakar Bhoi, had cultivated paddy on his two-acre farmland with a hope to repay Rs 70,000 borrowed from a private lender and Rs 35,000 taken from a bank for a

power tiller.

Revenue Minister Suresh Pujari said, "A report of crop loss will be available to us in the coming days. We have had several meetings with the farmers having crop insurance, and they will get compensated for the loss incurred. The farmers having partial loss will also get compensated by the insurance companies and government."

Earlier, a farmer named Kailash Chandra Dhal from Koladiha village in Kendrapada district took his own life by consuming poison allegedly due to severe crop loss.

Reports said Dhal had cultivated paddy on eight acres,

but the crop was largely destroyed by the unseasonal and incessant rains. Facing mounting financial pressure from a loan of around Rs 2.5 to Rs 3 lakh, Dhal suffered severe mental distress, leading to his tragic decision.

Preceding the above ordeals, on January 3, two farmers from Ranpur block of Nayagarh died of shock after witnessing the destruction of their harvests.

Meanwhile, the Mohan Majhi-led State Government has declared last month's spell of rains as a state calamity and announced a compensation package of Rs 291 crore to all affected farmers, including those who grew crops other than paddy.

PM lays stone for Rayagada Rail Divn



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday, via videoconferencing from New Delhi, laid the foundation-stone for a new Rayagada Railway Division, which marks a significant milestone in enhancing train operations in the region.

The Rs 107-crore facility will have all modern facilities and catalyse economic growth and influence demographic mobility in southern Odisha. Modi underscored Odisha's

potentials for international trade, supported by its expansive coastline and rich natural resources. He also announced plans for new projects involving an investment of Rs 70,000 crore.

Modi also revealed the start of operations at seven 'Gati Shakti Multi-Modal Cargo Terminals' (GCT) in Paradip.

Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw was present via videoconferencing. Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi attended the event being present in Rayagada.

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In Bargarh Cops suspect planned murder of BJP leaders

PNS ■ BARGARH
Police on Monday assigned a possible planned and pre-meditated murder angle to the death of the two BJP leaders in a suspicious car accident in Bargarh district on Sunday.
BJP Goshala Mandal president Debendra Nayak and former sarpanch Muralidhar Chhuria lost their lives on Sunday after their vehicle overturned and skidded off the road on Kantapali over-bridge on Sambalpur-Bargarh National Highway.
Along with the two deceased, a driver and three

other BJP workers were travelling in the car.
The injured, currently undergoing treatment after sustaining severe injuries, alleged that their vehicle was hit intentionally multiple times by a trailer truck that was on their tail. The victims' families alleged a planned murder and lodged an FIR, following which police initiated a probe.
According to the injured BJP workers, their car was first hit by the truck at Kantapali Square. When their car tried to speed away, the truck allegedly rammed them a second time.
Realising that something

was wrong, the car driver diverted towards a village road. Shockingly, the truck continued to chase them and struck the car a third time after following it for some distance.
The repeated hits and the manner of the accident have raised suspicions, and the police investigation is expected to shed light on whether it was an accident or a deliberate act.
Meanwhile, authorities took the driver of the truck involved in the accident into custody and are analysing CCTV footage from the scene to obtain crucial clues and unearth the truth.

Dense fog engulfs many parts of State

G Udayagiri coldest at 5 deg; BBSR 14.5 deg
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Dense fog engulfed several parts of the State on Monday morning as temperatures remained chilly owing to the cold wave.
The twin cities of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack remained shrouded in intense fog and mist since early morning with visibility limited to nearly 50 meters, causing significant problems for vehicular movement.
In Puri, the Jagannath



Temple was out of view as heavy fog settled over the area. Additionally, the sacred flag atop the temple, Patitapabana Bana, was also not visible due

to the intense fog. As per the Regional Office of the India Meteorological Department (IMD), Rourkela recorded dense fog with vis-

ibility between 50 and 200 meters while moderate fog enveloped areas of Kandhamal, Dhenkanal and Angul districts.

Temperatures in most places remained similar to the night preceding it. On Sunday night, Phulbani recorded the lowest temperature among the urban areas of the State at eight degrees Celsius whereas G Udayagiri, at 5 degrees, emerged as the coldest place for the second consecutive day. Bhubaneswar recorded a minimum temperature of 14.5 degrees and Cuttack 14 degrees.
The IMD has predicted a gradual rise in temperatures by at least 2 to 3 degrees starting from Monday night onwards and lasting for the next three days.

In Malkangiri 6 'priests' held on witchcraft suspicion

PNS ■ MALKANGIRI
Six persons were arrested for allegedly practising witchcraft on the pretext of performing puja to drive out an elderly woman in Chitapari-4 village of Patrel panchayat under Korukonda block in Malkangiri district on Monday.
The arrests occurred in response to allegations centred on the supposed actions of priests who allegedly branded the 67-year-old woman, Bati Khila, a witch, following a series of unexplained deaths of locals and animals. The arrestees are alleged to have collaborated with counterparts from the

neighbouring Chhattisgarh. They conducted rituals on the pretext of a sanctioned religious ceremony, raising suspicions amongst residents.
Upon receiving a tip from villagers, police intervened and halted the ceremony, leading to the arrest of six persons. Police seized various items and a vehicle used during the incident.
"The arrested were forwarded to court following the rejection of their bail pleas. We have seized a decorated Khatola and a car used in the alleged crime. We have also registered a case in this connection and a probe is underway," a police official said.

Hold election, audit in Pani Panchayats: CM

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Sunday, attending the State-level Pani Panchayat fortnight here, gave directions for holding elections and regular audit in Pani Panchayats, which should be developed as agricultural marketing centres.
Majhi said that due to expanded irrigation and research by farm scientists along with hard work of farmers, India is able to feed 140 crore people and also export food grains to foreign countries. Since water supply to the farmers' land is very necessary, all irrigation projects must be completed on a war footing.
To provide water to farmers, it has been decided to construct new field channels and convert old channels into con-



crete channels. By 2028-29, around 2400 km of new concrete canals would be constructed in 80,000 hectares of irrigated area. In addition, 1,860 km of very old and di-

lapitated field canals in 62,000 hectares of irrigated area would be reconstructed into concrete canals, Majhi said.
The CM released a coffee table book titled 'Irrigation Partner-

ship 3.0'. Besides, a short film on irrigation partnership was screened. Successful students, successful farmers, successful water panchayats and efficient officers were felicitated.

Provide immediate aid to rain-hit farmers: Cong



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
The untimely rains have severely affected paddy and vegetable cultivation in the State. But the affected farmers have not been compensated timely. They had not been given prior information about adverse weather conditions, due to which 14 farmers have ended their lives, said the Congress on Monday.
The farmer suicides are a very sensitive issue. But the State Government has failed to provide assurance to the farmers. The government has failed in achieving zero-casualty. It should immediately provide compensation to the

sharecroppers by amending the Relief Code. There is no coordination in the statements of different ministers. If the farmers' interest are not protected, the Congress would take to the streets, said a Congress delegation which visited the village of a deceased farmer, Krittibash Swain under Balikuda block in Jagatsinghpur district.
The delegation led by Kissan Congress president Amiya Patnaik and also consisting of former MLA Mohammed Moquim and Congress Legislature Party Leader Ram Chandra Kadma gave an assistance of Rs 1 lakh to the deceased Swain's family.

Organ donor cremated with state honours



Prahlad Raut's pledge has saved many lives
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Following his sudden death, a 38-year-old man from Khuntakata village in Athagarh block of Cuttack district was cremated with full state honours on Sunday for his selfless act of pledging to donate his organs.
Prahlad Raut tragically passed away while working at a private event the day before. His decision to donate his organs in case of death became a symbol of his immortality. His organs helped give new life to several individuals in need of a transplant across various hospitals.
Prahlad had married two

years ago and has now left behind a six-month-old daughter.
In similar cases from across Odisha, last year, 18-year-old Om Shibu of Kendrapada district had achieved heights of selflessness after his death due to a brain tumour. After his passing, family members respected his wish and donated his kidneys to the SCB Medical College Hospital, where it then saved two lives.
In another such act, a woman from Brahmapur, who died of brain haemorrhage in 2023, donated all her organs as per her pledge. The organ harvesting, conducted at the AMRI Hospital in Bhubaneswar, was the largest of its kind and had helped six lives across Odisha, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu.

BJD hits streets over soaring prices

Holds BJP govt responsible
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Biju Janata Dal (BJD) leaders and workers on Monday hit the streets in Bhubaneswar protesting the skyrocketing prices of essential commodities. They alleged that the BJP government has totally failed to check the price rise.
Holding placards and banners, the protesters gathered at Lower PMG and raised slogans and accused the Mohan Majhi government of crippling the lives of the poor and middle class.
"In New Year 2025, the BJD has descended on the battleground with new motivation, new role and new determination. The battle will go on; the voices of people should be heard. This government is only crippling the citizens with high prices and heavy taxation," BJD leader Arun Sahoo



said. "People have already started boycotting the BJP government in Odisha. Everyone is sad as Naveen Patnaik is not the CM anymore. Everyone is equally angry that this government has come by mistake; forget about the upliftment of people, they are only looting the people,"

Sahoo alleged. "This rise in prices is because of the Central government under PM Modi. They are double engine for double taxation and double loot," he further added. However, the BJD claimed that the BJD is doing all the dramas only to gain public sympathy.

"When BJD was in power, Odisha stood No. 1 for high prices in India. Now that they are out of power, they are doing all these dramas. However, people of Odisha clearly know the prices soared under which government," claimed BJD State vice-president Biranchi Narayan Tripathy.

Bizman abducted by miscreants in Koraput

Motive yet to be ascertained
PNS ■ KORAPUT
A dry fruits businessman of Paduwa village under the Boipariguda police station in Koraput district was allegedly kidnapped on Saturday night after being dragged out of his car near Patraput bridge of the district.
As per sources, the victim, identified as Kaya Satya, was returning alone from Jeypore to Paduwa with cash of 7.5 lakh.
However, he was allegedly abducted near Kota Junction late at night on a deserted stretch of the road.
Spotting the abandoned car, locals grew suspicious and in-

formed the police. Satya's family members also lodged a missing complaint with the police after he failed to answer their calls.
Later, Satya managed to call his family members in the morning and informed them that he was being held hostage at a place in Motu of Malkangiri district.
The businessman's family said that the kidnappers had not made any attempts to contact them nor had there been any demands for ransom. Moreover, after that one call, they failed to establish further contact with Satya.
The Boipariguda police began an investigation into the incident and said the motive of the crime would only be revealed after investigations.

SBI pensioners' meet held, new branch unveiled



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
The State Bank of India Bhubaneswar Circle organised SBI Pensioners' meet on January 3 at Rail Auditorium, Bhubaneswar. More than 1,200 pensioners participated in the meeting.

Chief General Manager of SBI Bhubaneswar Circle Dinesh Pruthi graced the occasion in presence of General Manager (Network-1) Ponnambalam M, General Manager (Network-2) Kaushal Kishor Singh, Circle Development Officer

Manoj Kumar Singh and office bearers of SBOA, SBISA, SBI Pensioners' Association and SEWA.
CGM Pruthi requested all pensioners to continue being ambassadors of SBI and spread the positivity in the society. Later in the afternoon,

Pruthi inaugurated the 908th branch of SBI in Odisha at Ramdasapur of Cuttack district.
Deputy General Manager Prashant Kumar and Regional Manager Bhabani Shankar Mohanty among others were present.

Road Safety Wk: Events held by Red Cross

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Under the guidance of honorary secretary, Indian Red Cross Society, State Branch, Ganesh Chandra Patra, the Road Safety Week was organised by the Junior Red Cross wing here.
Principal Secretary, Commerce and Transport Department Usha Padhee joined the event as chief guest and declared that Traffic Clubs will be opened in 1,000 schools in joint association of Junior Red Cross and State Transport Authority to reduce road accidents and fatalities.
Joint Commissioner, STA Pradeep Kumar Mohanty



took a session on road safety to create awareness among the volunteers and counselors. Junior Red Cross officer Laxman Swain demonstrated some first aid skills for providing emergency care to road accident victims for saving precious lives.

While Dr Ramesh Chandra Behera coordinated the meeting, treasurer IRS OSB, Labanya Sabar and Joint Secretary Ashok Kumar Mohanty were present.
A human chain was formed in front of Red Cross Bhawan to create awareness among

the general people. A painting competition was organised among the volunteers and the best volunteers were awarded with merit certificate and trophy. Near about 160 junior Red Cross volunteers, counselors, life members and staff members were present.

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District Election Officer expresses concern over senior AAP leaders exerting pressure

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The District Election Officer of New Delhi has raised concerns about senior AAP leaders including Rajya Sabha MPs Raghav Chadha and Sanjay Singh exerting pressure on him to share the personal details of objectors.

In a letter to the Chief Election Officer, Delhi dated January 4, he said, "I am writing to bring to your notice a matter of concern pertaining to the independent functioning of the institution of District Election Officer, New Delhi district. Representatives of the Aam Aadmi Party have been frequently visiting my office and are asking for personal details of objectors which are not mandated to be shared as per ECI guidelines."

He added that the AAP dele-

gation visited his office on December 21, 28, 29 last year and on January 3, 2025 and there have been attempts on their part to exert pressure on me for asking for personal details of the objector and other such information which falls outside the purview of routine operations. He requested the CEO to provide insight and guidance in this matter on whether he is allowed to attend meetings called by the ruling government, without any prior meeting agenda or any other appropriate action as deemed fit by authority.

He also mentioned that Chief Minister Atishi has been calling me for a meeting on December 4 without a specified agenda and in the past also, has called me for a meeting without any agenda, wherein discussion regarding electoral rolls

was held. He also wrote to the OSD of the Chief Minister to convey the agenda of the upcoming meeting in advance so that he may come prepared for the meeting as well the timing may be rescheduled to allow me to reach the Office of CM, GNCTD in prescribed time.

"In light of this, I respectfully request that the agenda for our upcoming meeting be shared with me in advance. This would enable me to come prepared and ensure that the meeting is productive," he added. Further, the Additional District Magistrate wrote to the Deputy Commissioner of Police (New Delhi) Dvesh Mahla to provide security cover in the office of DEO for ensuring law and order in order to prevent any mishapening.

"I am writing to bring to your



Ranjan Dimri

attention the frequent presence of representatives of political parties in the office of District Election Officer in light of Delhi Vidhan Sabha elections, 2025. It is imperative to mention that

conduct of election," the officer said.

He added, "In light of the above, I kindly request your intervention in deploying adequate police personnel at the location of our office i.e. 12/1 Jam Nagar House, for ensuring law and order in order to prevent any mishapening. The presence of security forces will deter any attempts to sabotage the ongoing election process and help the staff and officers involved in the election process to discharge their duties without fear or coercion."

Meanwhile, Atishi on Monday alleged a 'voters scam' in the New Delhi constituency from where AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal is contesting the upcoming assembly elections. She claimed that in the past few

days, 10 percent of new voters had been added to the New Delhi constituency electoral roll, and 5.5 per cent of voters had been deleted.

"In the New Delhi Assembly constituency, which has approximately one lakh voters, between December 15 and January 2, applications for adding 10,500 new voters were submitted. Adding 10,000 new voters in a constituency with one lakh voters could completely alter the election outcome," she said.

"When the Election Commission summoned these 84 objectors for a hearing, the scam was exposed. The objectors denied filing any applications," she claimed.

The CM also questioned the role of the election commission in the matter and said that the commission's role is 'suspi-

cious' in this as they have not investigated the matter. "I have written a letter to the Chief Election Commissioner regarding this scam in the New Delhi assembly and have asked for time to address our concerns," she said.

Responding to the AAP accusations, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said, "Team Kejriwal must understand that the civil society of Delhi wants to make Delhi free of fake and fraudulent voters. Any political party opposing the removal of fake votes will be ousted by the people of Delhi."

"Delhiites are actively working to remove fake, fraudulent, shifted, and deceased votes, and many social organisations are focusing on removing the votes of Rohingya and Bangladeshi Muslims," he added.

Notification of 'The Delhi Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Rules, 2024' approved by LG

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Monday approved the notification of 'The Delhi Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Rules, 2024' by the Finance Department of the Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD) in a bid to ensure that fraudulent schemes are not used by criminals to dupe hapless residents of their savings.



This initiative is in accordance with Section 38 of "The Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Act, 2019." The rules have special provisions for Self Help Groups as advised by the Ministry of Finance, Government of India (GoI) and Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

The Government of India had enacted the Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Act, 2019, through a gazette notification dated July 31, 2019, to establish a comprehensive framework aimed at prohibiting unregulated deposit schemes,

except those conducted in the ordinary course of business, thereby protecting the interests of depositors.

As per Section 38(1) of the Act, the State or Union Territory Government, in consultation with the Central Government, is required to issue rules to implement the provisions of the Act. "On October 29, 2020, the GoI forwarded copies of the Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Rules, 2020, and the Karnataka Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Rules, 2020, noting that the Karnataka Government had

advised obtaining the opinion of the then Hon'ble Lieutenant Governor, as required by Clause (4) of Article 239AA of the Constitution. Approval from the Lieutenant Governor was secured before forwarding the file to the Central Government."

The draft rules were subsequently submitted to the Ministry of Finance, GoI, under Section 38(1) of the Act. The Ministry provided minor drafting suggestions and confirmed that the proposed rules were in order, advising the GNCTD to finalize and notify them accordingly.

One notable suggestion from the GoI highlighted that Section 38(2) (a) in conjunction with Section 2(4) (j) of the Act allows the State Government to establish ceilings for Self-Help Groups (SHGs). The GoI cited the example of Tamil Nadu, which included a provision in its draft rules. While these provisions are enabling and not mandatory, the GNCTD was encouraged to consider including a corresponding provision if deemed necessary.

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

South Delhi BJP MP Ramvir Singh Bidhuri on Monday challenged AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal for a debate on the issue of development in rural Delhi, stating that the former Chief Minister and his party have betrayed Delhi Dehat (rural) area and are constantly lying.

Claiming that he will leave politics if Kejriwal proves that his allegations are true, he said, "Kejriwal accusing the central government is a situation of 'the thief scolding the police'. Kejriwal did not do any work in the interest of Delhi rural and farmers. Even the promises he made, he did not fulfil them."

He said that the proposal to regularize the expanding population of Delhi rural was passed by the Sheila Dikshit government in 2013 and the notification was also issued. "The RWAs of the villages were asked to submit their layout plans. Hundreds of layout plans were submitted to the



Delhi government but in the meantime Kejriwal's party came to power and till date that decision has not been implemented," Bidhuri added.

He said that Kejriwal as well as the current Chief Minister Atishi had promised that the house tax of Delhi rural areas would be waived off but it was not done. "The farmers whose land was acquired were given alternative residential plots but the Kejriwal government stopped this scheme. Similarly, the mutation of the names of the heirs of the farmers was

also stopped which has been started by the Lieutenant Governor recently after the request of BJP MPs," the senior BJP leader said.

Bidhuri reminded that Kejriwal had said that Delhi farmers will be given 50 per cent more MSP on their crops but he did not fulfil this promise either. "Farmers were promised free electricity for irrigation but commercial rates of electricity are being charged from them. The Delhi government had to give ownership rights to the land-

less farmers who were given land under the 20-point program but this government kept suppressing that decision too," he said, adding that the AAP government did not fulfil its promise of giving subsidy to farmers on agricultural equipment and even essential equipment like tractors were declared commercial.

"The decision to abolish Section 81-A and 33-A could also have been taken at the level of the Delhi government but the Delhi government did not implement it either. < Since the decision to declare villages as urbanized was not taken, these sections remained in force and due to this reason the GDA policy and land pooling policy could not be implemented," he stated.

Bidhuri said that Kejriwal and his party have not only treated the rural areas of Delhi step-motherly but also have not allowed the public welfare schemes announced for farmers by the government of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi to be implemented.

LG unveils two panther sculptures at Janki Chowk

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Monday unveiled two panther sculptures, at Janki Chowk, located at the crossroads of sectors 20, 22 and 23, Dwarka.



embodying agility, strength and grace, resonates with the aspirations of a modern suburb while subtly emphasizing the harmonious coexistence of nature and development. "This sculpture point would become a place of interest and admiration for residents and visitors, exemplifying a commitment to integrate art with urban infrastructure, aligning with the

larger vision of transforming Dwarka into a world-class hub that balances functionality with elegance," it said.

To enhance Ease of Living and to build world-class infrastructure, the DDA, under guidance and supervision of Lt Governor, is working relentlessly towards unprecedented infrastructural development of Dwarka sub-city and has suc-

cessfully completed many projects, including construction of affordable to premium houses, it stated.

The statement added that the area has seen major progress in development of roads, FOBs, community centres, and improvement in drainage systems, ensuring a seamless and efficient urban experience for the local residents. "A signifi-

cant milestone has been achieved in the rejuvenation of Storm Water Channels 2 and 5. Through this extensive project, sewage of various sectors of Dwarka is now intercepted and treated before merging with Najafgarh drain which further falls into River Yamuna," it said.

Dwarka is also emerging as a hub for sports and recreation. The recent inauguration of the country's longest golf course in Sector-24, spanning 7,377 yards, offers state-of-the-art facilities including an 18-hole course, a driving range, a clubhouse, a swimming pool, and a Golf Academy to nurture budding golfers.

Additionally, Centres of Excellence are being established in Dwarka for sports like wrestling, boxing, tennis, and hockey, further strengthening Delhi's position in the sports arena.

The city's green cover will expand further with the upcoming 200-acre Bharat Vandana Park in the sub city, designed to provide vast open spaces and eco-friendly recreational areas.

Nine Bangladeshi nationals deported since New Year from central district

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Speeding up its crackdown on illegal immigrants in the national Capital even as a slugfest has been ensuing between AAP and BJP over the issue, the Delhi Police on Monday claimed that it has deported nine Bangladeshi nationals since the New Year who were staying illegally in the central district of the national Capital.

Following the orders of Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena to launch a two-month special drive to identify and take strict action against illegal Bangladeshi immigrants residing in the city, the police have deported a total of 28 Bangladeshi nationals in southwest district, seven in south district, 14 in south-east district, nine in west district and 13 in central district.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Central) M Harsha Vardhan said that they have undertaken a two pronged strategy to intensify its vigilance against illegal foreigners includ-



ing on-ground verifications and data based analysis of foreigners. "They were caught during verification drives conducted by police," he said.

The nine immigrants who have been identified and identified since January 1 included 41 years old Md. Iman Hossain, 43 years old Md Sharmin Parvez, 24 years old Rakib Khan, 29 years old Mafujul Islam, 24 years old Shakil Sarker, 38 years old Md Monju Sarker, 36 years old Shahin Danish, 26 years old Taizul Islam and 19 years old Moin Mia.

"Among the nine Bangladeshi nationals deported in January are those caught during verification drives in Jama Masjid

and Nabi Karim areas.

They include Mohammad Iman Hossain, who entered India illegally after paying an agent, and Mohammad Sharmin Parvez, whose visa expired in October 2024. Others overstayed their visas and were attempting to acquire Indian identity documents," the DCP said.

He added that the rest of the accused have been detained from the area of Nabi Karim police station where they were staying in a hotel.

"On checking their documents, it was found that they are overstaying in India and were looking to acquire Indian identity documents," he stated.

Meanwhile, the police deported five foreign nationals in the last year including one Iranian and four Bangladeshis in the central district police.

The Bangladeshis nationals included 34 years old Md. Iqbal Hussain, 24 years old Md. Shohag Hosan, Raihan Islam Polin and Nasir Uddin while Keihan Honardoust belonged to Iran

PM2.5 pollution up in city for second year on a trot: Report

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi's annual PM2.5 levels rose in 2024 for the second consecutive year, despite a 37 per cent drop in stubble burning in Punjab, Haryana and the national capital. The report by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) said Delhi's annual PM2.5 concentration increased to 104.7 microgrammes per cubic metre in 2024 -- a 3.4 per cent rise from the 2023 levels. This is also more than twice the national ambient air quality standard of 40 microgrammes per cubic metre. Delhi recorded two major smog episodes this winter: from November 13-20 (about eight days) and from December 16-20 (about four days).

According to the report, the 2024 average is still 9.6 per cent lower than the 2018 peak of 115.8 microgrammes per cubic metre, it is 3 per cent higher

than the three-year average of 2021-2023, indicating a gradual reversal of earlier gains made between 2018 and 2022. The report highlighted that the total annual fire counts (on account of stubble burning) dropped by 37.5 per cent in 2024 in Delhi, Punjab, and Haryana. Punjab recorded a 75 per cent decline, and Haryana, a 37 per cent decline.

"In 2024, the city's annual PM2.5 levels rose to 104.7 µg/m³, marking a 3.4 per cent increase compared to 2023 and standing at 2.6 times higher than the national annual standard of 40 µg/m³. While the 2024 average is still 9.6 per cent lower than the 2018 peak of 115.8 µg/m³, it is 3 per cent higher than the three-year average of 2021-2023, indicating a gradual reversal of earlier gains. Delhi's city-wide winter PM2.5 average for the October-December 2024 stood at 178.3 µg/m³, a level consis-

tent with the average since large-scale monitoring began in 2018-19. This season's average was 0.2 per cent lower than the 2019 winter average, but 4.6 per cent higher than the three-year winter average (2021-2023), based on data from 37 monitoring stations across the city."

"However, a troubling trend emerges in peak pollution levels. The citywide winter peak for 2024 soared to 732 µg/m³, marking a 26 per cent jump compared to last year's peak of 580 µg/m³. The city-wide peak this year stood at 602 µg/m³, recorded on November 18, 2024. The worst station-level peak this season was 9 per cent lower than the highest ever recorded -- at 806 µg/m³ during the 2018 winter," it added.

According to the report, in 2024, approximately 121 days met the National Ambient Air Quality Standards, a trend similar to 2019, when the second-worst annual average was



recorded at 109.1 µg/m³. However, there has been a noticeable decline in the number of good air quality days, dropping from 152 days in 2023 to 121 this year. Annually, while the number of "good" air quality days increased slightly from 25 in 2023 to 29 in 2024, this improvement was over-

shadowed by a marginal rise in the combined numbers of overall "very poor" or worse category days including "severe" and "severe-plus" categories, which climbed from 107 in 2023 to 111 days this year.

During the winter months (October to December), there were five days of "satisfactory"

air quality -- up from three days recorded in the previous two years; but there were no "good" air quality days. Meanwhile, the number of days categorised as "poor" and "very poor" remained unchanged at 57, reflecting no progress in air quality during this critical period.

"This winter, only eight out of 37 CAAQMS (stations) showed improvement in their seasonal averages compared to the last three years. The most notable improvements were observed at DTU and NSIT Dwarka, which recorded 26 per cent and 22 per cent lower seasonal averages, respectively, compared to the mean of the previous three winters. On the other hand, three stations -- North Campus, Okhla Phase 2 and Jahangirpuri -- showed no change in their seasonal averages."

"CRRI Mathura Road (22 per cent), Aya Nagar (17 per

cent), Ashok Vihar and Vivek Vihar (each 15 per cent) and Pusa IMD (14 per cent) were the top five stations that recorded an increase in seasonal PM2.5 levels compared to previous winters. The seasonal averages ranged from 97 µg/m³ at DTU to 226 µg/m³ at Wazirpur, with Anand Vihar emerging as the second most polluted location in the city, recording a seasonal average of 224 µg/m³, it said.

Anumita Roychowdhury, executive director, research and advocacy, CSE, said the rise in PM2.5 levels cannot be seen as an annual aberration due to meteorological factors and consistent rise indicates the impact of growing pollution in the region.

"Delhi seems to be losing its air quality gains from past action. Local and regional sources of pollution including vehicles, industries, open burning of waste, use of solid fuels, con-

struction and dust sources have offset the gains -- undermining the longer-term progress over the past decade.

"Delhi cannot hide behind the smoke screen of farm fires anymore. Despite a 71.2 per cent drop in stubble fire incidents during the October-December 2024, the winter pollution has remained elevated, upsetting the annual trend," she said.

The city experienced 17 days of severe or worse air quality, alongside two extended smog episodes with average smog intensity of 371 microgrammes per cubic metre and 324 microgrammes per cubic metre, respectively. The average daily intensity of this smog stood at 371 microgrammes per cubic metre and 324 microgrammes per cubic metre, respectively. At least three continuous days of severe AQI is considered a smog episode.

Nitish rules out quitting NDA



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Monday ruled out the possibility of quitting the NDA, pointing out that his ties with the BJP went back a long way. The JD(U) supremo, who termed as a "mistake" his two short-lived alliances with the RJD-Congress combine, fondly recalled the backing he had always received from former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. "It was respected Atal ji who made me a Union minister. He used to shower so much of affection on me. I never faced any difficulty in getting my proposals cleared," Kumar told reporters in Vaishali district, which he toured as part of the state-wide 'Pragati Yatra'. The longest-serving chief min-

ister of the state also recalled that it was Vajpayee's wish that "I become the CM" when the NDA first won assembly polls in Bihar in 2005. "So, why would I not stay (with the BJP)? A couple of times the people in my party committed a mistake (by pressing for an alliance with the Congress-RJD combine). I rectified it both times," said the JD(U) president. Kumar was responding to queries about speculations in the political circles, triggered by Union Home Minister Amit Shah's equivocal stance on his projection as chief ministerial candidate in the assembly polls due in less than a year. The speculations grew stronger after RJD president Lalu Prasad recently said he was keeping his "doors open" for arch-rival Kumar. Meanwhile, Kumar inaugurat-

ed and laid foundation stones for 344 developmental projects worth Rs 276.80 crore in Vaishali during his visit to the district on Monday. "He chaired a meeting to review the ongoing developmental schemes of the state government in the district... The CM was briefed about the ongoing schemes, including Bihar Student Credit Card Scheme, Chief Minister Nishchay Self Help Allowance Scheme, tap water to every house and their maintenance, Chief Minister Rural Solar Street Light Scheme, irrigation water to every farm, Chief Minister Agricultural Electricity Connection Scheme in the district...", a statement issued by the CMO said. Kumar also announced that four new power substations will be opened in four blocks of the district.

SC orders foreigners to stay in India for criminal proceedings

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday said a foreigner should not be allowed to leave India if required to answer a criminal charge. A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan said while granting bail to a foreign national, the court should issue a direction to the state or the prosecuting agency, to immediately inform about its order to the registration officer concerned under the Registration of Foreigners Rules, 1992. "When a foreigner's presence is required in India to answer a criminal charge, permission to leave India must be refused. Under the Order (1948 order), the civil authority can impose restrictions on the movements of a foreigner," the bench said. The bench said the registration officer should then communicate the bail order to all relevant agencies, including the civil authority. SC's order came in a case where it had decided two main issues concerning bail conditions imposed on a Nigerian national in a drugs case in July, 2024. The top court had held the bail conditions, which allowed an investigating agency to continuously track the movements of an accused, violated the right to privacy guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution. In its order passed on Monday,

the bench referred to the provisions of the Foreigners Act, 1946, and said according to clause 5(1)(b) of the Foreigners Order, 1948, no foreigner should leave India without the leave of the civil authority having the relevant jurisdiction. Once a foreigner was released on bail, the top court said, they couldn't leave India without the permission of the civil authority under clause 5 of the 1948 order. It said if such information was furnished, it would enable the authorities under the Act, the rules and the order, to take appropriate legal steps. The bench directed a copy of its order to be forwarded to registrar generals of all the high courts, who in turn would forward it to all the criminal courts in the respective states. The top court was dealing with the question whether it was necessary to implead a foreign registration officer appointed under rule 3 of the Registration of Foreigners Rules, 1992, in the bail application filed by a foreigner within the meaning of the 1946 Act. The bench said the authorities under the law and the 1948 order have no locus to oppose the bail application filed by a foreigner unless the bail was sought where the allegation was of the offence punishable under Section 14 of the Act. Section 14 deals with penalty for contravention of the law's provisions, etc.



Om Birla honours women at Panchayat Se Parliament 2.0

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla Monday underscored the transformative role of women leadership in strengthening Indian democracy. He said that the inclusion and empowerment of women, especially from rural and tribal communities, are pivotal for the socio-economic change. Highlighting the Government's commitment to fostering gender equality, Birla cited the Nari Shakti Vandan Act as a testament to India's progressive vision for women's leadership. Birla was speaking at the 'Panchayat Se Parliament 2.0'

programme in the historic Central Hall of Samvidhan Sadan, organized by the Parliamentary Research and Training Institute for Democracies (PRIDE) of Lok Sabha Secretariat in collaboration with National Commission for Women and Ministry of Tribal Affairs. Union Minister for Tribal Affairs Jual Oram, Union Minister for Women and Child Development Annapurna Devi, Minister of State for Women and Child Development Savitri Thakur and Chairperson, National Commission for Women Vijaya Rahatkar were among the dignitaries present on the occasion.

The event, which saw the participation of more than 500 tribal women representatives from Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) from 22 states and Union Territories, served as a platform to reaffirm India's commitment to women led development and grassroots empowerment. Acknowledging the invaluable contributions of women in India's democratic and developmental journey, the Speaker paid heartfelt tributes to the 15 women members of the Constituent Assembly whose contributions continue to inspire the movement for women's empowerment in India.

Yemen court's sentence on nurse pending Presidential ratification



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The capital punishment handed to Indian nurse Nimisha Priya by a Yemeni court has not been ratified by President Rashad al-Alimi, the West Asian nation's embassy said on Monday. The embassy issued the clarification to a media outlet following its report on the case. The Yemeni government emphasises that the entire case has been handled by the Houthi militias, and therefore, Rashad Al-Alimi, Chairman of the Presidential Leadership Council, Yemen has not ratified this judgment, the mission said. Priya, hailing from Kollengode in Kerala's Palakkad district, has been found guilty of mur-

dering a Yemeni citizen in July, 2017. The 37-year-old nurse is presently lodged in a jail in Sana'a, the Yemeni capital city that is under the control of Iran-backed Houthis. According to reports, Priya was handed capital punishment by a trial court in 2020 while Yemen's Supreme Judicial Council upheld the verdict in November 2023. Last week, India said it is closely following the developments in the case. External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said the government is extending "all possible" help in the matter. "We are closely following the developments around the sentencing of Nimisha Priya. The government is extending all possible help in the matter," he said on Friday.

Court to hear pardon plea in multi-crore DHFL loan scam case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

A Delhi court is likely to hear on January 13 applications moved by five accused in multi-crore bank loan scam case involving Dewan Housing Finance Ltd's former promoter Kapil Wadhawan, seeking pardon and turning approver in the case. Special Judge Ashwani Kumar Sarpal posted the applications filed by accused persons -- Vivek Jayesh Thar, Malav Mehta, Gopal Dalvi, Rajen Vasant Kumar Dhruv and Arvind Kayan -- seeking pardon and for becoming prosecution witness for the next date, while directing them to provide additional documents to substantiate their claims. "Put up this application on January 13, 2025 for further consideration," the judge said in an order passed on January 4. The judge said mere fact that the prosecution has given no objection itself was not sufficient to allow the applications. The judge further clarified that the statement given by the accused in support of their applications will not be used for any other purpose except for disposal of this pleas for the time being. In case the appli-

cation of the accused is allowed and he is granted pardon, the statement filed alongwith the application can be used during inquiry or trial, he added. The FIR in the case was based on a complaint made by the Union Bank of India. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has alleged in the FIR that Dewan Housing Finance Ltd (DHFL), its then CMD Kapil Wadhawan, then director Dheeraj Wadhawan and other accused persons entered into a criminal conspiracy to cheat the consortium of 17 banks led by the Union Bank of India. The accused and others induced the consortium to sanction huge loans aggregating Rs 42,871.42 crore. Much of that amount was allegedly siphoned off and misappropriated by alleged falsification of the books of DHFL and dishonest default in repayment of the legitimate dues of the consortium banks, the CBI claimed. The complainant alleged that a wrongful loss of Rs 34,615 crore was caused to the consortium banks in as much as such was the quantification of the outstanding dues as on July 31, 2020. The CBI had in October 2022 filed a charge sheet against more than 70 accused people, including the Wadhawans.

CJI Sanjeev Khanna recuses from sports constitution cases

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India Sanjeev Khanna on Monday recused himself from hearing two separate pleas pertaining to finalisation of the constitutions of the Indian Olympic Association and the All India Football Federation, both framed by former apex court judge Justice L Nageswara Rao. The CJI, who was sitting on the bench with Justice Sanjay Kumar, said he would not be part of the bench to hear these cases as he had earlier taken up one of the pleas in Delhi High Court. "Let the pleas come before another bench headed by Justice PS Narasimha on February 10. I remember hearing this in Delhi High Court," CJI Khanna said. The pleas were last taken up on March 19, 2024, by a bench headed by the then CJI DY Chandrachud. The bench had then permitted the All India Football Federation (AIFF) to file its objections to the draft constitution proposed by Justice Rao. "The amicus curiae will update the existing chart to reflect the objections of the AIFF," the bench had said. It had also said that it would decide the issues raised about the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and the



AIFF constitutions on the next date of hearing. While dealing with the pleas on the AIFF's constitution, the bench had said the report submitted by Justice Rao would be circulated by Gopal Sankarnarayanan, the amicus curiae -- friend of court appointed to assist the court in the matter -- to all the parties wanting to secure soft copies. It had directed that the objections to the AIFF's draft constitution also be filed. Prior to this, the top court had extended the time for filing objections to the draft constitution of the IOA. It had

also made it clear that the pendency of pleas related to the IOA would not preclude high courts from continuing with hearings on pending petitions linked to other sports bodies. The IOA's draft constitution was adopted at the special general body meeting in Delhi. While the IOA adopted the draft constitution, framed under the supervision of the Supreme Court and the International Olympic Committee (IOC), several members said they were forced into adopting it after the apex court made it mandatory. The

top court had also urged Justice Rao to prepare a comprehensive report on finalising the AIFF constitution after taking note of the objections to a draft document by various stakeholders, including FIFA, the apex global body that governs football. It had said the voluminous objections to the draft constitution by various stakeholders could be taken care of by Justice Rao, who had finalised the IOA constitution on the top court's orders. The apex court had decided to hear the pleas related to the IOA and the AIFF together.

Setting up AFT benches in J&K, Shimla will reduce pendency: SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday called for setting up Armed Forces Tribunal benches in Jammu and Kashmir, and Himachal Pradesh, to deal with the growing pendency of defence-related cases. A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh said at present AFT, Chandigarh, was burdened by a huge backlog from these states and setting up circuit benches at Jammu and Kashmir, Shimla and Dharamshala, would help in speedy disposal of cases. Refusing to blame the Centre alone for delay in filling of the vacancies in the AFTs, the bench told attorney general R Venkataramani to explore the possibilities of having circuit benches. "There are sitting judges of this court who head committees. Even I head some of the committees which look after the appointment of members of the tribunals. Sometimes the workload is so much that the process gets delayed. We have to devise a mechanism so that a process



for filling of the vacancies gets started six months before the prospective vacancy arises in a tribunal," said Justice Surya Kant. The top court asked the Centre to collate data of the total sanctioned strength of tribunals and vacancies in these quasi judicial bodies, and furnish suggestions on systematically filling these posts. The Centre was further directed to furnish the details of the ongoing processes for filling the posts in the tribunals within four weeks. The top court was hearing an application for a direction to the Centre to expeditiously appoint members of the AFT. Senior advocate Vikas Singh, appearing for an intervenor,

said one of the members was transferred from Chandigarh to Kolkata, and the position was lying vacant. Venkataramani said the chairman of AFT, Chandigarh, could decide on setting up of circuit benches and informed the process of filling posts in tribunals happened round the year. He said the vacancy in AFT, Chandigarh, would be filled soon. On the challenge to the Tribunal Reforms Act of 2021, senior advocate Arvind Datar said the provisions of 2017 Finance Act related to service conditions of members of tribunals which was struck down by this court and was reproduced in subsequent legislations.

SC quashes cheating case against Goa MLA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday quashed a cheating case against a Goa MLA accused of land grabbing and fraudulent sale of property. A bench comprising Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan allowed the appeal of MLA Jit Vinayak Arolkar challenging a March 2023 Bombay High Court verdict dismissing his plea to quash the FIR. The case involved allegations under Section 420 (cheating) of the IPC, registered on October 26, 2020, at the Pernem Police Station, and then transferred to the special investigation team of the economic offences wing. The FIR accused Arolkar of fraudulently selling a property in Dhargalim Village, Pernem, Goa, without the consent of all legal co-owners. The property -- "Capnivoril Guera" or "Kapni Varil Ghera" -- came under dispute after the complainant, who filed 12 civil suits in 2018, claimed ownership. The complainant alleged Arolkar sold portions of the land in his capacity as the



constituted attorney of two co-owners, Vidhya Natekar and Sanjay Natekar, without the consent of other stakeholders. The MLA's counsel argued the sales only transferred the ownership rights of the individuals he represented and did not encroach on the complainant's rights. The complainant however filed a police complaint alleging fraudulent sale without the consent of the co-owners, resulting in the FIR. Justice Oka, who authored the judgment, said the dispute was primarily civil in nature, and did not justify invoking criminal law. "The appeal succeeds. The

impugned judgment and the order dated March 1, 2023, is set aside, and FIR.....And proceedings based thereon are hereby quashed and set aside only as against the appellant," held the bench. The judgment clarified of not making any adjudication on the merits of the pending civil dispute between the parties. The complainant acknowledged the co-ownership of the vendors in the property and filed the civil suits two years before registering the FIR, the bench said, and found no evidence to prove Arolkar deceived the complainant or caused harm to his property or reputation.

Over 33 lakh users from 183 countries visit Maha Kumbh website: UP Govt

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

People from 183 countries across the world are actively seeking information about the Maha Kumbh through various websites and portals, the Uttar Pradesh government said on Monday. The official website of Maha Kumbh, <https://kumbh.gov.in/>, has emerged as the primary source for reliable information, witnessing significant traffic from millions of users worldwide, it said in a statement. "According to the data of the website, as of January 4, over 33 lakh visitors from 183 countries accessed the portal to gather details about Maha Kumbh. This includes visitors from across continents, such as Europe, America, and Africa, showcasing the event's global appeal," it said. A representative from the technical team managing the website confirmed that, as of January 4, a total of 33,05,667 users have visited the official Maha Kumbh portal. These users belong to 183 countries, with visits recorded from as many as 6,206 cities worldwide, it added.

India remains the top country for website visits, followed closely by significant traffic from the United States, Britain, Canada, and Germany. Visitors have not only accessed the website but have also spent considerable time exploring its content, according to the statement. "The technical team noted a substantial surge in traffic since the website's launch, with the number of daily users now reaching millions as the event draws closer," it added. The Uttar Pradesh government is presenting the Maha Kumbh as a 'Digital Maha Kumbh'. Several digital platforms have been developed to ensure the convenience of devotees. Among these is the official website of Maha Kumbh, which was launched by CM Yogi Adityanath in Prayagraj on October 6, 2024. The website provides detailed information about the Maha Kumbh, ensuring devotees have easy access to details about the traditions associated with Kumbh, its spiritual significance, and the studies conducted on Kumbh.

PM Modi virtually inaugurates multiple railway projects, boosting connectivity across India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU/NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday virtually inaugurated a slew of railway projects, including the Jammu railway division, the Charlapalli terminal station in Telangana, besides laying foundation for the Rayagada railway division building in Odisha under the East Coast Railway zone. Lauding the country's fast-paced progress in connectivity, the prime minister said since the beginning of 2025, India has been accelerating its initiatives with its metro rail network expanding to over 1,000 kilometres. He also mentioned the recent inauguration of the Namo Bharat train in Delhi-NCR along with the launch of Delhi Metro projects. Today's event is a further testimony to the fact that the entire nation is moving forward together, step by step, as projects launched in Jammu and Kashmir, Odisha and Telangana mark a major leap in modern connectivity for the north, east and southern regions of the country, he said. He also reiterated that the mantra of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka



Vikas' is helping turn the vision of a developed India into reality while congratulating the people of these states and all citizens of India on the new developments. According to Modi, all these initiatives are generating millions of new employment opportunities in the railway sector. Keeping in mind the special skills related to the



railways, the country's first Gati-Shakti University has also been established, he added. Highlighting the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla rail line, he said that Jammu and Kashmir is achieving new milestones in railway infrastructure. The Railway Board appointed E Srinivas as the first Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) of the Jammu Rail Division soon after its

inauguration by PM. According to the prime minister, the completion of the Chenab bridge, the world's highest railway arch bridge in J-K, will play a key role in connecting the region with the rest of India, providing convenience to the people of Leh-Ladakh. "The Chenab bridge and the Anji Khad bridge are unparalleled examples of engineering

leading to economic progress in the region and promoting prosperity," he said. Laying foundation for the divisional railway manager (DRM) building for the Rayagada division in Odisha, Modi highlighted the state's abundant natural resources and a large coastline, which, according to him, hold significant potentials for international trade.

MP Chief Minister urges residents to take concerns on toxic waste disposal to court

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BHOPAL

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Monday urged the residents of Pithampur in Dhar district to present their concerns in court regarding the disposal of toxic waste from the Union Carbide factory. The appeal comes after the Madhya Pradesh High Court on Monday granted the State government six weeks to ensure the waste is disposed of in compliance with safety guidelines. While talking to media persons here on Monday, Yadav emphasized that the High Court's decision aligns with the State government's expectations, reiterating their commitment to adhering to judicial directives. He expressed confidence in the judiciary, stating, "The decision has come in accordance with our expectations. We have full faith in the court." The High Court also directed the media to refrain from disseminating inaccurate reports concerning the waste disposal issue. The Union Carbide pesticide factory in



Bhopal was the site of one of the world's worst industrial disasters when, on the night of December 2 and 3, 1984, methyl isocyanate (MIC) gas leaked from the facility. The tragedy claimed at least 5,479 lives and left thousands more with severe health complications and long-term effects. On January 2, 2025, the waste, packed in 12 sealed containers, was transported from the defunct factory in Bhopal to a disposal site managed by Ramky Enviro Engineers Limited in Pithampur, Dhar district. This action followed the High Court's December 3, 2024, order, which mandated the removal of the waste within

four weeks to avoid contempt proceedings. The transfer of the waste has sparked widespread protests in Pithampur, located about 50 kilometers from the Dhar district headquarters. Demonstrators argue that the incineration of the hazardous waste poses significant risks to human health and the environment. On January 3, tensions escalated when two protesters allegedly attempted self-immolation during a demonstration. Despite the unrest, the Chief Minister maintained that the State government has strictly followed the High Court's directives.

Dense fog causes chaos: 60 flights delayed at Kolkata airport due to poor visibility



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

Around 60 flights were delayed at the Kolkata airport on Monday due to poor visibility, an official said. Due to dense fog, low visibility procedures (LVP) had to be implemented at the airport from 7 am, he said. The ATC declares LVP when visibility falls below 800 metres. It is also activated when the cloud ceiling is below 200 feet. According to the Director of

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport (NSCIB), Pravat Ranjan Beuria, no traffic movement took place from 7.10 am to 9 am, and around 30 flight arrivals and 30 departures were delayed, the airport director said. The visibility had dropped below the permissible limit for commercial aircraft operations on Monday morning, he said. The Kolkata airport is equipped with CAT-III B Instrument Landing System

(ILS), which allows compatible aircraft and CAT III B trained pilots to operate with visibility up to 50 metres. However, the visibility at Kolkata airport turned close to zero on Monday morning, which ruled out operations completely till 9 am, the official said. The last flight departed from the airport at 3.35 am after which the visibility dropped. In addition, seven flights to Kolkata were diverted to other airports such as Bhubaneswar, Raipur, Hyderabad and Nagpur, he said. All arrangements were made to facilitate the stranded passengers in the airport terminal, Beuria said. He said that visibility conditions improved after 9 am, and the first flight to arrive at the airport was from Dubai at 9.04 am. The initial delays on Monday, both incoming and outgoing, will have a consequential effect throughout the day, airport sources said.

Jan Suraaj founder Prashant Kishor arrested amid fast unto death over Bihar PSC exam controversy



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PATNA

Jan Suraaj founder Prashant Kishor, who had been on a fast unto death at Gandhi Maidan here to press the demand for cancellation of a Bihar PSC exam, was arrested early on Monday, a top official said. Police personnel removed him and his supporters from the protest site. According to supporters of Kishor, the police took him to Patna AIIMS for a medical examination. Talking to PTI,

Patna, District Magistrate (DM), Chandrashekhar Singh, said, "Yes, Kishor and his supporters sitting on dharna at Gandhi Maidan, were arrested by the police on Monday morning. They will now be produced before a court." Their dharna was "illegal," he said, adding they were holding the sit-in near the restricted site, he added. The Patna Police had registered a case against Kishor for holding the fast unto death at Gandhi Maidan, a restricted site near

Mahatma Gandhi statue, another official said. Kishor began his fast unto death on January 2 in support of the civil service aspirants who have been demanding the cancellation of Bihar Public Service Commission (BPS) examination held on December 13 last year. However, the BPS had ordered the retest for a select group of candidates who had appeared in the December 13 exam, which was embroiled over allegations of question paper leak. The retest was held on Saturday at 22 centres here. Of 12,012 candidates, around 8,111 aspirants had downloaded their admit cards for the re-exam. However, 5,943 candidates appeared for the retest on January 4. The retest was held peacefully at all centres without report of any misconduct and malpractices, the BPS said in a statement issued on Saturday.

Chhattisgarh journalist murder: Main accused Suresh Chandrakar held in Hyderabad

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ RAIPUR

Suresh Chandrakar, the prime accused in the murder of a journalist in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district, has been taken into custody by a Special Investigation Team (SIT) from Hyderabad, a police official said on Monday. The accused, a contractor by profession, was absconding since the murder of journalist Mukesh Chandrakar came to light on January 3, he said. The SIT, which was constituted to conduct the probe into the case, rounded up Suresh Chandrakar from Hyderabad late Sunday night, the official said. His brothers Ritesh Chandrakar and Dinesh Chandrakar and supervisor Mahendra Ramekte have already been arrested in the case, he said. Mukesh Chandrakar (33), a

freelance journalist, went missing on January 1. His body was found on January 3 in a septic tank on a property owned by Suresh Chandrakar at Chhattanpara Basti in Bijapur town, police earlier said. A news report highlighting alleged corruption in a road construction work in Bijapur, that was shown on NDTV on December 25, is being discussed as the motive behind Mukesh Chandrakar's murder. The said construction work was linked to contractor Suresh Chandrakar. Chhattisgarh Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma had claimed that Suresh Chandrakar was a Congress leader. The opposition party, however, claimed the accused joined the ruling BJP recently.

Assam CM urges tycoons not to take illegal Bangladeshis for cheap labour

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MUMBAI

Industrialists have to look beyond "cheap labour", and perform a "national duty" by not giving any jobs to illegal Bangladeshi migrants, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Monday. Addressing a press conference here after meeting representatives of India Inc, including from the Tatas, Adani Group and Mahindra, Sarma regretted that Indian businessmen are hiring middlemen to get cheap labour from Bangladesh, where textile units are shutting down. "Who gets the cheap labour



into India? It is our own industry," he said adding, it is a national duty not to encourage the hiring of illegal Bangladeshi migrants. "If Bangladeshis get

employment, people will keep coming. Our industry, our trade, and business have to resolve not to give any jobs to Bangladeshis where will they come? If we have to strike, we have to strike at the roots," the Chief Minister said. He said simple enquiries would reveal that the Bangladeshi workers are coming to India after closer of textile units in the neighbouring country. When asked if the issue featured during his discussions with industry captains over the weekend, Sarma said there is no need to "re-emphasise" an issue on

which Assam has been fighting since 1979. The northeastern state is looking at investment commitments of Rs 1 lakh crore from the central government and entities allied with it over a five-year horizon at the upcoming "Advantage Assam 2.0" investment summit to be held in Guwahati next month, he said. This will be in addition to the over Rs 1 lakh crore of projects in the roads and railways sectors underway in the state, he added. Attracting investments in sectors such as tourism,

semiconductors and defence is the other focus area of the summit to be held on February 25-26, he said. He said the Tata group's mega Rs 27,000-crore investment for a semiconductor assembly plant is on schedule, and the first phase will be inaugurated in either November or December this year. Apart from that, the Tatas have also evinced interest in setting up a 500 MW solar capacity in the state, he said, adding that an industrial policy is in the works where fallow land being held by tea estates can be converted into solar power parks.

Three tigers and leopard die of avian flu at rescue centre in Nagpur, zoos on alert

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NAGPUR



Three tigers and a leopard died of avian influenza at an animal rescue centre in Maharashtra's Nagpur, prompting the authorities to put zoos on alert, an official said on Monday. Following the deaths that occurred at the end of last month, the Central government has issued an advisory, directing zoos to take precautionary measures, the official said. Shatanik Bhagwat, divisional manager of the Gorewada project, said the animals had been relocated to Gorewada Rescue Centre from Chandrapur following incidents of man-

animal conflict. He said the big cats died at the centre at the end of December. Bhagwat said the tigers were brought to the rescue centre in the second week of December, while the leopard had been housed there since May. The animals showed different

symptoms but limped and suffered from fever in the third week of December, he said, adding that their samples were sent to Bhopal for testing, and the test reports that arrived on January 2 confirmed they were positive for the H5N1 virus.

Mumbai: over 2000 autos fined for violations during two-day drive

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MUMBAI

More than 2,000 autorickshaws were found flouting rules during a drive conducted by the police and transport authorities in the eastern suburbs here, and Rs 24.53 lakh has been collected in fines, an official said on Monday. The joint drive, conducted by the Mumbai police and Wadala Regional Transport Office (RTO) on December 30 and 31, found that 40 per cent of autorickshaws operating in the eastern suburbs were violating rules. A senior RTO official said 2,130 out of 5,425 autorickshaws were operating beyond their service age and did not have valid fitness

certificates, insurance, PUC certificates, or public service permits. As many as 261 auto rickshaws were impounded for plying without a valid fitness certificate, a public service vehicle permit, or both, he said. "We found two autorickshaws that had exceeded their age limit but were still ferrying passengers illegally," the RTO official said, adding that some drivers were found without valid licences, badges or uniforms. Another RTO official said the fine for plying an autorickshaw without a valid permit is Rs 10,000, and the fine for operating without a fitness certificate is Rs 2,000 for the first-time offence.

Minister 'Jija' and MLA 'Saali' clash over promotion in polytechnic

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

The ongoing controversy over promotions to the posts of department heads in polytechnic institutions has escalated into a direct confrontation between Uttar Pradesh's Minister of Technical Education Ashish Patel and Samajwadi Party (SP) rebel MLA Dr. Pallavi Patel, who happens to be Jija and Saali. Responding sharply to Ashish Patel's recent statements, Pallavi accused him of betraying the Patel community, likening him to the historical figure Jai Chand. She declared that Rajbahadur Patel, the former Officer on Special Duty (OSD) to the minister, is the



true descendant of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel for courageously exposing alleged corruption despite facing harassment. Pallavi asserted that Rajbahadur Patel has been consistently targeted by the

minister for raising concerns about irregularities in promotions. After being removed from his OSD post, Rajbahadur was transferred to the Directorate of Technical Education and later shifted to Rampur.

Recently, he was issued a show-cause notice and transferred again on January 1, which Pallavi labeled as retaliation for his whistleblowing. Addressing the media, Pallavi alleged that the minister is persecuting Rajbahadur for revealing corruption in the department. She warned that if the harassment does not stop, under her leadership, would take to the streets in protest. Pallavi further claimed that threats have been issued to Rajbahadur's family, and accused the government of suppressing dissent. She challenged the administration, stating that any oppression of backward communities would lead to

severe consequences for the government. In response, Minister Ashish Patel took to social media attacking Pallavi without directly naming her. He alleged that a "sponsored conspiracy" was being orchestrated against him, driven by individuals working under ulterior motives. Referring to Rajbahadur, the minister claimed that his former OSD had been colluding with conspirators aiming to defeat NDA candidate Anupriya Patel in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. He warned his critics not to provoke him into crossing the limits of decency, as the consequences could be far-reaching. Meanwhile, Rajbahadur

Patel, speaking to journalists, provided a detailed account of the alleged irregularities in the promotion process. He stated that during his tenure as OSD, he had informed the minister about financial improprieties both orally and in writing. However, instead of addressing the issue, he faced harassment, forcing him to resign. Rajbahadur alleged that officials in the department, under undue pressure from the minister, violated rules to advance the promotion process. He warned that if the promotions were not annulled and direct recruitment initiated for the posts, he would approach the court for justice.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

E-student visa initiative

Special visa categories for international students would make it easier for them to pursue their education in India

India has taken a significant step to attract international students by introducing two special visa categories: the e-student visa and the e-student-x visa. This initiative not only streamlines the process for students seeking education in India but also demonstrates the country's commitment to becoming a global hub for higher education. The e-student visa is designed specifically for foreign learners registered on the "Study in India" portal. This platform facilitates admissions for international students into a variety of Indian institutions offering long-term and short-term courses. The e-student-x visa, on the other hand, caters to dependents of these students, ensuring families can stay together during their academic journey. To apply for these visas, students need to secure admission to a partner institution listed on the 'Study in India' portal. Once the admission is confirmed, they can use their 'study in India' identification number to authenticate their identity and complete the visa application process at the official portal. These visas are valid for up to five years, depending on the duration of the chosen course.



By welcoming a diverse cohort of international students, Indian universities can elevate their global reputation, fostering cultural exchange and enhancing their academic standing on the world stage. Increased enrollment of international students contributes to revenue generation, which can be reinvested in research, infrastructure, and faculty development. The influx of students from different countries enriches the campus environment, promoting global perspectives and intercultural dialogue. With a range of courses across disciplines, international students can find programmes tailored to their interests and career aspirations. Studying in India provides an unparalleled opportunity to experience its rich cultural heritage, traditions and diversity. Globally, countries like the US and the UK have long-established student visa frameworks that have attracted millions of international learners. The US for example offers the F-1 visa for academic students and the M-1 visa for vocational or technical students. These visas allow students to work part-time on campus and participate in Optional Practical Training (OPT) programmes, enabling them to gain work experience in their field of study. The UK's Tier 4 student visa permits full-time study and part-time work during term time. Post-study work options, such as the Graduate Route, allow students to stay and work in the UK for two years after graduation. India's introduction of specialised student visa categories is a strategic move to position itself as a global education hub. By simplifying the visa process, the country is poised to attract a significant number of international students. With affordable fee structure, India can attract good number of students from across the world. However, a lot more needs to be done in terms of quality of education and infrastructure. University campuses that are foreign student friendly will go a long way in making India an international education hub.

PICTALK



Flocks of pelicans and cormorants congregate at Man Sagar Lake, in Jaipur

Gandhi's arrest: A turning point in the global fight for freedom



RAJDEEP PATHAK

His arrest, far from quelling resistance, galvanised the nation, showcasing the power of non-violence as a tool for liberation and freedom

On January 4, 1932, Mahatma Gandhi was arrested after the Congress Party had decided to resume a civil disobedience movement in the wake of emergency measures imposed by the British government. The arrest marked a pivotal juncture in India's struggle for independence and left an indelible impact on global movements for justice and equality. Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence and civil disobedience not only reshaped India's freedom struggle but also served as a blueprint for resistance movements worldwide.

The Civil Disobedience Movement, initiated by Mahatma Gandhi in 1930, was a landmark moment in the Indian nationalist struggle. It was launched with the historic Salt March (Dandi Yatra) - where Gandhi defied British-imposed salt taxes, a symbol of colonial exploitation - foot-marching from Sabarmati Ashram in Gujarat to the river Dandi, a journey of 241 miles. This movement aimed to undermine British authority through non-violent means such as boycotting British goods, refusing to pay taxes, and disobeying oppressive laws.

By the early 1930s, the movement had gained mass participation but faced severe repression from the British administration. Lord Willingdon, the Viceroy of India, adopted a policy of suppression, seeing Gandhi's leadership as a threat to the stability of British rule in India. On January 4, 1932, Gandhi was arrested under the 'Defence of India Act' for his role in perpetuating 'civil disobedience' - after it was decided by the Congress Party to resume a 'civil disobedience' movement in the wake of emergency measures imposed by the British government in the form of a series of Viceroy's ordinances. The arrest of Gandhi had immediate repercussions in India, sparking a wave of protests and acts of defiance. Historian Bipan Chandra in his book 'India's Struggle for Independence' (Penguin Books, 1989), writes that Gandhi's detention was a "turning point that revitalized the waning momentum of the movement". The arrest was perceived as an attack on



India's moral and political conscience, galvanising people from all walks of life to resist British rule. Women, in particular, stepped into leadership roles during this period. Kasturba Gandhi, Gandhi's wife and Sarojini Naidu led marches and protests, ensuring that the movement did not lose steam.

Acts of civil disobedience, such as the refusal to pay land revenue and the boycott of British institutions, intensified across the country. The arrest also amplified the moral and symbolic power of Gandhi's leadership. His willingness to endure imprisonment demonstrated his steadfast commitment to non-violence and truth. The Indian masses responded with unprecedented solidarity, reinforcing the idea that freedom could be achieved through peaceful resistance.

Gandhi's arrest in 1932 was widely reported in the global press, drawing attention to the Indian struggle for independence. In Britain, the arrest sparked wide debate. While the colonial government justified the move as a necessary measure to maintain law and order, prominent intellectuals like Bertrand Russell and George Orwell criticized the repression. Orwell in his book 'As I Please: Essays' (1943); Tribune Publishing remarked, "The



GANDHI'S ARREST BECAME A BEACON FOR OPPRESSED PEOPLES WORLDWIDE, INSPIRING MOVEMENTS FOR FREEDOM AND JUSTICE. NELSON MANDELA, WHO WOULD LATER LEAD THE ANTI-APARTHEID STRUGGLE IN SOUTH AFRICA, CREDITED MAHATMA GANDHI AS THE PIONEER OF NON-VIOLENT RESISTANCE

paradox of Gandhi's imprisonment lay in the fact that a man advocating peace was treated as a threat to the empire". The arrest also resonated with leaders of other anti-colonial and 'civil rights movements'. Years later, Martin Luther King Jr. would cite Gandhi's arrest as an example of how moral authority could triumph over systemic oppression. King said, "Gandhi's life and sacrifices teach us that non-violence is not only a method but a philosophy of life", adding, "The non-violent resistance of Gandhi was the guiding light of our struggle for justice in America".

Gandhi's arrest became a beacon for oppressed peoples worldwide, inspiring movements for freedom and justice. Nelson Mandela, who would later lead the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, credited Mahatma Gandhi as the pioneer of non-violent resistance. In his autobiography "Long Walk to Freedom", Mandela wrote, "The spirit of defiance Gandhi embodied in India was equally relevant in South Africa's fight against apartheid".

Historians and political theorists have studied Gandhi's detention in 1932 as a case study in the dynamics of resistance and power. British historian Judith M. Brown, in her seminal work "Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope" (1989) also

points out that Gandhi's imprisonment highlighted the moral contradictions of British colonialism. "By incarcerating Gandhi, the British sought to delegitimise him, but instead they exposed their own vulnerability to ethical critique". International British historian Erik Hobsbawm situates Gandhi's arrest within the broader context of anti-colonial movements. In "The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, (1914-1991)", Hobsbawm notes that "The imprisonment of Gandhi was not merely an Indian event; it marked the erosion of imperial authority on a global scale".

Today, as the world grapples with challenges like systemic injustice, racial inequality, and climate change, Gandhi's principles of civil disobedience remain a guiding light. Some movements such as 'Extinction Rebellion' (a UK-founded global environmental movement and 'Black Lives Matter' draw on the strategies of non-violent protest that Gandhi exemplified. Mahatma Gandhi's example serves as a reminder that moral courage and non-violent resistance are humanity's most potent tools for building a just and equitable society.

(The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RSS CHIEF ROOTS FOR UNITY

Madam — Apropos of the article 'Bhagwat champions unity as path to India's Vishwaguru vision' (Jan 6), the Mahakumbh at Prayag is the biggest manifestation of glamour, valour and cultural prosperity of the Sanatan with no discrimination of caste, sects, beliefs, regions and religions. What else is required to prove inclusivity, tolerance and omnipresence of the Sanatan? Sikhs are mainstream Hindus and calling them a minority is anti-thesis of both the religious faiths. Sikhs never claim any minority status and both Hindus with Sikh brethren visit temples and Gurdwaras with the strongest faith and devotion. The political conundrum and vote bank politics are hell-bent upon dividing Hindus on caste lines so much so that even a caste census is demanded in utter disregard to the Sanatan and Hindu beliefs.

The main problem of the explicit divide in Hindus, Muslims and Christians is propelled by the Hindu politicians always craving for power on caste and religious divisions and provoking the Muslim fundamentalist leaders to widen such divide. I bet if Hindu politicians adhere to the Sanatan values, there is absolutely no reason for confrontation in different religions and the fundamentalists of any religion will not dare to surge. The current controversies of the excavation of mosques built upon temple remnants and ruins are also the result of oppression of Hindus and discrimination even after seven decades of independence. RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat's message is loud and clear and shows tolerance among hundreds of disputes. However, it is true that local Hindus are aggrieved by the loss of their temples during their lifetime and in the ages of their forefathers. How can they be pacified? It is a very difficult problem and looks unstoppable. The illegal occupation of temples was a deliberate act to humiliate the Hindus in a colonial mindset and such illegal occupations should be surrendered voluntarily.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

A Journey from poverty to prosperity



The SBI Research report unveils a transformative narrative of India's poverty eradication journey, with the poverty rate falling below 5 per cent in 2024. This milestone reflects not just economic progress but a holistic reconstruction of India's socio-economic fabric under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership. Rural poverty has significantly declined from 25.7 per cent

in 2012 to 4.86 per cent in 2024, showcasing the impact of government schemes. Initiatives like MGNREGA provided consistent rural employment, the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana ensured safe housing, and the Ujjwala Yojana improved women's health and energy efficiency through free LPG connections. Rural India, the nation's backbone, has played a pivotal role in this success. Urban poverty, too, witnessed a dramatic drop from 13.7 per cent in 2012 to 4.09 per cent in 2024. Revolutionary measures like Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) and Jan Dhan Yojana eliminated corruption, enhancing financial inclusion and enabling direct cash benefits for millions.

R K Jain | Barwani

JUSTICE FOR MUKESH CHANDRAKAR

Madam — It is sad that the new year began on a tragic note for India's media fraternity, as a young journalist Mukesh Chandrakar was found murdered, with his body seen lying in a septic tank in Bijapur. The journalist was allegedly killed for his ground reporting of the Maoist conflict in Chhattisgarh's Bastar region. It was reported that Mukesh, a seasoned journalist and the creator of the popular YouTube channel Bastar Junction, garnered millions of views for his investigative reports. The global toll of journalist fatalities reached 179 in 2024, spanning 25 countries. India reported four journalist killings last year, all from central India, a region fraught with challenges for the press. Mukesh Chandrakar's untimely death has once again spotlighted the perils faced by journalists in conflict zones and the urgent need for stronger protections for media professionals in India. But every attack on the fundamental right of freedom of speech and expression only adds to the strength of the Fourth Estate in our country.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

HEALTHCARE SYSTEM NEEDS ATTENTION

Madam — Health services, once considered a noble and selfless profession, have now largely turned into a business, making the situation worse than before. Citizens, especially the poor, find themselves unable to access even basic services, including in government hospitals. The inexplicable anguish caused by long queues, deplorable conditions, and unprofessional behaviour of some practitioners leaves a lasting stigma on healthcare. While people place their hopes on free medicines to alleviate their suffering, hospitals often provide only cheaper medicine and for expensive medicines, patients are compelled to visit private pharmacies, forcing them to spend beyond their means. As a result, the poor are often left to endure prolonged illness and deteriorating health. This issue needs attention, as healthcare should be accessible and equitable for all, irrespective of financial status.

Jakir Hussain | Kanpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Resilience redefined: The art of bending without breaking

Far from avoiding pain, resilience teaches us to embrace it as a catalyst for self-discovery and renewal

Resilience is often misunderstood as an unshakable strength, but its true essence lies in flexibility and growth. It is not about avoiding pain or adversity but learning to navigate them with courage and purpose. Resilience is the whisper within us that says, "You can rebuild."

Take Priya (name changed), a 36-year-old software engineer whose life unravelled after an unexpected layoff. "I thought I had lost everything—my confidence, my identity," she admitted. Beneath her professional stress lay years of self-worth tied to external validation. Through journaling and cognitive reframing, Priya discovered her worth extended beyond achievements. The layoff became not an ending, but an opportunity to redefine herself.

Psychologist Ann Masten calls resilience "ordinary magic," highlighting that it is not an extraordinary trait but a skill we can all cultivate. In today's unpredictable world, resilience is no longer optional—it is essential. **The Building Blocks of Resilience**



Resilience is not about bouncing back but about moving forward, transformed by challenges. Its foundation rests on four key elements: 1. Self-Trust: Believing in your ability to navigate life's storms. 2. Emotional Agility: Acknowledging and processing emotions without being consumed by them. 3. Relational Anchors: Relying on meaningful connections for support and safety. 4. Hopeful Realism: Balancing acceptance of hardship with faith in better outcomes. Consider Rohan (name changed), a 50-year-old attorney overwhelmed by work stress. Grounding techniques like mindful breathing helped him regain

clarity. "It reminded me that even in chaos, I could find stillness," he shared. These elements are accessible to everyone. Resilience is not about extraordinary strength; it's about ordinary choices made consistently.

Practical Tools for Resilience Building Resilience starts with small, intentional actions. Journaling allows us to process emotions and uncover patterns. Prompts like "What does my fear want me to learn?" or "What would I tell my younger self about this moment?" can reframe challenges into opportunities for growth. Mindfulness anchors us in the present. Aditi (name changed), a single mother, found solace in a simple prac-



KAVITA KABIR

tice: placing her hands over her heart and repeating, "I am safe. I am enough." Creative expression, like art or movement, helps release emotions that words cannot. Samaira (name changed), a 19-year-old dancer, choreographed a piece to process grief after losing a loved one. "It became a way for my body to tell the story I couldn't speak," she reflected.

The Gift of Resilience Resilience is deeply human. It is found in the small decisions to try again, the connections that remind us we are not alone, and the ability to see hope in uncertainty. As Viktor Frankl observed, "When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves." Resilience is not about being unbreakable—it is about learning to bend without breaking and trusting that, no matter how many times we fall, we can rise again. (The writer is a psychologist specialising in trauma and inner child healing. She writes and speaks extensively about mental health and resilience; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF YOGA

Hatha Yoga emphasises holistic well-being, nurturing the body, mind and spirit in harmony



RAVI VALLURI

Hatha Yoga lays emphasis on the overall well-being of the body while nurturing the mind and spirit of the seeker. The bedrock of this yogic technique is strongly based on the traditional eight limbs of yoga as expounded by Patanjali in his Yoga Sutras. These are 10 quotes on yoga by Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar which help one to appreciate the depth of yoga.

1. "Like a flower bud, human life has the potential to blossom fully. Blossoming of human potential to fullness is yoga." Yoga is a discipline that is both gentle and powerful for uniting body, breath and mind in awareness. It integrates elements from all the different paths of yoga where you get a glimpse of Raj Yoga, Ashtanga or Hatha Yoga, Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga as well Gnana Yoga making the yogic experience wholesome.
2. "Yoga brings knowledge, passion and action together." Yoga is not just doing some body-twisting postures – it is experiencing the union of the body, mind and breath.
3. "Yoga is a study of life, study of your body, breath, mind, intellect, memory and ego; study of your inner faculties." The practice of yoga has been known for centuries to produce benefits in the areas of health, mental clarity and spiritual connection.
4. "Withdraw your senses from the object to its source, then the union happens, then the yoga happens." One must learn the correct way of doing asanas and pranayama.
5. "Peace is our very nature, and yoga leads you to inner peace." Yoga teaches one how to pay attention to what one experiences inside and what is the state of mind. Declutter the mental chatter.



6. "The purpose of yoga is to stop suffering even before it arises." Yoga is a holistic way of energising and integrating mind, body and spirit.
7. "Yoga is not just weight-loss programme; it is a science to make one feel lighter. It helps to lose the mental stuff of anger, jealousy, hatred, greed, etc." During the Sri Sri Yoga basic programme that is taught in 10 to 12 hours at the Art of Living Retreat, certified teachers help to experience the real depth of yoga that brings benefits not just at the physical level but at the mental, emotional and spiritual level too.
8. "One of the rules of yoga is to cultivate the practice of being happy." Everybody ultimately wants to be happy. But what is real happiness? The wise say that shifting gears from the pursuit of happiness to being happy makes happiness a journey rather than the destination, which is the key.
9. "The wisdom of yoga transforms one from arrogance to self-confidence; meekness to humility; from dependence to a realisation of interdependence." One may wonder if yoga is a self-help programme. Taught at various levels, yoga programmes connect one with ancient wisdom and nourish one's inner beauty as a human being.
10. "The wisdom of yoga transforms one from craving freedom to recognition of the 'unboundedness', from limited ownership to oneness with the whole." Does it seem incredulous? But yes, this is indeed the real potential of yoga. Simple yogic postures, rejuvenating breathing techniques, and blissful meditations integrated with the invaluable ancient wisdom of yoga put one on the path of genuine life transformation. As a yoga explorer with over a decade and a half of experience, I can state that all fellow explorers can dive deeper and experience what it takes to be a real yogi (or yogini).

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living)

Turning Canada's crisis into India's opportunity



DINESH SOOD

India holds the potential to become a global talent powerhouse by addressing skill gaps and aligning training programs with international demands



For years, Canada has been a top destination for Indians, especially Punjabis, seeking quality education and better employment opportunities. However, as Canada grapples with various socio-economic challenges, the situation has created a ripple effect with unforeseen opportunities for India. While the crisis in Canada poses significant concerns, it also presents a moment for introspection and action for India's young workforce. India stands at a unique vantage point, with its burgeoning youth population and a growing demand for skilled workers across key sectors like IT, hospitality, transportation, beauty and wellness, and retail.

The current global workforce shortages highlight India's potential to bridge these gaps while empowering its workforce to meet domestic and international demands. With over 65 per cent of its population under 35, India boasts one of the world's youngest and most vibrant workforces. This demographic advantage positions the country as a potential global talent hub. However, the critical challenge lies in transforming this potential into a skilled, job-ready workforce. While India's youth are ambitious and eager, many lack access to industry-relevant skills and training. Bridging this skills gap is crucial for ensuring employability and driving economic growth. Canada's challenges serve as a wake-up call for India to accelerate its focus on skill development, especially in sectors that align with global demand.

Global Demand Beyond Canada
While Canada's crisis has brought attention to the workforce, opportunities extend far beyond North America. Countries in Europe, as well as South Asian nations like Taiwan and Vietnam, are also facing workforce gaps and require skilled, hardworking individuals. With its demographic advantage and growing focus on skill development, India is well-positioned to fill these gaps. By aligning training programs with the specific needs of these markets, India can



WHILE INDIA'S YOUTH ARE AMBITIOUS AND EAGER, MANY LACK ACCESS TO INDUSTRY-RELEVANT SKILLS AND TRAINING. BRIDGING THIS SKILLS GAP IS CRUCIAL FOR ENSURING EMPLOYABILITY AND DRIVING ECONOMIC GROWTH

cement its reputation as a global supplier of talent. Bridging the Skills Gap with Policy Support India has already made strides in skill development through initiatives like Skill India, Digital India, and the National Skill Development Mission. However, these efforts must be scaled and aligned with global standards to capitalise on emerging opportunities, and the private sector truly should be able to design certification programmes that meet international benchmarks. Hands-on training, internships, and industry-specific curricula ensure that Indian workers are both employable and competitive globally. Equitable access to skill development programmes is critical. Government subsidies, partnerships with educational institutions, and digital learning platforms can make high-quality training accessible even in rural areas. Technology can be a game-changer in India's skill development journey. Online learning platforms, virtual reality simulations, and AI-driven personalised training modules can revolutionise how skills are imparted. These tools make training accessible to even the country's remotest corners, enabling millions to participate in the economic mainstream. Skill development should focus on employment and fostering entrepreneurship. For instance, a trained beauty and wellness professional could start a salon, or a logistics expert could launch a delivery service. With mentorship and financial support, such ventures can create jobs and spur regional economic growth.

Key Sectors with Growing Opportunities

1. **Information Technology (IT):** India's IT sector is already a global leader, but the rapid advancements in artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and cyber secu-

2. **Hospitality and Tourism:** With increasing international and domestic travel, the hospitality and tourism sectors demand professionals with strong soft skills, cultural competence, and customer service excellence. Vocational training in these areas, coupled with language enhancement programs, can help Indian youth secure lucrative positions both at home and abroad.
3. **Transportation and Logistics:** The transportation industry is a vital economic pillar, requiring skilled personnel for logistics management, safety protocols, and infrastructure operations. By offering targeted training in these areas, India can create a workforce ready to address the growing demand in this sector.
4. **Beauty and Wellness:** Often overlooked, the beauty and wellness industry has witnessed exponential growth globally. This sector offers immense opportunities, from cosmetology to spa therapies and holistic wellness. By blending traditional Indian practices with modern techniques, India can produce skilled professionals catering to diverse cultural needs worldwide.
5. **Retail:** The rise of e-commerce and the evolution of traditional retail have created a demand for skilled workers in inventory management, customer relations, and digital marketing. Training programmes focused on these areas can help India's youth tap into this dynamic sector.

A Collaborative Effort Capitalising

on these opportunities requires a coordinated effort between the government, private sector, and educational institutions. Policies should focus on creating industry partnerships, providing financial incentives for skill development, and ensuring that training programs are aligned with market demands. At the same time, private enterprises must invest in upskilling initiatives and collaborate with training institutes to design job-ready curricula. International partnerships can also be vital in providing Indian workers with exposure to global best practices. Seizing the Moment India's youth stand at the cusp of a transformative moment. By equipping them with the right skills, the nation can address unemployment, meet global workforce demands, and drive economic growth. The current challenges faced by countries like Canada remind us of the interconnectedness of global economies and the opportunities that lie within crises. This is an opportunity for India to fill workforce shortages in other nations and elevate its standing as a global talent powerhouse. By focusing on skill development today, India can ensure a brighter, more prosperous tomorrow for its young generation and the nation. As the world navigates economic uncertainties, it is not the crises that define us but how we respond to them. This is a moment for India to turn challenges into opportunities and empower its youth to shine within the country and on the global stage. (The writer is co-founder and MD of Orane International, a training partner of the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and a network Member of India International Skills Centres, an initiative of GoI. The views expressed are personal)

Cooperative entrepreneurship: A pathway to inclusive growth and social justice

By fostering self-reliance, financial inclusion and social equity, cooperatives have the potential to drive sustainable development

Cooperative entrepreneurship is emerging as a transformative mechanism to address social and economic challenges, especially for marginalised communities. By integrating economic activities with social objectives, it fosters self-reliance, financial inclusion, and social equity, making it a key pillar for sustainable development.



BINOD ANAND

where socio-economic disparities hinder development. By aligning member incentives with enterprise goals, cooperatives drive regional economic growth and nurture local entrepreneurship. Worker cooperatives and employee-owned businesses exemplify how collective ownership transforms workplaces. Through reinvesting profits locally and prioritising social

objectives over profit maximisation, cooperatives contribute to community development and social impact. Eastern India can draw inspiration from dairy cooperatives like Amul and the Amreli Model, which have uplifted rural communities by ensuring fair pricing, market access, and technological support. The historical evolution of cooperatives highlights their relevance in modern economies. Grounded in principles of democratic governance, voluntary participation, and equitable resource distribution, cooperatives ensure equal decision-making power for all members, irrespective of socio-economic status. This inclusivity can significantly impact Eastern India by

bridging developmental gaps and fostering socio-economic resilience. Research underscores how cooperative structures promote innovation through shared ownership and long-term perspectives. Their resilience during economic downturns, supported by collective decision-making, creates an environment conducive to entrepreneurial activities. Innovations in worker cooperatives worldwide, such as those studied by Virginie Pérotin, offer replicable models for Eastern India to boost creativity and efficiency in community-driven enterprises. Cooperatives integrate economic, social, and environmental objectives, aligning closely with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By addressing socio-econom-



ic disparities and promoting equitable wealth distribution, cooperatives serve as engines of inclusive growth. Policy recommendations advocate for robust frameworks to amplify their impact on sustainable development. In Eastern India, cooperatives can tackle regional challenges like agricultural inefficiencies and lack of industrialisation, fostering local enterprises and generating jobs. A recent government decision to extend

PM Fasal Bima Yojana benefits to Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) marks significant progress in financial inclusion and risk mitigation for marginalised groups. This initiative ensures access to crop insurance, protecting vulnerable farmers from losses due to unpredictable weather patterns. In Eastern India, where agriculture forms the backbone of rural livelihoods, this extension can stabilise incomes and encourage cooperative farming ventures. Historical evidence shows that regions with robust cooperative farming models have achieved significant socio-economic upliftment. Cooperatives enable collective bargaining for better input prices and market access, while

providing small and marginal farmers with resources to modernise agricultural practices. Eastern India can build on these successes by developing region-specific cooperative frameworks to address local agricultural challenges and enhance farming resilience. Amul Dairy Cooperative in Gujarat serves as an exemplary model, organising millions of dairy farmers to ensure fair prices and market access while uplifting rural communities. Another noteworthy example is the Lijjat Papad Cooperative, run by economically disadvantaged women, showcasing how small-scale production can evolve into a globally recognised enterprise. Cooperatives are crucial for fostering social justice in

Eastern India by addressing systemic inequities and promoting inclusive growth. They enhance financial inclusion by offering microfinance options, enabling marginalised groups to access entrepreneurial capital. By eliminating middlemen, cooperatives ensure fair pricing for products and services, advancing economic equity. Their governance structures also help members develop leadership skills, strengthening their role in community affairs. Women-centric cooperatives, in particular, provide financial independence, leadership opportunities, and platforms to address gender-specific challenges. (The writer was the member of the MSP committee formed by the central government; views are personal)

S Korean anti-corruption agency, police debate measures to detain impeached president

PTI ■ SEOUL

South Korea's anti-corruption agency and police debated on Monday more forceful measures to detain impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol after their previous attempt was blocked by the presidential security service last week.

The discussions highlighted the obstacles facing the criminal investigation into Yoon's Dec. 3 martial law decree, which led to his impeachment on Dec. 14. The one-week detention warrant was set to expire at midnight, but the agency requested a new court warrant to extend the timeframe for taking Yoon into custody.

The Seoul Western District Court last week issued a warrant to detain Yoon and a separate warrant to search his residence after he defied authorities by refusing to appear for questioning over his brief power grab. Executing those warrants is complicated as long as Yoon remains in his official residence.

Yoon has described his power grab as a necessary act of governance against a liberal opposition bogging down his agenda with its legislative majority and has vowed to "fight to the end" against efforts to oust him. While martial law lasted only several hours, it set off turmoil that has shaken the country's politics, diplomacy and financial markets for weeks and exposed the fragility of South Korea's democracy while society is deeply polarized.

The Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials, which leads a joint investigation with police and military investigators, revealed Monday it had asked police to take over efforts to detain Yoon, following its prominent role in Friday's failure.

However, the anti-corruption agency backtracked hours later after the police stated it could be legally problematic for them to be entirely responsible for

Yoon's detention, given that the warrants had been obtained by the agency.

The agency, which has faced questions about its competence after failing to detain Yoon, said the efforts to execute the warrants would be carried out under the authority of the joint investigation team but did not clarify whether its approach would change.

Police vow more forceful efforts to detain Yoon: Police

available options" were being reviewed. If investigators manage to detain Yoon, they will likely ask a court for permission to make a formal arrest. Otherwise, he will be released after 48 hours.

Meanwhile, the agency has urged the country's acting leader, Deputy Prime Minister Choi Sang-mok, to instruct the presidential security service to comply with the execution of the detention warrant. Choi

Oh Dong-woon, and six other anti-corruption and police officers for orchestrating Friday's detention attempt, which they claim was illegal.

The lawyers also filed complaints against the country's acting national police chief, the acting defense minister and two Seoul police officials for ignoring the presidential security service's request to provide additional forces to block the detention attempt. The lawyers



Protesters demanding the arrest of impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol attend a rally near the presidential residence in Seoul on Monday. AP/PTI

say they plan to make a more aggressive effort to detain Yoon at the official residence, where members of the presidential security staff were seen installing barbed wire near the gate and along the hills leading up to the building.

A police official, who spoke on condition of anonymity per department rules, told reporters there were discussions with the anti-corruption agency on whether to arrest members of the presidential security staff if they forcefully obstruct efforts to detain Yoon.

When asked about the possibility of deploying police special task forces, the official said "all

has yet to publicly comment on the issue. Yoon's lawyers argued the detention and search warrants against the president cannot be enforced at his residence due to a law that protects locations potentially linked to military secrets from search without the consent of the person in charge — which would be Yoon. They also argue the anti-corruption office lacks the legal authority to investigate rebellion charges and delegate police to detain Yoon.

Yoon's lawyers file complaints: Yoon's lawyers on Monday filed complaints with public prosecutors against the anti-corruption agency's chief prosecutor,

said they also plan to file complaints against some 150 anti-corruption and police investigators who were involved in Friday's detention attempt.

The anti-corruption agency has been weighing charges of rebellion after Yoon declared martial law and dispatched troops to surround the National Assembly. Lawmakers who managed to get past the blockade voted to lift martial law hours later.

His fate now lies with the Constitutional Court, which has begun deliberations on whether to formally remove Yoon from office or reinstate him.

S Korea's military says North Korea fired missile into eastern sea

PTI ■ SEOUL

North Korea on Monday fired a ballistic missile that flew 1,100 kilometers (685 miles) before landing in waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan, South Korea's military said, extending its heightened weapons testing activities into 2025 weeks before Donald Trump returns as US president.

The South's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the midrange missile was fired from an area near the North Korean capital of Pyongyang and that the launch preparations were detected in advance by the US and South Korean militaries. It denounced the launch as a provocation that poses a serious threat to peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.

The joint chiefs said the military was strengthening its surveillance and defense posture in preparation for possible additional launches and sharing information on the missile with the United States and Japan.

Japan's Defence Ministry said the missile landed outside its exclusive economic zone and that there were no reports of



A TV screen shows a file image of North Korea's missile launch during a news program at Seoul Railway Station in Seoul on Monday. AP/PTI

damage to vessels or aircraft.

The launch came as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was visiting Seoul for talks with South Korean allies over the North Korean nuclear threat and other issues.

Blinken's visit comes amid political turmoil in South Korea following President Yoon Suk Yeol's short-lived martial law decree and subsequent impeachment by parliament last month, which experts say puts the country at a disadvantage in getting a steady footing with Trump ahead of his return to the White House.

In a news conference with South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul, Blinken said they condemn North Korea's latest launch, which violates UN Security Council resolutions against the North, and reiterated concerns about the growing alignment between Pyongyang and Moscow over Russian President Vladimir Putin's war on Ukraine.

According to US, Ukrainian and South Korean assessments, North Korea has sent more than 10,000 troops and conventional weapons systems to support Moscow's war against Ukraine. There are concerns that Russia could transfer North Korea advanced weapons technology in return, which could potentially enhance the threat posed by leader Kim Jong Un's nuclear-armed military.

Blinken described the military cooperation between Russia and North Korea as a "two-way street," saying Russia has been providing military equipment and training to the North and "intends to share space and satellite technology."

Blinken and Cho both dismissed concerns about damage to the US-South Korea alliance in the aftermath of the political turmoil in Seoul.

Experts had warned that Yoon's martial law decree — which lasted only hours but has rattled politics, high-level diplomacy and financial markets for weeks — exposed the fragility of South Korea's democratic system in a divided society.

Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal issues second arrest warrant against ex-PM Hasina

PTI ■ DHAKA

Bangladesh's International Criminal Tribunal (ICT) on Monday issued arrest warrants against deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina and 11 others, including former military generals and an ex-police chief, for their alleged role in incidents of enforced disappearances.

This was the second arrest warrant by the ICT against Hasina, who fled to India after her Awami League regime's toppling following unprecedented anti-government protests in August last year. The tribunal has so far recorded three cases against her.

"Justice Md Golam Mortuza Mojumdar, chairman of the tribunal, issued the arrest warrant after hearing a prosecution plea," an ICT official said.

The Inspector General of Police was ordered to arrest the twelve people, including Hasina, and produce them before the tribunal on February 12 in the case filed over complaints of

enforced disappearances of several hundred people.

The deposed premier's then-defence adviser Major General (ret'd) Tarique Ahmed Siddique and former IGP Benazir Ahmed are among those named in the case. While Siddique is currently under custody, Ahmed is believed to be on the run. ICT Chief Prosecutor Mohammad Tajul Islam did not disclose the names of most of the accused "in the interest of investigations and their arrest."

"The next hearing for this case is also scheduled for February 12. The tribunal has instructed that the investigation report be submitted on that day if completed," Islam later told reporters. He, however, said if the investigation report could not be submitted by then, the law enforcement agencies would have to provide a progress report on the arrests.

The Islam told the tribunal that the ousted regime had established a culture of enforced disappearances under state sponsorship.



The chief prosecutor alleged that those involved in carrying out these disappearances were rewarded. He added that agencies like the elite anti-crime Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), the police's Detective Branch (DB), the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit, and the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) were most frequently used for the purpose. "Over the past 15 years,

a culture of fear was established in Bangladesh through enforced disappearances and crossfires. Thousands of people were abducted by various forces, either in plainclothes or in uniform. Most of them never returned," Islam told journalists.

Last month, Dhaka officially sought Hasina's extradition from India. While New Delhi acknowledged the receipt of the letter, it refrained from commenting on it.

The ICT issued the first arrest warrant against the ex-premier on October 17 on charges of genocide and crimes against humanity committed during the July-August protests and uprising.

After the fall of the Awami League government, at least 60 cases or complaints of enforced disappearances, killings, genocide, and crimes against humanity were lodged at the ICT, accusing Hasina, leaders of her party and its allies, and senior officials of different law enforcement agencies.

Trudeau likely to resign as Liberal Party leader this week: Report

PTI ■ OTTAWA

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is expected to resign as the leader of the Liberal Party this week amid internal party dissent and low public opinion ratings, according to a media report.

The Globe and Mail newspaper citing sources said it is unclear when exactly Trudeau, who has been Canada's prime minister since 2015, will step down, but a resignation is expected to come before a national caucus meeting on Wednesday.

One of the sources, who spoke recently to the Prime Minister, said Trudeau, 53, realises he needs to make a statement before he meets the Liberal caucus so it doesn't look like he was forced out by his own MPs. The sources said they are unsure about what the Liberal Party's national executive plans to do to replace Trudeau as leader. They said it remains unclear whether he will leave immediately or stay on as

Prime Minister until a new leader is selected.

The Liberal Party national executive, which decides on leadership issues, plans to meet this week, likely after the caucus session, the report said. On Friday, The Globe reported that Trudeau's advisers are looking at how he can remain Prime Minister while a new Liberal leader is selected.

A source said on Sunday they believed that Trudeau would stay in his position until a new leader was chosen.

The party has two options: appoint an interim leader on the recommendation of the national caucus or hold a shortened leadership contest. A leadership contest would require the Prime Minister to request that Governor-General Mary Simon prorogue Parliament, which constitutional experts say is not guaranteed, the paper said.

Another source said it makes sense for Trudeau to remain as Prime Minister until a leader is

chosen so he can deal with the incoming US administration of Donald Trump and his threat of 25-per-cent tariffs.

A Liberal Party source said a leadership race would take at least three months, although the party constitution requests at least four months.

The news of resignation comes as Trudeau's popularity continues to dwindle in Canada, which should hold an election by late October.

Public opinion polls show that his party will likely be swept out of power by Pierre Poilievre's Conservatives.

According to Canadian pollster Angus Reid, Trudeau has a disapproval rate of around 68 per cent as of December 24.

Trudeau faced a difficult few months in politics. His own party members are calling for his resignation. In September, he faced a no confidence vote in parliament that later failed, despite efforts from the Conservative Party to remove him from office.



On December 16, Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland announced that she was stepping down from Trudeau's cabinet, dealing a significant blow to the prime minister.

Later in December, one of Trudeau's key allies, New Democratic Party leader Jagmeet Singh, said that he planned to present a formal motion of no-confidence against him.

Biden, in 11th hour action, bans new offshore oil, gas drilling in most federal waters

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden is moving to ban new offshore oil and gas drilling in most US coastal waters, a last-minute effort to block possible action by the incoming Trump administration to expand offshore drilling.

Biden, whose term expires in two weeks, said he is using authority under the federal Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act to protect offshore areas along the East and West coasts, the eastern Gulf of Mexico and portions of Alaska's Northern Bering Sea from future oil and natural gas leasing.

"My decision reflects what coastal communities, businesses and beachgoers have known for a long time: that drilling off these coasts could cause irre-

versible damage to places we hold dear and is unnecessary to meet our nation's energy needs," Biden said in a statement.

"As the climate crisis continues to threaten communities across the country and we are transitioning to a clean energy economy, now is the time to protect these coasts for our children and grandchildren," he said.

Biden's orders would not affect large swaths of the Gulf of Mexico, where most US offshore drilling occurs, but it would protect coastlines along California, Florida and other states from future drilling.

Biden's actions, which protect more than 625 million acres of federal waters, could be difficult for President-elect Donald Trump to unwind, since they would likely require an act of

Congress to repeal. Trump himself has a complicated history on offshore drilling. He signed a memorandum in 2020 directing the Interior secretary to prohibit drilling in the waters off both Florida coasts, and off the coasts of Georgia and South Carolina until 2032.

The action came after Trump initially moved to vastly expand offshore drilling, before retreating amid widespread opposition in Florida and other coastal states. Trump has vowed to establish what he calls American "energy dominance" around the world as he seeks to boost U.S. oil and gas drilling and move away from Biden's focus on climate change.

Environmental advocates hailed Biden's action, saying new oil and gas drilling must be sharply curtailed to reduce greenhouse

gas emissions that contribute to global warming. 2024 was the hottest in recorded history. "This is an epic ocean victory!" said Joseph Gordon, campaign director for the environmental group Oceana.

Gordon thanked Biden "for listening to the voices from coastal communities" that oppose drilling and "contributing to the bipartisan tradition of protecting our coasts."

Biden's actions build on the legacy of Democratic and Republican presidents to protect coastal water from offshore drilling. Gordon said, adding that U.S. coastlines are home to tens of millions of Americans and support billions of dollars of economic activity that depend on a clean environment, abundant wildlife and thriving fisheries.

Pope Francis names first woman to head major Vatican office

PTI ■ ROME

Pope Francis on Monday named the first woman to head a major Vatican office, appointing an Italian nun, Sister Simona Brambilla, to become prefect of the department responsible for all the Catholic Church's religious orders.

The appointment marks a major step in Francis' aim to give women more leadership roles in governing the church. While women have been named to No. 2 spots in some Vatican offices, never before has a woman been named prefect of a dicastery or congregation of the Holy See Curia, the central governing organ of the Catholic Church.

The historic nature of Brambilla's appointment was confirmed by Vatican Media, which headlined its report "Sister Simona Brambilla is

the first woman prefect in the Vatican".

The office is one of the most important in the Vatican. Known officially as the Dicastery for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, it is responsible for every religious order, from the Jesuits and Franciscans to smaller newer movements.

In an indication of the novelty of the appointment, and the theological implications involved, Francis simultaneously named her a co-leader, or "pro-prefect," a cardinal: Angel Fernández Artime, a Salesian. But the appointment, announced in the Vatican daily bulletin, lists Brambilla first as "prefect" and Fernández second as her co-leader, which theologians say is necessary since the prefect must be able to celebrate Mass and perform other sacramental functions that current-

ly can only be done by men.

Brambilla, 59, is a member of the Consolata Missionaries religious order and had served as the No. 2 in the religious orders department since last year. She takes over from the retiring Cardinal Joao Braz de Aviz, 77.

Francis made Brambilla's appointment possible with his 2022 reform of the Holy See's founding constitution, which allowed laypeople, including women, to head a dicastery and become prefects.

Brambilla, a nurse, worked as a missionary in Mozambique and led her Consolata order as superior from 2011-2023, when Francis made her secretary of the religious orders department.

Her appointment is the latest move by Francis to show by example how women can take leadership roles within the Catholic hierarchy, albeit with-



out allowing them to be ordained as priests.

Catholic women do much of the church's work in schools, hospitals and passing down the faith to future generations. But they have long complained of second-class status in an institution that reserves the priesthood for men.

Francis has upheld the ban on

female priests and tamped down hopes that women could be ordained as deacons.

But there has been a marked increase in the percentage of women working in the Vatican during his papacy, including in leadership positions, from 19.3% in 2013 to 23.4% today, according to statistics reported by Vatican News. In the Curia

alone, the percentage of women is 26%.

Among the women holding leadership positions are Sister Raffaella Petri, the first-ever female secretary general of the Vatican City State, responsible for the territory's health care system, police force and main source of revenue, the Vatican Museums, which are led by a laywoman, Barbara Jatta.

Another nun, Sister Alessandra Smerilli, is the No. 2 in the Vatican development office while several women have been appointed to under-secretary positions, including the French nun, Sister Nathalie Becquart, in the synod of bishops' office.

Pope wraps up busy Christmas season by calling for culture of welcome in Christian communities: Pope Francis wrapped up a busy Christmas season on Monday by calling for the faithful to promote a culture of welcome

and integration in their communities and reject discrimination.

Francis presided over Mass in St. Peter's Basilica to mark Epiphany.

According to the Bible, the feast marks the day that three wise men guided by a star came to visit the newborn Jesus. Francis said the star, in guiding humanity to God, doesn't discriminate among ethnic, linguistic or national groups and is there for all.

"We do well to meditate on this today, in a world in which individuals and nations are equipped with ever more powerful means of communication, and yet seem to have become less willing to understand, accept and encounter others in their diversity!" he said in his homily.

God, he said, calls on Christians to reject anything that discriminates or excludes

and discards people. He called instead for promoting "a strong culture of welcome, in which the narrow places of fear and denunciation are replaced by open spaces of encounter, integration and sharing of life; safe spaces where everyone can find warmth and shelter."

Francis has long preached the Gospel-mandated need to welcome the stranger, applying it to migrants in particular.

The Epiphany Mass marked the end of a particularly busy Christmas season for Francis that also coincided with the start of the 2025 Holy Year. The once-ever-quarter-celebration of Christianity is expected to bring more than 30 million pilgrims to Rome over the next 12 months.

The 88-year-old pope has a daunting schedule ahead greeting and ministering to them, alongside his other papal duties.

Starmer slams 'lies and misinformation' after attacks from Elon Musk

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Monday condemned "lies and misinformation" that he said are undermining UK democracy, in response to a barrage of attacks on his government from Elon Musk.

Asked about Musk's comments during a question session at a hospital near London, Starmer criticised "those that are spreading lies and misinformation as far and as wide as possible," particularly opposition Conservative politicians in Britain who have echoed some of Musk's claims.

which groups of men, largely from Pakistani backgrounds, were tried for grooming and abusing dozens of girls. The cases have been used by far-right activists to link child abuse to immigration, and to accuse politicians of covering up the 'grooming gangs' out of a fear of appearing racist.

speech near London, Starmer defended his record as chief prosecutor, saying he had reopened closed cases and "changed the whole prosecution approach" to child sexual exploitation.

on facts and truth, not on lies." Musk has also called for the release of Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, a far-right activist who goes by the name Tommy Robinson and is serving a prison sentence for contempt of court.

owner's ire, has taken a similar approach. Scholz said he is staying "cool" over critical personal comments made by Musk, but finds it worrying that the US billionaire makes the effort to get involved in a general election by endorsing the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party.

including party leader Kemi Badenoch, have echoed Musk's points, the main UK beneficiary of his interest has been Reform UK, the hard-right party led by Nigel Farage that has just five seats in the 650-seat House of Commons but big expansion plans.

Congo will execute over 170 people convicted of armed robbery

PTI ■ KINHASA (CONGO)

More than 170 inmates from Congo's capital to a high-security prison in the north where they will be executed, Congolese authorities said.

China protests US sanctions for its alleged role in hacking, complains of foreign hacker attacks

PTI ■ BANGKOK

China has slammed a decision by the US Treasury to sanction a Beijing-based cybersecurity company for its alleged role in multiple hacking incidents targeting critical US infrastructure, while the Chinese cyber security agency complained Monday of attacks on Chinese networks.

Zhicheng Technology Group, said in a statement Monday to the Shanghai Stock Exchange. The China National Cyber Security Information Center said it had discovered attacks from various malicious websites and foreign IP addresses, including some in California and Florida.

Department reported that Chinese hackers had remotely accessed several of its workstations and unclassified documents in a major breach of cybersecurity. The Treasury Department said it learned of that problem on Dec. 8, when a third-party software service provider, BeyondTrust, flagged that hackers had stolen a key "used by the vendor to secure a cloud-based service used to remotely provide technical support" to workers.

Austrian far right gets mandate to try to lead govt for first time since World War II

PTI ■ VIENNA

The leader of Austria's Freedom Party received a mandate Monday to form a new government, which would be the first headed by the far right since World War II if he succeeds.

at all. Those efforts to form a governing alliance without the far right collapsed in the first few days of the new year and Nehammer said Saturday that he would resign.

as the junior partner. Most recently, they ran Austria from 2017 to 2019 in a government in which Kickl — a 56-year-old with a taste for provocation — served as interior minister. It collapsed in a scandal surrounding the Freedom Party's leader at the time.

emergency law. The Freedom Party also calls for an end to sanctions against Russia, is highly critical of Western military aid to Ukraine and wants to bow out of the European Sky Shield Initiative, a missile defense project launched by Germany.

Russia claims it captured another town in Ukraine

PTI ■ KYIV

Russian troops in eastern Ukraine have captured the stronghold of Kurakhove after a monthlong battle, Russia's Defence Ministry claimed Monday, adding the wrecked town to the Kremlin's list of conquests in the partially occupied Donetsk region during the almost three-year war.

eastern front line. It has an industrial zone, a thermal power plant and a reservoir. It also sits on a highway running between eastern and southern Ukraine.

Trump's lawyers ask judge to halt sentencing in hush money case

PTI ■ NEW YORK

President-elect Donald Trump asked a judge Monday to halt this week's sentencing in his hush money case while they appeal his recent rulings upholding the verdict.

PUBLIC NOTICE I Roop Narayan Garg S/O Shri Jagdish Prashad, R/O H. No. 316/1, Mohalla Purani Mandi, Narnaul, Haryana declare that I am the sole owner of Flat No. 9-0, Pocket 2, Kondli Ghareli, New Delhi.

PUBLIC NOTICE On behalf of M/S MAXHEIGHTS TOWNSHIP & PROJECTS PVT. LTD having its registered office at 408, 4th floor, RG Trade Tower, Netaji Subhash Place, Pitampura, New Delhi-110034, the general public is hereby informed that on the basis of application/documents submitted by Sh. Atul Verma S/o. Late Sh. Khyali Ram Verma R/O. House No. 2023, Sector-46, Gurgaon-122003, the Developer M/s Maxheights Township & Projects Pvt. Ltd is substituting, in place of late Sh. Khyali Ram Verma, the name of following Class I Legal heirs of Late Sh. Khyali Ram Verma, qua allotment of Flat No. I-023, 2nd Floor, Maxheights Metro View Apartments, Sector-35, Sonapat, 1. Seema (Wife) 2. Manju Verma (Daughter) 3. Renu Verma (Daughter) 4. Atul Verma (Son)

PUBLIC NOTICE In the matter of Goldenbridge Global Trade Private Limited having its registered office at 3rd Floor, Orchid Centre, Near Ilim Institute, DLF QE, Gurgaon, Haryana-122002, seeking confirmation of alteration of the Memorandum of Association of the Company in terms of the special resolution passed at the Annual General Meeting / Extra ordinary general meeting held on 13/09/2024 to enable the company to change its Registered office from "State of Haryana" to "State of Delhi", the Registered office at Unit No. 302, 3rd Floor, Living Style Mall, Jasola, Sector-6, Kalindi Kunj Road, New Delhi-110025 within Fourteen days from the date of publication of this notice.

PUBLIC NOTICE M/S SIGNATUREGLOBAL HOMES PRIVATE LIMITED (CIN: U70100DL2008PTC176641) Registered Office: 13th Floor, Dr. Gopal Das Bhawan, 28, Barakhamba Road, Connaught Place, New Delhi-110001, Phone: 0124-4908200, 011-49281700 Email: Compliance@signatureglobal.in

PUBLIC NOTICE Notice is hereby given to the General Public on behalf of our client that Mrs. Vandana Lakha & Mr. Brijesh Kumar Lakha are claiming to be the owners of Residential Plot bearing No. 058, area measuring 109.50 sq. mtrs., situated in Block-B, of Sector 49, Noida, District Gautam Budh Nagar UP; vide Transfer cum Sale Deed dt. 19/04/2018 executed by the Transferor cum vendor Doc. No.1552. The above owners have informed that original documents of the said property like Allotment Letter, Possession Letter, Lease Deed dt. 04.01.2000 (Doc.No.32/24), Regd. G.P. dt. 04.01.2000, ATs dt. 04.01.2000, Regd. Will dt. 04.01.2000, Transfer Memorandum dt. 05.12.2003 and Transfer Deed dt. 05.12.2003 (Doc. No.13225) are lost & not traceable. All persons are hereby informed that above mentioned owners want to mortgage the said property to our client. If anybody has any objections on the ownership of above owner over the said property, its sale/mortgage/loan, please do so within the stipulated 07-days period by contacting Legal Veritas: North (Advocates & Legal Consultants) at Office No. 11, 1st Floor, Building No. A-4/A, Sector-16, Noida, Uttar Pradesh-201301; Landline: 910120-3101653, e-mail: accounts@nvlnorth.in

PUBLIC NOTICE This is to inform the general public that Mrs. Harjinder Kaur is the GPA Holder of Built-Up First Floor Front Side without roof right, with two bike parking space at ground floor. Built on Property bearing plot no. 2, area measuring 90 Sq. Yds. Yrs. dt. 04/01/2008, No. 58/15, situated at village Hahnda, Delhi, Colony Shree Vinay in Block-B, Mohan Garden Ext, Uttar Nagar, New Delhi - 110059. She is in possession through Notarised GPA, ATs & Will dated 19/09/2024 Mrs. Priyanka Meena Alias Mrs. Pooja Meena, daughter of Mrs. Harjinder Kaur in respect of the said floor. Mrs. Harjinder Kaur intends to transfer the ownership of aforementioned Property by way of Sale Deed to Mr. Ajay Kumar R/o A-7, Sector-16, Noida, U.P. in presence of the witnesses by executing the said deed. Any objections or concerns regarding this transaction should be raised within a period of 07 days from the date of publication of this notice and in the event of no response having been received to the notice, the title of the seller to the said floor shall be deemed to be clear of any charge or encumbrance of any nature whatsoever and any subsequent claim shall not bind our clients/Purchaser, in any manner whatsoever. Shivkant Arora, Advocate M/s Intelective Law Offices A-74, LGF, Defence Colony New Delhi-110024

PROVISION OF TRACK MACHINE SIDING AT KATIAR DIVISION E-Tender Notice No. KIR/Engg/56 of 2024 Dated: 30-12-2024. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: Tender No. 1. Brief Description of work: Kumedpur-Malda Town & Eklakhi-Balughat- Provision of track machine siding - 2 & 3 stations respectively. Tender Value: ₹6,56,32,288.73/-, Bid Security: ₹4,78,200/- Tender No. 2. Brief Description of work: Hatwar-Kumedpur - Provision of track machine siding-5 stations. Tender Value: ₹6,21,65,317.01/-, Bid Security: ₹4,60,800/- Date & Time of closing of Tender: 15.00 hrs. on 29-01-2025 & opening at 15.30 hrs. of 29-01-2025. The complete information of the tender document of above e-tender will be available upto 15.00 hrs. of 29-01-2025 in the website www.ireps.gov.in DRM (W), Katihar

Table with 3 columns: Particulars, Previous Bank Accounts, New Bank Accounts. Includes details for M/S SIGNATUREGLOBAL HOMES PRIVATE LIMITED.

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS CHANGE OF NAME I, Bhagat Dass S/o Yawan Das Sahu R/o A 201-228/06, Forth Floor, New Panchwati Colony, Bhatia Mod GT Road, Ghaziabad, U.P.-201001 have changed my name from Bhagat Dass to Bhagat Das Sahu. Henceforth I would be known by the name of Bhagat Das Sahu for all future purposes. PD(1200)A

I, Kamlesh W/o Ajay Kumar R/o Flat -A-8, Block-C, Yadav Park, Nangloi, West Delhi, Delhi-110041 have changed my minor son's name from Kanishk to Kanishq for all future purposes. PD(1201)A

PUBLIC NOTICE M/S SIGNATURE INFRABUILD PRIVATE LIMITED (CIN: U70100DL2013PTC247676) Registered Office: 13th Floor, Dr. Gopal Das Bhawan, 28, Barakhamba Road, Connaught Place, New Delhi-110001, Phone: 0124-4908200, 011-49281700 Email: Compliance@signatureglobal.in

Table with 3 columns: Particulars, Previous Bank Accounts, New Bank Accounts. Includes details for M/S SIGNATURE BUILDERS PRIVATE LIMITED.

OFFICE OF THE NAGAR PALIKA PARISHAD HATTA -DIST DAMOH (Fourth Call) Notice Inviting e-Tenders Dated: 06-01-2025 Online lumpsum bids for the following works under "sbm (u) - 2.0" (estimated on uddr issr (w.e.f. - 02.08.2021) are invited from registered contractors and firms of reputed fulfilling eligibility criteria

PUBLIC NOTICE Reg: First Floor Front side without roof rights referred to as "said floor" of part of Property bearing No. 1-121, area measuring 82.7739 sq mtrs. i.e. 99 sq yds. out of 150 sq yds., falling in Kharsa No. 16/16. Situated in the area of Village Mirzapur, Delhi State, Delhi Colony known as Mahavir Enclave, New Delhi. Hereinafter referred to as "said property". Be it known to all that our clients, Mr. Ghanshyam Mandal and Mrs. Saraswati Kuman (hereinafter called the "Purchaser") intend to purchase the said floor from Mrs. Kirli Jain and Mr. Manirajan Ramaswamy (hereinafter called the "Seller"). In this connection, the seller have informed the purchaser that they are the joint owners of the said property. The seller have further informed the purchaser that the said floor was owned by Mrs. Kirli Jain (60%) and Mrs. Aparna Ramaswamy (40%) vide Sale Deed executed by Mrs. Pushpa Rana in their favour. The said Deed is registered as Document No.963, Book No.1, Vol No. 10306, pages 88-93, on 07/02/2020 (SRO-X). Later on, Mrs. Aparna Ramaswamy expired and her share in the said property was inherited by her legal heirs viz., Mr. N Ramaswamy and Mr. Manirajan Ramaswamy. Subsequently, Mr. N Ramaswamy executed a Relinquished Deed in favour of Mr. Manirajan Ramaswamy in respect of his share in the said property. The said Deed is registered as Doc No.10918, Book No.1, Vol No. 11866, pages 72-76 on 17/09/2022 (SRO-X). Thus, Mrs. Kirli Jain and Mr. Manirajan Ramaswamy became the joint owners of the said property. The seller have also informed the purchaser that the said floor is not mortgaged anywhere and there is no charge or dispute or any litigation pending regarding the said floor. Any person including Banks, Financial Institutions, relatives/having any claim, right, title or any interest of any nature whatsoever into or upon the aforesaid floor is hereby called upon to make the same their favour, in writing, with documentary evidence, by Registered AD Post, to the undersigned at the address mentioned herein below within 07 days of publication of this notice and in the event of no response having been received to the notice, the title of the seller to the said floor shall be deemed to be clear of any charge or encumbrance of any nature whatsoever and any subsequent claim shall not bind our clients/Purchaser, in any manner whatsoever. Shivkant Arora, Advocate M/s Intelective Law Offices A-74, LGF, Defence Colony New Delhi-110024

PUBLIC NOTICE M/S SIGNATURE INFRABUILD PRIVATE LIMITED (CIN: U70100DL2013PTC247676) Registered Office: 13th Floor, Dr. Gopal Das Bhawan, 28, Barakhamba Road, Connaught Place, New Delhi-110001, Phone: 0124-4908200, 011-49281700 Email: Compliance@signatureglobal.in

PUBLIC NOTICE Whereas M/s Signature Infrabuild Private Limited (hereinafter referred as "Company") is in the process of developing of an Independent Residential Floors namely: "Signature Global City 92-II" situated at village- Mewka, Wazirpur, Sector-92, District- Gurugram, Haryana over an area measuring 7.806 Acres under License No. 12 of 2021 dated 12.03.2021 granted by Director, Town and Country Planning, Haryana and having RERA Registration No. 39 of 2021 Dated 27.07.2021, Extn. No. 04 of 2024 Dated 13.05.2024.

Table with 3 columns: Particulars, Previous Bank Accounts, New Bank Accounts. Includes details for M/S SIGNATURE INFRABUILD PRIVATE LIMITED.

Table with 5 columns: Tender ID, Scope of the work, Probable amount of contract (Rs. in Lacs), Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) (In Rs), Cost of Bid/Time of Completion including rainy season. Includes details for NIT No. 1146.

Table with 3 columns: Particulars, Previous Bank Accounts, New Bank Accounts. Includes details for M/S SIGNATURE INFRABUILD PRIVATE LIMITED.

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Market crash makes investors poorer by Rs 10.98 lakh cr

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Investors' wealth tumbled Rs 10.98 lakh crore on Monday as markets crashed due to across-the-board selloff amid concerns over third-quarter earnings growth and foreign fund exodus.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex tanked 1,258.12 points or 1.59 per cent to close below the 78,000 level at 77,964.99. During the day, it plunged 1,441.49 points or 1.81 per cent to 77,781.62.

The NSE Nifty slumped 388.70 points or 1.62 per cent to 23,616.05.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms dived Rs 10,98,723.54 crore to Rs

4,38,79,406.58 crore (USD 5.11 trillion).

From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Tata Steel, NTPC, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Power Grid, Zomato, Adani Ports, IndusInd Bank, Asian Paints, ITC and Reliance Industries were among the biggest laggards.

Titan, HCL Tech and Sun Pharma were the gainers.

"The Indian equity markets are witnessing a sharp decline today, with both Nifty and Bank Nifty slipping below their 200-day moving averages (DMA). The sell-off can be attributed to a rise in Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) selling and concerns surrounding the upcoming Q3



earnings season.

"Additionally, fears related to the new HMPV have added to the bearish sentiment, triggering fresh rounds of selling after the recent counter-trend pullback rally," Santosh Meena, Head of Research at Swastika Investment, said.

FIIs offloaded equities worth Rs 4,227.25 crore on Friday after a day's breather, according to exchange data.

The BSE smallcap gauge cracked 3.17 per cent and midcap index fell by 2.44 per cent.

"Indian equities faced intense selling pressure amid concerns regarding the outbreak of HMPV virus and sharp fall in banking stocks post lacklustre

quarterly updates," Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Research, Wealth Management at Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said.

All BSE sectoral indices ended lower, with utilities tumbling 4.16 per cent, power (3.73 per cent), services (3.45 per cent), metal (3.15 per cent), oil & gas (3.15 per cent), energy (3.03 per cent), industrials (2.97 per cent) and commodities (2.74 per cent).

As many as 3,474 stocks declined while 656 advanced and 114 remained unchanged on the BSE.

"Emerging markets are undergoing consolidation due to uncertainties surrounding new US economic policies, the

Fed's hawkish stance on future rate cuts, potential upward revision for CY25 inflation, and a strong dollar, all of which are negatively impacting market sentiment. The primary catalyst for a sharp sell-off in the domestic market appears to be concerns over the Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV).

"Additionally, the initial Q3 consensus earnings estimate suggests a potential gradual recovery in domestic corporate earnings, which could explain the domestic market's underperformance compared to global markets led by premium valuation," Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services, said.

RBI adds eight tons gold to its reserves in Nov 2024: WGC

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Central banks around the world collectively, in November 2024, added 53 tonnes of gold to their reserves, of which the Reserve Bank of India's addition was 8 tonnes, the World Gold Council (WGC) said in a report on Monday.

In 2024, central banks - mostly those from emerging markets - remained keen buyers of gold, driven by the need for a stable and secure asset amid global economic uncertainties.

"Assessing the final act of 2024, central banks around the world continued to play a leading role in the demand for gold. November represented another solid month of gold buying as central banks collectively added a net 53 tonnes to global official holdings," WGC said in a report - Central bank gold statistics November 2024. The gold price dip in November, following the US election, may have provided some central banks with added impetus to accumulate, WGC said.

WGC further noted that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) continued with its 2024 buying streak, adding a further 8 tonnes to its gold reserves in November.



This lifted the year-to-date buying to 73 tonnes and total gold holdings to 876 tonnes, maintaining its position as the second largest buyer in 2024, after Poland.

According to WGC, the National Bank of Poland (NBP) was a major buyer in November increasing its gold reserves by 21 tonnes in November, taking its total year-to-date purchase to 90 tonnes and the total holding to 448 tonnes.

The Central Bank of Uzbekistan's gold reserves rose

by 9 tonnes during the month - the first monthly addition since July. The bank's year-to-date net purchases amounted to 11 tonnes and total gold holdings amounted to 382 tonnes, said the report.

Meanwhile, the National Bank of Kazakhstan increased its gold reserves by 5 tonnes, the second successive month of buying as a result, the bank has flipped to being a net purchaser with a total gold holdings of 295 tonnes.

The People's Bank of China (PBOC) had resumed gold purchases after a six-month hiatus, adding 5 tonnes of gold to its reserves, increasing its year-to-date net purchases to 34 tonnes and its total reported gold holdings to 2,264 tonnes (5 per cent of total reserves), the report said.

Data published by the Central Bank of Jordan showed its gold reserves rose by over 4 tonnes in November - the first monthly increase since July. The country's year-to-date net purchases now total nearly 2 tonnes, lifting gold holdings to 73 tonnes, it added.

The Central Bank of Turkey increased its gold reserves by 3 tonnes during November 2024, and also entered into reverse swap agreements (gold for lira) with domestic commercial banks to manage liquidity.

Gold reserves held by the Czech National Bank rose by almost 20 tonnes in November - the 21st consecutive month of buying, it said, adding the Czech National Bank's year-to-date net purchases now total almost 20 tonnes, lifting total gold holdings to just above 50 tonnes.

The Bank of Ghana continued its gold accumulation as part of its domestic gold purchase programme, adding 1 tonne in November, taking its year-to-date net purchases to a total of 10 tonnes, lifting total gold holdings to 29 tonnes.

The bank also launched a Ghana Gold Coin to the public during the month as part of its efforts to stabilise the economy and promote investment in Ghana's gold reserves, WGC stated. Meanwhile, the Monetary Authority of Singapore was the month's largest seller, reducing its gold reserves by 5 tonnes, bringing the year-to-date net sales to 7 tonnes and overall gold holdings to 223 tonnes, it added.

ICICI Securities pays Rs 40.2 lakh to settle case with SEBI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Brokerage firm ICICI Securities on Monday settled a case pertaining to the alleged violation of stock brokers rules with capital markets regulator Sebi, after paying Rs 40.2 lakh towards settlement charges.

The order came after ICICI Securities proposed to settle the matter without "admitting or denying the facts and conclusions of law", through a settlement order. "In view of the acceptance of the settlement terms... The adjudication proceedings initiated against applicant (ICICI Securities) vide show cause notice (SCN) dated May 17, 2024 is disposed of in terms of the settlement regulations," Sebi's adjudicating officer Amit Kapoor said.

The order came after the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) initiated adjudication proceedings against ICICI Securities for the alleged violation of Stock Brokers regulations.

Thereafter, a show cause notice was issued by the markets watchdog to the applicant on May 17, 2024 for the alleged violation.



The SCN alleged that applicant had failed to monitor its authorised person (AP), as trading terminals of five users, allocated to the AP were being operated from unknown places, which were not reported to the exchange.

Further, Sebi also observed that ICICI Securities allegedly did not have systems to monitor the trading practices of its authorised person, as the AP was using login credentials of the clients for online trading. Additionally, the SCN had

alleged that the applicant did not ensure that only the approved users operate the trading terminal allocated to them.

Pursuant to the receipt of the application, ICICI Securities filed revised settlement terms, which was approved by Sebi's High Powered Advisory Committee (HPAC).

Thereafter, ICICI Securities remitted the settlement amount of Rs 40.2 lakh which was confirmed by the regulator and the case was settled with Sebi.

India's services sector growth hits four-month high in Dec on new biz orders



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's services sector growth touched a four-month high in December, supported by new business inflows on strong demand conditions and easing inflationary pressures, a monthly survey said on Monday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Services Business Activity Index, rose from 58.4 in November to 59.3 in December, highlighting the strongest rate of expansion in four months.

In the Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) parlance, a print above 50 means expansion, while a score below 50 denotes contraction.

According to the survey, demand buoyancy continued to drive new business inflows higher, which in turn supported output growth and prompted firms to recruit additional workers.

"India's services companies expressed strong optimism in December as business activity growth surged to a four-month high. Forward-looking indicators such as new business and future activity suggested that the strong performance will likely continue in the near future," Ines Lam, Economist at HSBC, said.

On the price front, there was a softer increase in cost burdens, though panellists continued to report greater outlays on food, labour and materials. Selling price inflation also eased in December.

"The easing of input price inflation in the month also sup-

ported business sentiment. Strength in the services PMI stands in contrast with the growing signs of a slowdown in the manufacturing industry," Lam noted.

India's manufacturing sector growth fell to a 12-month low in December, as new business orders and production expanded at softer rates.

Service providers remained confident that output would increase over the course of the coming 12 months. The overall level of positive sentiment fell from November's six-month high but remained above its long-run average.

The combination of new business growth, upbeat forecasts and rising capacity pressures created another round of job creation across the service economy.

"The rate of employment growth softened from November, but was sharp and among the strongest seen since data collection began in December 2005," the survey said.

Meanwhile, private sector companies in India posted a faster increase in output at the end of the calendar year. At 59.2 in December, up from 58.6 in November, the HSBC India Composite Output Index signalled the strongest rise for four months.

Composite PMI indices are weighted averages of comparable manufacturing and services PMI indices. Weights reflect the relative size of the manufacturing and service sectors, according to official GDP data.

Rupee falls 4 paise to close at new record low of 85.83 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee declined 4 paise to settle at a fresh record low of 85.83 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, amid a steep fall in domestic equity markets and unabated outflow of foreign capital.

Forex traders said the surging US bond yields and concern over HMPV virus outbreak triggered a US dollar chase due to its safe-haven appeal.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 85.77 and touched the lowest-ever level of 85.84 against the greenback in intraday trade. The unit finally settled at its record low closing level of 85.83 (provisional), registering a fall of 4 paise from its previ-



ous close. On Friday, the rupee depreciated 4 paise to close at 85.79 against the dollar.

Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset

Sharekhan, said the rupee touched a fresh record low amid weak tone in the domestic markets and persistent FII outflows, while rising US bond yields and worries over HMPV virus scare also weighed on the rupee.

"However, a soft US dollar and any further intervention by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) may support the rupee at lower levels. Traders may take cues from services PMI and factory orders data from the US, Choudhary said and projected the USD-INR spot price "in a range of 85.65 to 86.10".

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.33 per cent lower at 108.44.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.31 per cent to USD 76.27 per barrel in futures trade.

In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex crashed 1,258.12 points, or 1.59 per cent, to settle at 77,964.99 points, while the Nifty tanked 388.70 points, or 1.62 per cent, to 23,616.05 points.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded Rs 4,227.25 crore in the capital markets on a net basis on Friday, according to exchange data.

The country's forex reserves dropped by USD 4.112 billion to USD 640.279 billion during the week ended December 27, the Reserve Bank said on Friday.

Government mulls mandatory hallmarking for silver jewellery

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Food and Consumer Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi on Monday asked the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) to consider implementing mandatory hallmarking for silver and silver artifacts following consumer demands.

"There is a demand from consumers for mandatory hall-marking of silver. You (BIS) can deliberate and take a call," Joshi said at the 78th BIS Foundation Day event.

The work in this direction has already begun and the government will take a decision after completion of stakeholder consultations and feasibility assessment by BIS, the minister told reporters on the sidelines of the event.

"I have asked BIS to work out feasibility and take reactions from consumers and ornament dealers. We will consult all stakeholders and start the process," he added.

Silver hallmarking, which certifies the purity of the white metal, is currently voluntary. BIS Director General Pramod Kumar Tiwari told PTI that the Bureau could be ready to implement mandatory silver hallmarking within 3-6 months, adding that the stake-



holder discussions were underway.

"Several rounds of discussions were held with stakeholders and they are in favour of it. The discussion on printing a unique six-digit alphanumeric code is going on," Tiwari said.

The move follows successful implementation of mandatory gold hallmarking introduced in June 2021, which now covers 361 districts.

The existing system includes a unique six-digit alphanumeric code (HUID) certifying gold purity.

According to the minister, about 90 per cent of jewellery being purchased is now hall-

marked. More than 44.28 crore gold jewellery items have been hallmarked with unique IDs since the launch.

Stakeholders from Gujarat, Karnataka and other states have requested the extension of mandatory hallmarking to silver, the minister added.

BIS, established under the BIS Act in 1986, is an autonomous national body responsible for setting quality standards for products and services.

Listing out upcoming focus areas, the minister said the BIS is also developing standards for Artificial Intelligence (AI) and is at the forefront of shaping the future of innovation and technology.

Trade Unions demand hike in minimum EPFO pension to Rs 5K

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Trade Unions on Monday pressed for increasing minimum EPFO pension 5 times to Rs 5,000 per month, immediate constitution of the 8th Pay Commission and higher taxes on super rich in the upcoming 2025-26 Budget.

In their customary pre-budget meeting with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, trade union leaders also demanded an increase in income tax exemption limit to Rs 10 lakh per annum, social security scheme for gig workers, and restoration of old pension scheme (OPS) for government employees.

The Budget for 2025-26 will be presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on February 1.

Talking to reporters after the meeting TUCC National General Secretary S P Tiwari said the government should stop all privatisation and corporatisation of PSUs and impose an additional 2 per cent tax on super rich to fund social security for informal workers.



Tiwari also demanded that agriculture workers be extended social security and their minimum wages should also be fixed.

Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh Organising Secretary (Northern Zone) Pawan Kumar said that the minimum pension under EPS-95 should be increased from Rs 1,000 per month to Rs 5,000 monthly as a first step and subsequently linked to the VDA (Variable Dearness Allowance).

He also suggested that the threshold for Income Tax exemption be raised to Rs 10 lakh. Also, income from pension should be exempted from tax. Kumar also demanded that the 8th Pay Commission to revise salary structure of government employees be constituted immediately.

The Design Clinic Facility unveiled at the 71st Foundation Day of NRDC



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Design Clinic Facility was unveiled at the 71st Foundation Day of the National Research Development Corporation (NRDC) at its headquarters in New Delhi. Dr. N. Kalaiselvi, Secretary of DSIR and Director General of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), presided over the event and inaugurated the Design Clinic Facility in partnership with the National Institute of Design, Madhya Pradesh.

This state-of-the-art center is designed to support startups, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and foster design innovation across industries. During the ceremony, CMD, Amit Rastogi (Retd.), of NRDC, shared the Corporation's rich legacy of fostering technological excellence and driving India's self-reliance by promoting innovation and supporting the start-up ecosystem.

Paris Saint-Germain beat Monaco 1-0 to win Champions Trophy

AP ■ PARIS

Ousmane Dembélé scored a stoppage-time winner as Paris Saint-Germain beat Monaco 1-0 to win the Champions Trophy. The France winger was unmarked at the back post to meet a low cross from the left by Fabian Ruiz in the second minute of added time on Sunday. PSG won the trophy, also known as the French Super Cup, for the third straight time and a record-extending 13th overall. PSG won the league and cup double last season, with Monaco finishing second in the league. "The result reflects our domination," PSG coach Luis Enrique said, while Monaco coach Adi Hütter conceded PSG played better. "A goal in the last minute always feels like a knife in the back," Hütter said. "PSG deserved to win if we're being honest, they had more chances." The match took place at Stadium

974 in Doha, Qatar, with PSG owned by Qatar-based QSI since 2011. Désiré Doué hit the crossbar early on for PSG and Monaco goalkeeper Philipp Köhn made several saves. Monaco improved after the break and hit the post through Eliesse Ben Seghir and Brazilian defender Vanderson. Although Köhn made a fine save to deny Achraf Hakimi in the 74th minute, he failed to properly read Ruiz's cross and Monaco missed out on winning the trophy for the first time since 2000. Marseille marches on Marseille strengthened its grip on second place in the French league, moving three points ahead of third-place Monaco after routing Le Havre 5-1 at home. Ghana's Andre Ayew was on the wing for Le Havre against his former club. He scored 60 goals in 209 games for Marseille from 2007-15 and won two League Cups. His brother, Jordan Ayew,



and his father — Abedi Pele — both played for the club. Marseille opened the scoring against 17th-place Le Havre in the 25th minute when midfielder Valentin Rongier drilled a low shot into the left corner from 20 meters out. Rongier's rare strike was followed by a first league goal for midfielder Bilal Nadir, who turned neatly before arrowing a shot in off the left post in the 39th. It was a special moment for Nadir, who ruptured his left ACL one year ago and was given a new contract by the club as a show of faith. Moments before halftime, striker Neal Maupay headed in from close range and Mason Greenwood broke down the right to set up substitute Elye Wahi midway through the second half. Ulisses Garcia added the fifth goal for coach Roberto De Zerbi's side. Home fans at Stade Velodrome chanted Ayew's name after he headed in a consolation goal in

the 85th. Ayew applauded the fans back when he went off moments later. PSG is seven points ahead of Marseille after 16 rounds. Toulouse climbed up to eighth place with a 1-0 win at seventh-place Lens, which leads Toulouse on goal difference. Striker Zakaria Aboukhhal scored a penalty in the 73rd. The game came shortly after Lens midfielder David Pereira da Costa was shown a second yellow card following a video review and was sent off. Angers beat Brest 2-0, and Strasbourg rallied to win 3-1 at home to Auxerre and move into 10th spot. Esteban Lepaul scored early on for Angers and fellow striker Ibrahima Niane, who replaced Lepaul in the 75th, wrapped up the win in stoppage time. Strasbourg's goals came from captain Habib Diarra, Félix Lemarechal and forward Emanuel Emegha, after Hamed Traore gave Burgundy side Auxerre an early lead in Alsace.

Focus on Satwik-Chirag as Indians look for strong start at season-opening Malaysia Open

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR

India's doubles duo of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty will aim for a strong result. Lakshya Sen will look to build on his recent form and HS Prannoy will hope to shake off rust after a lengthy break at the season-opening Malaysia Super 1000 tournament starting here on Tuesday. For Satwik and Chirag, seeded seventh, this USD 1.45 million event marks the start of a new season like it did in 2024. Last year, although they narrowly missed out on the title, the pairing went on to reach three more finals, winning two of them. The Asian Games gold medallists in exceptional form and will be hoping to replicate that success this year. Having reunited with Malaysian coach Kim Tan Her, the former world number ones are determined to go the



distance, but they face a tough challenge ahead. The high calibre of opponents in their draw will make the path to victory anything but easy. Satwik and Chirag, who reached the semifinals of the 2024 China Masters in their last event, will open their campaign against the pair of Ming Che Lu and Tang Kai Wei from Chinese Taipei. If they progress, they are likely to face a quarterfinal clash

against Indonesia's fourth seeds Fajar Alfian and Muhammad Rian Ardianto, a matchup that promises to be a thrilling contest. In men's singles, Lakshya will look to carry forward his recent success after ending a long title drought with a victory at the Syed Modi International Super 300 and a third-place finish at the King Cup International last month. These wins have given him much-needed confidence, and

he will aim to make a deep run in the Super 1000 event. Prannoy, on the other hand, will be returning to action after a five-month hiatus following his prequarterfinal exit at the Paris Olympics. The 32-year-old, who had to take a break due to chikungunya and to regain his fitness, will be hoping to shake off any rust. His first test will be against Canada's Brian Yang in the opening round. Priyanshu Rajawat, who has shown flashes of brilliance but has struggled with consistency, will face seventh-seeded Chinese player Li Shi Feng in his opening match. In women's singles, two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu will be missing from the tournament, having recently got married. In her absence, other Indian players -- Malvika Bansod, Aakarshi Kashyap, and Anupama Upadhyaya will look to make their mark.

Odisha government announces three-year sponsorship for Indian kho kho team

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha government on Monday announced a three-year sponsorship deal for the Indian national kho kho team, marking a significant step forward in promoting indigenous sports in the country. Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi said the state will invest Rs 5 crore annually from January 2025 to December 2027, with funding provided through the Odisha Mining Corporation. The total sponsorship package of Rs 15 crore demonstrates Odisha's continued commitment to sports development, following its successful partnership with Indian hockey. This initiative aims to elevate Kho Kho's status and provide essential support to the national team. "This is a watershed moment for Kho Kho in India. By supporting our indigenous



sports, we are not only preserving our cultural heritage but also creating new opportunities for our athletes," said Majhi. "Just as we transformed Indian hockey, we envision a similar renaissance for Kho Kho, positioning Odisha as a catalyst for sporting excellence." Sudhanshu Mittal, President of the Kho Kho Federation of India (KKFI), welcomed the announcement, as the country prepares to host the sport's

first ever World Cup from January 13-19 in New Delhi. "Odisha's commitment to Kho Kho represents a turning point for this traditional sport. This sponsorship will significantly enhance our ability to develop world-class athletes and promote Kho Kho on the global stage," Mittal said. The sponsorship will facilitate team development, training infrastructure, and participation in national and international competitions.

Kiran Jadhav wins air rifle gold in Lakshya Cup

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Kiran Jadhav of Navy Koutclassed fancied names in the fray to bag the 10m air-rifle gold in the 15th Lakshya Cup invitational tournament here. The 29-year-old Jadhav totalled 251.7 points to emerge victorious for the first time after consistently making the final every year since 2018. Jadhav pipped Gajanan Khandagale of Maharashtra, who tallied 250.9, to the second place while Mohit Gowda, also of Maharashtra, finished third with 229.3 points. Paris Olympics finalist Arjun Babuta of Railways was the favourite to win the title here but he ended up at fourth with 208.2 points. However, reigning men's and women's national air rifle champions, Shahu Mane and Ananya Naidu, failed to qualify for the finals.

Asian Games gold winner Bahadur Sagoo to succeed Sumariwalla as AFI chief

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Asian Games gold medallist shot putter Bahadur Singh Sagoo will be elected unopposed as the president of Athletics Federation of India (AFI) at its Annual General Meeting (AGM) here on Tuesday, succeeding the long-serving Adille Sumariwalla for the top post. The 51-year-old Sagoo won a shot put gold in the 2002 Busan Asian Games and also took part in 2000 and 2004 Olympics. He is a member of the outgoing executive council as an Athletes Commission representative. He is also a member of the senior selection committee. Sagoo is the lone candidate left in the fray after incumbent senior vice president Anju Bobby George opted out of the race for the top post. Anju will, however, remain as the senior vice president for a second term. The first agenda item of the two-day AGM is the appointment of the new AFI office bearers for the next four



years. Sagoo had won the men's shot put gold in the 2002 Asian Games with a throw of 19.03m. He has a lifetime best of 20.40m, and is also a Padma Shri recipient. There will also be no elections for the remaining posts, just like it happened during the last AGM in 2020. Delhi unit's top official Sandeep Mehta will be elected unopposed as the AFI secretary. He was the senior joint secretary in the outgoing executive council. Jyotirmoyee Sikdar, who won 800m and 1500m gold in the

1998 Asian Games, will be the joint secretary and Stanley Jones of Telangana will be elected the treasurer. Sikdar was also a member of the outgoing executive council as an Athletes Commission representative. Among the new executive committee members will be Sudha Singh, who won 3000m steeplechase gold in 2010 Asian Games, former 100m national record holder Rachita Mistry, Harjinder Singh and Priyanka Bhanot - daughter of AFI Planning Commission Chairman Lalit Bhanot.

Indonesia fires head coach Shin Tae-yong

AP ■ JAKARTA

Indonesia has dismissed Shin Tae-yong as head coach of its national team, the country's federation announced on Monday. "This decision was made based on long and mature considerations and evaluations carried out by as a whole regarding the team's performance and the long-term goals that the Indonesian National Football Team wants to achieve," the Indonesian federation, known locally as PSSI, said in a statement. Appointed in 2020, the South Korean boss had led Indonesia to the third round of qualification for the 2026 World Cup for the first time. In November, the team defeated Saudi Arabia 2-0 to move into third place in the six-team group with four games remaining. At a press conference in Jakarta, PSSI chairman Erick Thohir, who handed Shin a contract extension to 2027 last June, explained the decision.



"The dynamics of the national team need special attention from us," Thohir said. "We see the need for a leader who can better implement strategies agreed upon by the players, good communication and better implementation." There was no announcement of a replacement, though there is speculation that the new boss could be European. The national team's recent success has been driven by the naturalization of players of Indonesian heritage, born and raised in Europe. Of the team that started November's victory over Saudi Arabia, only Marselino Ferdinan, who scored both goals, was born in the Southeast Asian nation.

Mandhana to lead India women in home ODIs against Ireland

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Prolific opener Smriti Mandhana was on Monday named captain of the Indian women's cricket team for this month's three-match home ODI series against Ireland after regular skipper Harmanpreet Kaur was rested. Also given a break was pacer Renuka Singh Thakur, the BCCI announced in a press release. The short series against Ireland will begin on January 10 at Rajkot and all three games will be played at the same venue. Harmanpreet had injured her knee during the home series against the West Indies last month, forcing her to sit out of the last two T20Is before returning to play three ODIs. Before that, the 35-year-old had sustained a neck injury during the match against Pakistan in the Women's T20 World Cup in October last year. Lead pacer Renuka was the



player of the series in the ODIs against the West Indies after taking 10 wickets from three matches. In the past, a stress fracture of the back had troubled her. The move to rest her for the series against Ireland could be to ease her workload. The Indian women's team will enter the games against Ireland on a high after recording its first home T20 International series triumph in five years by beating the West Indies 2-1 last month. It then went on to blank the travelling side 3-0 in the ODIs that followed. The 28-

year-old Mandhana was in scintillating form during the assignment, notching up three consecutive half centuries in the T20 Internationals. She also scored two fifties during the ODIs. India squad: Smriti Mandhana (C), Deepti Sharma (VC), Pratika Rawal, Harleen Deol, Jemimah Rodrigues, Uma Chetry (wk), Richa Ghosh (wk), Tejal Hasabnis, Raghvi Bist, Minnu Mani, Priya Mishra, Tanuja Kanwer, Titas Sadhu, Saima Thakor, Sayali Satghare.

Diallo goal seals 2-2 draw for Manchester United against Liverpool

AP ■ LIVERPOOL

Amad Diallo came back to haunt Liverpool with a late equalizer that secured a 2-2 draw for Manchester United against Premier League leader Liverpool. The forward turned home Alejandro Garnacho's cross in the 80th minute at Anfield after Mohamed Salah's penalty had looking like giving Liverpool the win on Sunday. Diallo struck at the end of extra time as United beat Liverpool 4-3 in a dramatic FA Cup clash last season and hit a 90th-minute winner against Manchester City last month. His goal on Sunday was only worth a point on this occasion, but it halted United's four-game losing run

and prevented fierce rival Liverpool from opening up an eight-point lead at the top of the standings. United head coach Ruben Amorim, however, was still unhappy. "It's a point, a deserved point, but it's just one point, and we should get mad. Today we should be really disappointed," he said. United led through Lisandro Martinez's strike in the 52nd, but Cody Gakpo leveled seven minutes later. Salah fired Liverpool ahead from the spot in the 70th after Matthijs de Ligt handled in the box. The draw saw United move up to 13th in the standings. Liverpool missed the chance to open up an eight-point lead on second-place Arsenal, which drew 1-1 with Brighton

on Saturday. It is still six points clear at the top with a game in hand. "Over the whole game we created more chances than them; a point feels like it's something to take, but when I watch the game back I would hope for more," Liverpool head coach Arne Slot said. United is without a win at Anfield since 2016 — a run that spans nine games in all competitions. But it was a first point for Ruben Amorim's team since the 2-1 win against Manchester City on Dec. 15. It could have been better for United, with Harry Maguire firing over from close range deep into added time. Liverpool had its chances to win as well, with Virgil van Dijk firing a header straight at United goalkeeper Andre Onana late on.



With 39 top-flight titles between them, this was the latest meeting between English soccer's two greatest teams. Liverpool has the chance to equal United's record total of 20 league crowns this season

and could have taken a firmer hold on the title race with a win in front of its home fans. But United produced a performance that confounded its recent form, which has even had Amorim admitting his team could face a

relegation fight. "We've been fairly criticized because the position in the table says it all," United captain Bruno Fernandes said. "I think it's a fair result, both teams played really good football. But we can't be satisfied. I'm really upset because if we can show this against Liverpool, why can't we do this every week?" Diallo and Rasmus Hojlund had chances in the first half before Martinez lashed a left-footed shot into the roof of the net from a narrow angle. Alexis Mac Allister had seen Liverpool's best effort in the first half saved by Onana, but the 'keeper could do nothing to stop Gakpo's powerful shot after cutting onto his right foot in the box. A VAR review led to referee

Michael Oliver awarding Liverpool a penalty after the ball struck De Ligt's arm and Salah fired low to score his 21st goal of the season. He has scored 13 goals against United — more than any other player in Premier League history. But it wasn't enough to earn Liverpool the win after substitute Garnacho cut the ball back for Diallo to convert. "The way we conceded the two goals was unacceptable, lazy and careless," Van Dijk said. "It shouldn't happen." Late drama Raul Jimenez scored a penalty in the first minute of second-half stoppage time to salvage a 2-2 draw for Fulham against Ipswich. It was Jimenez's second penalty of the match as

Fulham twice came from a goal down at Craven Cottage. Relegation-fighting Ipswich went ahead through Sam Szmodics in the 38th and Jimenez leveled from the spot in the 69th. Ipswich went in front again through Liam Delap's penalty in the 71st and looked like climbing out of the relegation zone. But when Jimenez was brought down by Leif Davis in the box, referee Darren Bond pointed to the spot again. Jimenez made no mistake and fired into the top corner to share the points. Fulham is ninth and six points off the top four, while Ipswich is 18th and below Wolverhampton on goal difference, having played a game more.

Harbhajan Singh urges BCCI to end 'superstar culture' in team

Former India spinner Harbhajan Singh has urged the BCCI to end the "superstar culture" in the team and pick players for future assignments solely on the basis of performance and not on reputation.

can't keep picking players on their reputation. "If you do that, then you should take Kapil Dev sir and Anil bhai also. Here, the BCCI and the selectors will have to be firm and act tough. I don't think that the superstar attitude is taking the team forward."



thinks in his mind that he is a big superstar. If we have to take Indian cricket forward, we have to ask tough questions. "I am not saying that you should drop them but if you take them on tour, they (struggling players) should play some form of cricket whether county cricket or something before England tour."

"If you give a youngster an opportunity, I feel he will also be able to do this much (match the stats of Kohli)." Harbhajan said India would have lost the series 0-5 or 0-4 if Jasprit Bumrah was not part of the team.

India's bench strength: Plenty of batting options; bowling talent sparse

The nightmarish batting performance is deservedly under the scanner after India's meek surrender in the Border-Gavaskar series but a closer look at the team's bench strength would reveal that bowling resources are a bigger concern for the side as it navigates a difficult transition.

just-concluded series? The spearhead was forced to watch from the dressing room during the last innings of the decisive fifth and final Test that India lost by six wickets as back spasms prevented him from bowling.

remotely in contention for a playing XI slot in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. For Sarfaraz Khan, his technique against left quick bowling was always doubtful but the manner in which he got out in Pune and Mumbai in the home Tests against New Zealand has made the current team management wary.

They are Chennai Super Kings skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad, who is yet to make his debut, three-Test-old Rajat Patidar and Mumbai's very own Shreyas Iyer. Iyer's problem has been the short ball, while Patidar flattered to deceive against England at home last year.

coming back with the old ball for his third or fourth spell or how a batter is dealing with spinners on rank turners will also hold more relevance. But any decision on who would be elevated to the next level will be taken only after the end of the domestic season in February.

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Speechless: Beau Webster gushes after a 'dream debut' in Sydney against India

Australian all-rounder Beau Webster is feeling "speechless" after his impressive debut against India during the fifth Test here, which the hosts won by six wickets to reclaim the Border-Gavaskar Trophy after a decade.

Webster replaced an out of form Mitchell Marsh in the Australia eleven for the New Year Test, and the all-rounder admitted that initially he felt a bit "awkward."

Webster made 57 and unbeaten 37 in the two innings of the Sydney Test, important contributions in the match's context, besides taking the wicket of Shubman Gill in India's second innings.

"I'm a bit speechless, honestly. If you told me a week ago that all this would happen in the last few days, I wouldn't have believed you," Webster told cricket.Com.Au.

"It's been a dream debut and to get the win there inside three days is a hell of a feeling. I'm sure the boys will celebrate accordingly," he added.

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