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**WORLD 8**  
HAMAS CLOSE TO  
ACCEPTING GAZA CEASEFIRE,  
HOSTAGES RELEASE

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## Parliament Committee to question Meta CEO



(Left to right): Ashwini Vaishnaw, PM Narendra Modi taking oath in June 2024 and Mark Zuckerberg

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

Peevved by the unwarranted comments on Lok Sabha elections by social media giant Mark Zuckerberg, the Parliamentary Committee is to summon representatives of the Meta during the next couple of days. In past also social media giants Facebook and the then Twitter, Amazon, Google were summoned by the Centre and Parliament committees on different issues including protection of data and its privacy and allegation over supporting a particular individual, group or party in elections. The Centre led by Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw has already responded and countered to Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg's claims that most incumbent governments, including BJP led NDA, lost their positions post the Covid-19 pandemic. BJP MP Nishikant Dubey,

who heads the Parliament's Standing Committee on Communications and Information Technology, sought an apology from social media giant Meta for "tarnishing" India's image. He said that the panel will summon the firm very soon. "My committee will summon Meta for this incorrect information. Incorrect information about any democratic country tarnishes its image. This organisation will have to apologise to the Indian Parliament and the people here for this mistake," Dubey said in a statement. A day earlier Vaishnaw took the lead to criticise Zuckerberg for making "factually incorrect" statement that the incumbent government in India lost the election in 2024 over issues arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic. "It is disappointing to see misinformation from Zuckerberg himself. Let's uphold facts and credibility," Vaishnaw said on several

social media platforms including X (formerly Twitter) from where the matter has spiraled. While Zuckerberg owns the controlling stake in the Meta group of companies, X is now headed by US Tycoon Elon Musk. "From free food for 800 million, 2.2 billion free vaccines, and aid to nations worldwide during COVID, to leading India as the fastest-growing major economy, PM Modi's decisive 3rd-term victory is a testament to good governance and public trust," Vaishnaw said in a statement. Zuckerberg in a podcast said the lead to criticise Zuckerberg for making "factually incorrect" statement that the incumbent government in India lost the election in 2024 over issues arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Meta chief was referring to 2024 Lok Sabha elections, in which BJP lost its majority and the third term of Narendra Modi's government was formed by alliance partners like JDU and TDP as NDA alliance.

## Police find NGO, political ties in Delhi bomb threats

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Hinting towards a deeper conspiracy behind the bomb threats being sent to schools and several educational institutions across Delhi-NCR in recent past, the Delhi Police on Tuesday revealed link of an NGO, who opposed the hanging of terrorist Afzal Guru and has an association with a political party, with the 12th class student who had sent mails to over 400 schools. BJP alleged that the police investigation hints towards Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) involvement in the case, charging that AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal is not just

Delhi's but the country's enemy ahead of the Delhi elections. The BJP has been targeting Chief Minister Atishi on her parents opposing the hanging of Guru. Addressing a Press conference, Special CP/Law and Order Division Zone-II Madhup Tiwari said that the minor has sent about seven threatening mails to more than 400 schools between February 12 and January 8. He also sent the mail on May 1 when about 250 schools received the hoax bomb threat creating large-scale panic and fear among both parents and children, disrupting normal lives of the public, the officer added.



The matter came to fore when the police identified a 16 year old for sending bomb threats to about 23 schools on January 8. The hoax threats were delivered through heavily encrypted email services and complex digital pathways, clearly indicating intent to conceal identity and evade

detection, Tiwari said. However, he added that considering technical complexities and advanced techniques used in sending such emails, the police started probing the role of other entities/players/associates. The police pulled out at the background of the juvenile's

family. "We wanted to see how this child could have done all this on his own. To investigate this, we did a background profiling of the entire family. It is revealed that one NGO, which is part of a civil society group, has a significant influence at the workplace of the juvenile's guardian. It has a longstanding association and deep connection with a political party. This NGO is known for advocacy for the political party in open public domain and questions the legitimacy of Afzal Guru's hacking, a convicted terrorist involved in the 2001 Parliament attack," the officer said.

## CM takes holy dip in Baitarani to mark Makar



To attend various events over next 2 days

PNS ■ KEONJHAR

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi took a holy dip in the sacred river Baitarani at Patna of his home district Keonjhar on Tuesday to mark the Makar Sankranti. The CM arrived at Raisuan airstrip on Tuesday at about 11 am with a special aircraft from Bhubaneswar and went

to Patna on road for a bath in the river. He wore a mask and dived into the river. Later, he offered puja in the 12 Jyotirlingas in the temple nearby. People gathered near the river to witness the Chief Minister from a close distance. Later, he visited Jhumpura to inaugurate a bridge and subsequently, went to his home village Raikala. He interacted with family members as well as village friends and heard the grievances of the people.

For this, he returned from Delhi early in the morning and went straight to visit Keonjhar. The Chief Minister has come to Keonjhar on a 3-day visit. Security arrangements for the CM were tightened. On Wednesday, Majhi will participate in a government programme at Keonjhar and distribute allowances and land leases. After attending a festival in Barbil, the Chief Minister will leave for Bhubaneswar on January 16.

## Kumbh to boost UP's revenue by ₹2 Lakh Crore

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Maha Kumbh 2025 is expected to generate a revenue from Rs 2,00,000 crore to Rs 4,00,000 crore, to boost the economy of Uttar Pradesh. After Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath claims that Maha Kumbh 2025 will generate a revenue to the tune of Rs 2 lakh crore, traders' body the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) has also backed these figures, saying that Maha Kumbh is expected to generate trade worth approximately Rs 2 lakh crore. Furthermore, Industry estimates the average cost of accommodation and food for each visitor in Prayagraj would be Rs 10,000, which would contribute Rs 4 lakh crore to the state government's treasury by the end of the Mela. It is also expected to boost both nominal and real GDP by over 1 per cent. The national capital, being a largest trading centre of goods and services, is anticipated to supply items worth approximately Rs 40,000 crore from Delhi to Prayagraj and nearby towns. According to CAIT's estimates, revenue from transportation, including inter-state travel, taxis and goods transport, is estimated at Rs10,000 crore. The tourism sector, including travel guides and tour packages, is expected to generate another Rs 10,000 crore. Temporary medical camps, medicines and Ayurvedic products are expected to contribute Rs 3,000 crore. Revenue from e-tickets, digital transactions,

Wi-Fi usage and mobile charging stations is expected to be Rs 1,000 crore. Finally, the sale of entertainment services, advertisements and promotional events is estimated to generate Rs 10,000 crore. As per CAIT's estimates, accommodation and tourism are expected to generate Rs 40,000 crore trade; Rs 20,000 crore by food and beverage market; Rs 20,000 crore by religious items and offerings such as oil, lamps, Ganga water, idols; Rs 10,000 crore by transportation and logistics; Rs 5,000 crore by handicrafts and souvenirs; Rs 3,000 crore by healthcare services; Rs 1,000 crore by IT and digital services; Rs 10,000 crore by entertainment and media; and more. According to estimates, the event may generate Rs 2 lakh crore if each of 40 crore visitors spends an average of Rs 5,000. Some experts estimated the average cost of accommodation and food for each visitor in Prayagraj would be Rs 10,000, which would

contribute Rs 4 lakh crore to the state government's treasury by the end of the Mela. BJP MP from Chandni Chowk and Secretary General of CAIT, Praveen Khandelwal said an estimate suggests that with an average expenditure of Rs 5,000 per person during religious travel, the total spending will exceed Rs 2 lakh crore. This includes spending on hotels, guesthouses, temporary accommodations, food, religious items, healthcare, and other services. Many companies and corporate sectors from India as well as abroad are jostling for space to showcase their presence during the 45 day event. Dabur, Parle, Coca-Cola, Reliance Consumer Products, ITC Mangaldeep, Aditya Birla Sun Life AMC are just some of the companies out to woo the crores of devotees expected at the holy fair. Dabur has also tied up with dhabas and eateries in the city and on the highways. ITC Mangaldeep has set up unique 5 ft tall agarbatti installations at high traffic locations including Sangam Ghat. Reliance Consumer Products has also set up Campa Ashram, a space that offers a safe and serene haven for pilgrims to rest. The Maha Kumbh 2025, the largest religious congregation in Prayagraj, started on January 13 and will end on February 26. The event is anticipated to attract around 400 million visitors during its 45-day period. Back in 2019, the Kumbh Mela generated Rs 1.2 lakh crore in revenue, which is expected to grow to Rs lakh crore this time.

## SANGAM BANK BECOMES SELFIE HOTSPOT

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The Sangam bank in Prayagraj on Monday became a hotspot with crowds flocking to take selfies with the cutouts of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on the first bathing festival of the Maha Kumbh. The 45-day Maha Kumbh Mela will culminate on February 26 with 40 crore devotees expected to take a dip in the Sangam. Also Read: Maha Kumbh 2025: Devotees take a 'holy' dip at Sangam on first day A sizeable number of women and youths gathered in large numbers at Nandi Dwar on Paush Purnima Snan to click photos and selfies, displaying their craze for Modi and Adityanath. Brajesh Sharma, a



visitor from Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh expressed his admiration for Modi and Yogi, stating that the cutouts attracted him. His entire family joined in for selfies, praising the arrangements at the Maha Kumbh Mela. Suganma Dhippo, who travelled from Pune to Maharashtra for the sacred bath, lauded the arrangements at the event. She said the images of Modi and Yogi at Nandi Dwar were captivating, prompting her and her family to take selfies.

## In State Milk to be added to students' mid-day meals

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha Government would soon add milk to the mid-day meal given to the students in schools, informed Fisheries and Animal Resources Development Minister Gokulananda Mallik on Tuesday. According to sources, each student will be provided 200 millilitres (ML) of milk fortified with Vitamins A and D alongside their daily meals. A pilot initiative in this regard, known as 'Gift Milk', was commenced on Monday in the Rairangpur region of Mayurbhanj district. The project currently provides 200 ML of milk to 1,184 students across 29 schools. Minister Mallik has indicated intentions to extend this initiative to all schools across the State in the future. Notably, President

Droupadi Murmu virtually inaugurated 'Cow Induction, Gift Milk and Market Support' for the Odisha State Cooperative Milk Producers' Federation (OMFED) initiatives of the National Dairy Development Board from the Rashtrapati Bhavan on Monday. The Gift Milk programme is the first initiative of NFN wherein 200 ml of flavoured milk fortified with Vitamins A and D (as per FSSAI standards) is distributed among government school children on all school working days through a dairy cooperative under CSR allocations. The target group is mainly school children aged 5 to 15 years in primary and upper primary classes from government schools or schools run for underprivileged children by NGOs and charitable organisations.

## MoU to be signed for K'jhar steel plant

PNS ■ KEONJHAR

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Tuesday inaugurated a newly constructed bridge at Jhumpura in Keonjhar district. On the occasion, Majhi said that a MoU for a mega steel plant in Keonjhar district would be signed at the Utkarsh Odisha programme on January 28 and 29 in Bhubaneswar. The Chief Minister said the development of Keonjhar is being given priority. Efforts are on for development of education, health and other sectors. The new bridge has been constructed on the Jhumpura-Ukhunda road. By this bridge, more than 5,000 to 10,000 people of nearby areas would benefit by commuting on this daily,

## Dhadi Darshan at Puri from January 20

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The proposed 'Dhadi Darshan' (queue system) at the Jagannath Temple in Puri would commence from January 20, informed Law Minister Prithviraj Harichandan on Tuesday. According to the minister, all kinds of arrangements for a disciplined Dhadi Darshan have been completed. "Earlier, it had been decided that Dhadi Darshan would be

implemented from the New Year. Hence, a trial run of the system was considered. However, experimentation is not required now and it will be carried out directly from January 20," said Harichandan. Meanwhile, some servitors are of the opinion that a trial run is required before the implementation of the Dhadi Darshan system as it may create difficulties for the devotees. Senior servitor Binayak Das Mohapatra said, "How



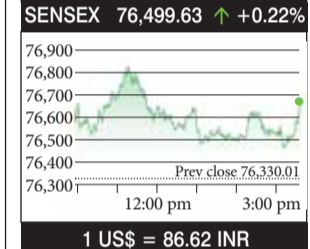
many devotees will be able to have darshan of the deities in this system in an hour is to be estimated and it should be

compared with the current system of darshan. Hence, a trial run in this regard is required. It should be ensured that the devotees don't face any kind of difficulties in the new system." However, a devotee said, "Devotees are facing lots of difficulties in the current system of darshan. If Dhadi Darshan is implemented, devotees will be able to have a smooth darshan of the deities."

## WEATHER

AQI 275  
MAX 21.2°C(+1.3)  
MIN 8.5°C(+1.5)

## MARKETS



## Retail inflation drops, Sensex, Nifty bounce

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty bounced back on Tuesday after declining for the past four sessions on easing retail inflation and a rebound in global markets. Besides, bargain hunting in energy, banking and metal stocks supported the market sentiment. However, rising global crude prices and unrelenting selling by foreign investors capped the gains, traders said. The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex rose 169.62 points or 0.22 per cent to settle at 76,499.63. During the day, it surged 505.6 points or 0.66 per cent to 76,835.61. As many as 2,867 stocks advanced while 1,096 declined and 110 remained unchanged on the BSE. The NSE Nifty climbed 90.10 points or 0.39 per cent to 23,176.05. The BSE Sensex has plunged 1,869.1 points or 2.39 per cent in the past four trading sessions. "A rebound in the global market and an ease in domestic CPI inflation provided respite to the broader indices. This may provide some leeway for RBI in its next policy meeting. However, rising oil prices and higher 10-year yields will be watched carefully. "The IT sector weighed down amid concerns over weak earnings guidance for Q4. The domestic sentiment will be more inclined towards the ongoing earnings season and upcoming union budget, which has a mixed view," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

# Khurda-Bolangir rail project achieves key success

With breakthrough of T3 tunnel

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**  
The Khurda-Bolangir new rail line project has achieved a major milestone with the successful breakthrough of tunnel number T3 located between Buguda and Banigochha in Nayagarh district.

This tunnel, with a length of 2,620 meters and a 2-degree curve, has now completed the New Austrian Tunneling Method (NATM) excavation.

The breakthrough or 'daylighting' was achieved on Monday, marking an important step in the construction of this crucial rail line project.

Tunnel number T3 is the longest tunnel in Nayagarh district and the second longest in the entire Khurda-Bolangir rail line project.

The tunnel's excavation employed state-of-the-art technologies and machines, designed to navigate the challenging and rugged terrain of the Eastern Ghats. This will play a crucial role in connecting the eastern and western parts of Odisha, boosting the



region's transportation and economic potential.

In his comment on the achievement, Railway Minister

Ashwini Vaishnav said, "A milestone showcasing engineering excellence in challenging terrains: A breakthrough

has been achieved in the 2.6 km-long Tunnel T3 (with a 2-degree curve) between Buguda and Banigochha stations on

the Khurda-Bolangir section in Odisha."

The rail line project, which spans 301 kilometers, presents numerous engineering and logistical challenges, particularly in the construction of tunnels. The project includes seven tunnels within a 75-km stretch, all located between Daspalla and Purunakatak. The construction of these tunnels, particularly through the difficult terrain of the Eastern Ghats, has been one of the most complex aspects of the project. Once completed, this rail line will drastically reduce travel time between Bhubaneswar and Bolangir.

## Urban growth via Town Planning scheme

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**

The Odisha Government has announced a new initiative aimed at expanding urban development through a series of Town Planning (TP) scheme. A dedicated department will be established to manage this expansive initiative, ensuring adherence to a specified time period.

Additionally, a new office would be established to streamline the planning process, informed Housing and Urban Development Minister Krushna Chandra Mohapatra stated on Sunday.

He said there would be no unplanned developments within city limits. Initial implementation of these urban plans would target cities such as Cuttack, Brahmapur

and Rourkela. The government's new initiative is designed to promote a systematic urban growth throughout the State, extending beyond the capital city Bhubaneswar, which is already renowned for being a well-planned city.

The project will see the establishment of additional town planning offices and an increase in human resources to support fair and efficient execution of urbanisation across the State. The BDA jurisdiction has been increased and a similar extension will be made in Cuttack so that all constructions are taken up in a planned manner. A Director, Town Planning office will be set up and strengthened so that urbanisation takes place in a planned manner.

## Hansita's staff makes sensational revelations

Claims he was asked to morph her pictures with VIPs

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**

Even as the Commissionerate police have expedited their probe, more skeletons are tumbling out of fraudster Hansita Abhilipsa's cupboard.

Hansita and her close aide Anil Kumar Mohanty, arrested for a multi-crore fraud, allegedly morphed photos with prominent personalities to dupe their victims.

A former employee of the duo has revealed that Hansita instructed to edit her photo with the Chief Secretary and share it with her in WhatsApp. They also were engaged in



fraudulent CSR projects and operated from Bhubaneswar, facing allegations of land grabbing and impersonating as relatives of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Principal Secretary PK Mishra.

The duo functioned from an

office in Raghunathpur in Bhubaneswar, where plans for scams and conspiracies were allegedly hatched, the former employee revealed.

In 2016, Hansita and her associates grabbed land in Brahmeswar Patna in

Bhubaneswar, sparking protests from locals. The matter escalated after complaints were lodged against her with the local police.

Hansita, then known as 'Bishnupriya Chand', continues to face mounting allegations with more startling facts expected to surface.

So far, police during investigations have unearthed more than half a dozen luxury cars owned by the couple. Interestingly, cash payments were made for these cars, each of which cost more than Rs 1 crore. Besides, some high-end flats have been detected. The fraudster duo have come under the Income Tax dragnet and it is expected that the Directorate of Enforcement (ED) would make an entry in the case.

## Sanitation vehicle catches fire in city



**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**

Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) vehicle used for sanitation and cleaning operation went up in flames under mysterious circumstances in the Chandrasekharpur area of the city on Tuesday.

As per reports, no injury to anyone was reported in the incident that took place near Damana Chhak. The vehicle engaged in road cleaning operation suddenly caught fire

on the road, locals said.

The fire spread rapidly and engulfed the entire vehicle within minutes. The Fire Service was immediately alerted.

A team of the Fire Service reached the site after being informed and extinguished the blaze. However, extensive damage had already been caused to the vehicle due to the fire.

The exact reason behind the incident was yet to be ascertained. Efforts were on to find out the cause of the fire.

## SNEH's prog Importance of restorative justice practices stressed

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**

The Society for Nature, Education, and Health (SNEH) organised a programme on restorative justice on January 11 at SAMPRITI- the organisation's peace training-cum-resource and research center in Bhubaneswar.

It was inaugurated by retired District Judge Biswajeet Mohapatra. SNEH president, Subarna Ghosh welcomed the participants. A diverse audience of 30 civil society members attended the workshop, including senior police officers, human rights officers, advocates and social workers, members of the judiciary, educationists, human rights activists and journalists.

Chief Speaker Dr Bijoy Chandra Mohapatra advo-



calated for restorative justice as a means to address the challenges, highlighting its potential for prisoner reformation and community integration.

Former Judge Mohapatra emphasized the importance of restorative justice to resolve compoundable matters.

Advisor, SNEH, Subas Panda elucidated SNEH's on-

going interventions in the Salia Sahi slum. He highlighted its focus on offender rehabilitation, victim restoration and community reconciliation, for which SNEH is actively lobbying for a restorative justice Bench in local police stations.

Also, two trained women peace leaders from the slum shared their experiences and success stories.

An open session facilitated by Subas Panda held discussions on various aspects of restorative justice and its integration into the existing justice delivery system. The programme was supported by the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), Kolkata.

## NGMA's modern art exhibition Utkalika opens

Masterpieces of country's eminent artists on display

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**

The National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), New Delhi, in collaboration with the Lalit Kala Akademi (LKA), Regional Centre, Bhubaneswar, is hosting a special exhibition, 'Utkalika - A Show of Modern Art', exploring the history of modern and contemporary art, coinciding with the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) here.

The exhibition was inaugurated on January 6 at the Lalita Kala Regional Centre in Kharvela Nagar here and is open to the public till February 6.

The purpose of this special exhibition was to introduce the visiting diaspora and art enthusiasts to the collection of national treasures of artworks



brought to the Temple City Bhubaneswar by the NGMA, Mumbai Branch. These prized artworks would be showcased to the visiting art-lovers to traverse through the diverse and vibrant hues of Indian heritage. The artworks feature unique indigenous cultural heritage represented via the portrayal of a unified theme of return to Indian roots of culture and spirituality through the route of art. This exhibition intends to create points of interest, interaction and in-

spire creativity and learning for art lovers, students and research scholars.

The masterpieces of eminent artists SH Raza, KH Ara, FN Souza, Shankar Palshikar, Akbar Padmsee, MF Hussain, Tyeb Mehta, VS Gaitonde, Ram Kumar, MV Dharanidhar including prominent artists from early 19th century to the contemporary times, represent both the experimental and adventurous journey of modern art in the Indian subcontinent and

its impact on the international art scenario.

This special exhibition Utkalika is an innovative initiative of NGMA Director General Sanjeev Kishor Goutam to generate global awareness of Indian modern and contemporary art. The contemporary artworks of Progressive Artists Group are being exhibited to raise awareness and foster an appreciation for Indian art history. Kshitish Chandra Das is coordinating the event.

## Veterans unite against British colonial practices



**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**

As the nation observed "Veterans Day" to honour former soldiers and retired officers who dedicated the best years of their lives to serving the nation, some ex-servicemen's organisations came together in Bhubaneswar to raise their voice against British colonial practices through government bodies like the Rajya Sainik Board and Zilla Sainik Boards.

Gathering at the Lower PMG, these veterans accused

Secretary of the Rajya Sainik Board retired Commodore Ghanashyam Ojha of misusing a significant portion of the 8 lakh government funds allocated for the Veterans Day celebration. Allegedly, only a small amount was spent on the event in collaboration with his associates.

The veterans, calling for unity among all ex-servicemen to fight the colonial practices perpetuated by the Rajya Sainik Board, voiced their concerns under the leadership of five different veteran organisations. They pointed

## Minimum temp increases in State

To fall after 3 days; fog predicted

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**

The minimum temperature in the State is likely to fall again by 2 to 3 degree Celsius after three days, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Tuesday.

The mercury rose in the last 24 hours with Daringbadi in Kandhamal being the coldest in the State at 9.5 degree followed by G Udayagiri at 10.2 degree, Semiliguda in Koraput at 11.2 degree, Phulbani at 11.5

degree and Rourkela at 11.7 degree.

Bhubaneswar and Cuttack recorded 16.7 degree and 15.5 degree, respectively. The mercury had been hovering around 13 degree in the twin cities for the last few days.

The weather office has also forecast dense fog in Kalahandi, Kandhamal and Bhadrak districts till January 16 morning. Shallow to moderate fog may also occur in Jharsuguda, Keonjhar, Sambalpur, Sundargarh, Cuttack, Khordha, Puri, Ganjam and Gajapati till January 17 morning.

## Bhitarkanika closed for crocodile census

**PNS ■ KENDRAPADA**

The Bhitarkanika National Park in Kendrapada district has been closed for tourists and locals for nine days starting on Tuesday to conduct the annual crocodile census till January 22.

Officials have also planned for conducting a crocodile protection and awareness programme to sensitise people about the eco-sensitive zone.

"While Bhitarkanika will remain closed from January 14 to 22, counting will take place from January 19 to 21. The gap days will allow water in the rivers to stabilise and

the crocodiles to be calm in their natural habitat," said Bhitarkanika DFO Sudarsan Gopinath Yadav.

In order to complete the exercise meticulously, herpetologist and wildlife researcher Dr Sudhakar Kar will lead the forest officials during the counting process. Additionally, the census will be conducted across the four ranges of Kanika, Rajnagar, Mahakalapada and Gahirmatha.

Notably, in last year's census, the Bhitarkanika National Park had recorded 1,811 salt-water crocodiles, marking a slight increase from 1,793 reported in 2023.

## Paddy procurement in JSpur Min Patra inspects Mandis, holds review

**PNS ■ JAGATSINGHPUR**

Food Supplies and Consumer Welfare Minister Krushna Chandra Patra visited Jagatsinghpur on Saturday, inspected the Mandis for the coming paddy procurement season, and held a review meeting with the district officials.

At the review meeting, Minister Patra stated that all farmers' paddy will be procured and requested farmers not to bring extremely lower quality paddy to Mandis for procurement. "Collectors have been instructed to follow the FAQ guidelines issued by the Union Government," he said.

Meanwhile, the Minister added that farmers will be allowed an extra 15 days if their token lapses, allowing them more time to dry their wet paddy and make it fit for sale at Mandi.

However, Minister Patra asked PDS beneficiaries to complete their e-KYC by Janu-

ary 31. If somebody faces any difficulties they are advised to take the assistance of the toll-free number 1967 for redressal measures, he said.

Industry and Skill development Minister Sampad Chandra Swain attending the review meeting said that the State government is ready to compensate farmers for damages caused by unseasonal rains.

MLAs Sarada Prasanna Jena and Dr Ramakanta Bhoi urged the State government to make certain compromises on collecting FAQ quality paddy as farmers' paddy crops have been affected due to unseasonal rains.

Collector J Sonal informed about the arrangements made on the upcoming paddy procurement season. Among others, District Supply Officer Sujata Mishra, Agriculture Officer Biswajit Panda, the Chief Executive Officer Zilla Parishad and the ADM Jagatsinghpur were present.

# Girl ends life over lewd remarks in Ganjam

Accused still moving scot-free  
PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

A girl ended her life by consuming poison after allegedly being unable to bear the mental distress caused by harassment by some unruly youths in Ustapada village under the Kabisuryanagar police station in Ganjam district on Monday.

Sources said the deceased, identified as Rajeshwari Pradhan, was allegedly subjected to lewd comments and

obscene gestures, along with her sister, by some youths in the village.

Rajeshwari consumed some poisonous substances at her home. Later, family members found her in a critical condition and admitted her to the Kodala Community Health Centre (CHC), where doctors declared her brought dead.

Sources added that the deceased's sister identified the main accused as Kankada Pradhan, a native of the same village. He was reported to have made indecent gestures

and vulgar remarks at the victim earlier in the afternoon and also threatened her with sexual assault.

Later, Rajeshwari disclosed the matter to her sister and the duo decided to confront the accused. However, he allegedly continued with the obscenity and made similar remarks at them both.

Meanwhile, a written complaint has been filed by the deceased's family at the Kabisuryanagar police station. But her family said no action has been taken by the police so far.

# In Subarnapur Tension as worker dies in factory mishap

PNS ■ SONEPUR

A contract labourer working at Mash Bio Fuels Private Limited in Subarnapur district died after falling into the dryer on Sunday evening.

The deceased was identified as Ajay Mahakur (25), a native of Arakhpadar village under the Tarbha police station. The incident occurred when Mahakur was operating the dryer in absence of the operator.

As the news of his death spread, family members and co-workers gathered in front of the factory demanding adequate compensation.

While plant officials offered a Rs 2-lakh compensation, Mahakur's family members insisted on Rs 25 lakh.

The deceased's family members refused to allow the body's postmortem until their compensation demands are met. "We deeply regret the in-

cident and stand in support with the deceased's family. The matter is under investigation," said a senior official of the company.

As per reports, other workers have expressed grave concerns over the lack of safety measures at the factory. They have stated that necessary precautions to guarantee their safety were not provided, putting them in life-threatening situations.

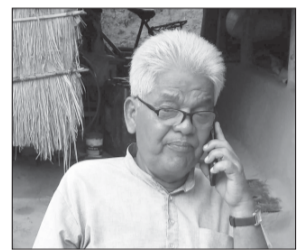
# CPM leader Mishra's demise mourned

Body donated to MKCG MCH  
RAJEEV RATHAN ■ BRAHMAPUR

Prominent farmer and senior CPI(M) leader Jagannath Mishra's mortal remains were donated to MKCG Medical College and Hospital here on Monday for medical research and education.

Earlier on the day, Mishra's body was taken to the CPM district office, where a solemn atmosphere prevailed. Hundreds of CPM workers, representatives from various political parties and organisations and distinguished personalities paid heartfelt tributes to the late leader.

CPM Central Committee member Ali Kishore Pattanayak draped Mishra's body with the party's red flag, while State secretary Suresh Panigrahi and senior leader Janardan Pati offered floral tributes. Notable attendees include Brahmapur Mayor Sanghamitra Dalai, BJD leader Subash Maharana, Corporators Sanjit Panigrahi and Surendra Maharana, CPI



leaders Prabir Das and Bhala Chandra Sadangi, AAP leader Aditya Rath, environmentalist Praful Samantara and leaders from labor, farmer, youth, and women's organisations.

CPM leaders from across the State, including district secretary Judhishtir Behera, Kailash Sadangi and Harikrishna Reddy, as well as representatives from Puri, Nayagarh and Gajapati districts, also paid their respects. Members of the legal fraternity, journalists and cultural groups joined the mourning.

Mishra's body was handed over to MKCG Medical College. Principal Professor Suchitra Das and Anatomy Department Head Dr Sagar Prusty received the donation. Additionally, Mishra's eyes were donated to MKCG's eye bank on Sunday.

# In Jharsuguda Rampant river sand mining poses ecological threat

Dist admn, police cast a blind eye  
RAJKUMAR SHARMA ■ JHARSUGUDA

Illegal sand mining along the Ib and Bheden riverbeds has become a persistent issue, raising alarm among local residents and environmentalists. The unchecked excavation of sand to meet the booming construction demands in Jharsuguda is causing significant ecological harm, including the depletion of water tables and rendering borewells in the area ineffective.

Residents allege that the Mines Department and district administration have turned a blind eye to the issue, with some officials accused of complicity in these unlawful activities. Despite repeated complaints, no concrete ac-



tion has been taken to curb the menace, fueling public outrage.

On December 26, locals intercepted a sand-laden Hyva near Sodhamal Ashram School Chowk and the driver failed to provide documents for sand transportation. The Mines and Police officials did

not respond, allowing the vehicle to escape. Similarly, on January 6, the villagers discovered eight to ten Hyvas illegally lifting sand from the Bheden riverbed. Although officials later confirmed the illegal activity, sand mining resumed within days.

The Integrated Tribal Society in Sodhamal has demanded the cancellation of a lease allegedly granted to a trader involved in the illegal operations. District Mines Officer Chudamani Biswal stated that action is being taken against the offenders, but residents remain skeptical.

Illegal sand lifting is also rampant in areas such as Talpatia, H Katapali, and Lahandabuda along the Ib river, with over 50 tractors and 10 Hyvas reportedly operating daily to supply sand to local contractors. However, enforcement measures remain inadequate.

Locals are urging strict enforcement by the Mines and Police departments to prevent further environmental degradation and economic losses caused by the rampant illegal sand mining.

# SKRM repairs house of destitute widow in Joda

PNS ■ KEONJHAR

Sawan Kirpal Ruhani Mission (SKRM) Joda centre helped Nini Mahakud, a destitute widow who is living in a dilapidated house under Ward No. 10 in Joda Municipality. Joda SRKM founder Braja Kishore Behera said that realising the hardship of the widow during the ongoing cold in the mining town Joda, the followers of the SKRM came to the rescue of the widow and renovated her house from their own pocket. They handed over the key of the renovated house to the beneficiary on January 9 in the presence of former Chairman, Joda Municipality

RK Das, S Rajeev Sehgal, Sitaram Mohapatra, president and secretary SKRM, Joda, respectively and other members were also present.

It may be recalled here that during Covid epidemic, the SKRM had provided food pockets to the downtrodden people for consecutive 25 days through Joda Municipality. Further, in order to maintain communal harmony, SKRM, Joda Centre provided food and beverage at a mosque situated at the old Joda market during last Eid al-fitr festival. During various festivals like Durga Puja, Rath Yatra and Ram Navami etc, the organisation supplies food and beverage to the devotees.

# In Kendrapada Disabled sexagenarian sets example in nursing his father

RAJESH BEHERA ■ KENDRAPADA

The relation between the physically disabled sexagenarian Dhiren Kumar Sahu and his nonagenarian father shows one of the unconditional love.

Dhiren of Kuanrapala village under Garajanga GP of Marshahal block is physically disabled since his childhood. A walking stick and a tricycle are the only sources for him to move from one place to another.

"When I was a child my mother passed away. My father used to take care of me and nourished me with lots of difficulties and also solemnized my marriage. But as ill luck would have it, my spouse also deserted me after some days of my marriage. Mean-



while, my nonagenarian father is my whole world now," said Dhiren.

Although having very limited physical capabilities, he still takes care of his nonagenarian father, Satrugna Sahu, who has been suffering from oldage related diseases and counting his last days.

Everyday, Dhiren lifts him-

self into his wheelchair with his hands and arms, goes for grocery shopping, helps his father take bath, prepares meals for the day and feeds his father first and later, he takes meal.

Adverse circumstances with physical disabilities, though stand as a hindrance to take care of his nonagenarian father, but Dhiren ensures he never fails to complete the routine works. He never gives up no matter how difficult his life may be.

India has long cemented a belief that it is a child's duty to care for his aging parents. But in a land known for revering its elderly, a secret shame has emerged a burgeoning population of older people abandoned by their own families. The story is an inspiring one for several others who have deserted their parents and forced them to stay in oldage homes to spend their final days in exile, said social worker Ganesh Samal.

According to Dhiren, "When I was a child my father took care of me despite my disability. Now time has come for returning care and love to my elderly father."

# B'pur's Tibetan market: A cultural, economic link

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ BRAHMAPUR

In the bustling city of Brahmapur, a seasonal Tibetan market has been a significant part of the local life since 1965. What began as a humble initiative has since blossomed into a beloved feature of the city's cultural and economic landscape.

The Tibetan market bridges the Tibetan community in Chandragiri and the people of Brahmapur, offering much more than woolen garments; it provides a glimpse into a rich cultural heritage that has endured the test of time.

Chandragiri, nestled in the picturesque hills of Gajapati district, is just 85 km from Brahmapur. Tibetan refugees were initially settled in the region in 1963, as part of a larger settlement effort. The community, known as Phuntsokling (the Land of Happiness and Plenty), became home to thousands of Tibetans who fled their homeland after the Chinese occupation. The Indian government, in collaboration with the Odisha administration, allocated land for their

settlement, marking the beginning of a new chapter for the Tibetan community.

Over time, the Tibetan community in Chandragiri transitioned from agriculture to other economic activities. By the 1980s, Tibetan families began selling woolen garments, particularly hand-knitted sweaters, as a seasonal business. These garments quickly gained popularity, especially during the colder months, and made their way to markets like Brahmapur.

For the Brahmapur's residents, the Tibetan market has become synonymous with winter. From September to February, the market comes alive with vibrant stalls offering a variety of woolen garments such as sweaters, shawls, caps, and socks. The wool for these garments is sourced from northern India and Nepal, ensuring warmth and durability. Tibetan sweaters stand out not only for their practicality but also for their cultural significance, representing the resilience and craftsmanship of a community that has preserved its



heritage through generations.

A remarkable aspect of the Tibetan market is the linguistic adaptability of its vendors. Many are fluent in Odia and Hindi, in addition to their native Tibetan language. This ability to communicate in local languages has been pivotal in fostering strong relationships with the local population. Over the years, the Tibetan market has evolved into a cultural exchange, where people from diverse backgrounds come together in mutual respect and understanding. Friendly interactions between Tibetan vendors and local customers exemplify the harmonious rela-

tionship nurtured over decades.

The economic impact of the Tibetan market is significant. For Tibetan families in Chandragiri, the income from selling woolen garments during the winter months constitutes a major portion of their annual earnings. These sweaters are more than just products; they symbolize a community that has preserved its identity despite numerous challenges. In return, the market offers the local community affordable, high-quality winter clothing while contributing to Brahmapur's broader economy.

However, the Tibetan market faces challenges, such as rising costs, climate change, and competition from modern retail outlets. Despite these hurdles, the community's entrepreneurial spirit remains strong. In recent years, younger generations have embraced digital platforms to expand their reach. Social media and e-commerce have extended the market's visibility beyond its seasonal presence in Brahmapur, helping to ensure its continuity.

Tibetan Human Association president Tsering Yangzom stated, "Every year, around 40 to 50 stalls are set

up in Brahmapur from July 15 to January 25. We close it down after that period to prepare for the celebration of the Tibetan New Year festival, which occurs on February 15 each year. Our winter clothing business is a part-time venture, while our primary business revolves around agricultural products."

She further explained that while they produce about 50 percent of the woolen garments themselves, they also source the remaining 50 percent from Nepal, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Amritsar.

From its modest beginnings in 1965 to its current status as a thriving seasonal market, the Tibetan market in Brahmapur has withstood decades of change. Today, it remains a tangible link to a culture that thrives against the odds. Whether you're a long-time resident or a first-time visitor, walking through the vibrant stalls and engaging with the friendly Tibetan vendors offers a unique experience, one that warms both the body and the soul.

while A Ananta Raidu got position, C Kausyla stood second and Y Sahasra finished third. Similarly from senior group L Sirisha, Lalita and R Rajalakshmi got first, second and third positions, respectively. All winners were awarded prizes. Other participants were given consolation prizes. Samiti president S Srinivas Rao, secretary Chakradhar Rao, treasurer B Someswar Rao, J Suryanarayana, Ch Durga Prasad, M Venkat Ramana and J Laxmi, Jyoti attended as jury members.

## IN BRIEF

### Woman killed hit by bus in Jajpur

Jajpur: A woman was killed after being hit by a bus near the Bramhani Bridge in Kabatabandha on Chandikhol-Duburi NH-53 in Jajpur district on Tuesday. The deceased was identified as a resident of Sathuapatna village under Marjitapur panchayat. The woman was going in a bike as a pillion rider. When the bike was crossing the Bramhani bridge, the bus hit the vehicle from the rear. The woman fell down from the bike and sustained critical injuries. Locals shifted her to the nearby hospital. However, the doctors there announced her brought dead.

### Woman missing from Dhanu Yatra hospitalised

Bargarh: A young woman who came to watch the Dhanu Yatra festival in Bargarh and was missing from there was rescued after 48 hours in a serious condition on Tuesday from Kurla forest under Bargarh block. There were deep cuts on her head and various parts of her body. It is suspected that the victim was brutally tortured and gang raped. She was immediately rushed to Burla VIMSAR for treatment. More investigation was going on in the matter, said Bargarh SP Prahalad Sahayak Meena.

### Utkal Sammilani pays tributes to Vyasakabi

Bhubaneswar: Members of the Utkal Sammilani paid floral tributes to the statues of Vyasakabi Fakir Mohan Senapati here on Tuesday. Utkal Sammilani president Ananta Prasa Jena said Odisha Asmita (pride) began from the time of Fakir Mohan. Utkal Sammilani general secretary Dillip Dashsharma coordinated the event. Sammilani vice-president Surendra Kumar Mishra and Mancheswar branch president Sital Chandra Mohanty also spoke about the contribution of Fakir Mohan. Among others, Siddhartha Shankar Gadnaya, Basanti Tripathy and many other members were present.

### DAVians hold Vyasakabi birth anniv

Bhubaneswar: DAVians of Chandrasekharpur, Bhubaneswar observed the 182nd birth anniversary of Vyasakabi Fakir



Mohan Senapati amidst various activities in the school premises on Tuesday.

### VOS functionaries call on Dy CM Singh Deo

Bhubaneswar: On the occasion of the Makar Sankranti, office-bearers of the Vanivihar Old Students' Sangathan (VOS 92) met Deputy Chief Minister Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo at



his residence here on Tuesday. They urged him to take adequate steps at the government level for development of Odia language and culture. The VOS delegation included its president Priyabrata Mohanty, secretary Manoj Kumar Rout and convener Gadadhar Rath.

### NTR Seva Samiti holds Rangoli test in B'pur

Brahmapur: To mark Makar /Pongal celebration, NTR Seva Samiti, Brahmapur conducted Rangoli competition among girls here. Total 11 girls from the junior group and 16 from the senior group participated. Amongst the junior group,



while A Ananta Raidu got position, C Kausyla stood second and Y Sahasra finished third. Similarly from senior group L Sirisha, Lalita and R Rajalakshmi got first, second and third positions, respectively. All winners were awarded prizes. Other participants were given consolation prizes. Samiti president S Srinivas Rao, secretary Chakradhar Rao, treasurer B Someswar Rao, J Suryanarayana, Ch Durga Prasad, M Venkat Ramana and J Laxmi, Jyoti attended as jury members.

### Kandhamal OAV girl tops State level test

Phulbani: Ksheerabdhhi Tanaya, a student of Class-XI of Dhubotata Odisha Adarsh Vidyalaya near Belpadar in Kandhamal district, secured the first position in a State level competition in Bhubaneswar, on mock parliament. The competition was organised by the Directorate of Teachers Education and the State Council of Educational Research and Training, Bhubaneswar from January 7 to 10 in which students from 30 districts participated. Tanaya surpassed everyone by performing the role of President Draupadi Murmu and received the Natha Pardarshita Award from the chief guest. The Kandhamal District Education Officer, the Principal of Odisha Adarsh Vidyalaya and teachers of all schools extended their heartfelt congratulations to her.



# Jammu and Kashmir incomplete without PoK: Rajnath Singh

**MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU**

Sending out a stern warning to the neighbouring Pakistan Defence Minister Rajnath Singh Tuesday said Jammu and Kashmir is incomplete without Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK). He also hit out at the Prime Minister of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), Chaudhry Anwarul Haq, over his remarks on India.

Noting that Pakistan has not stopped destabilising India and has been promoting illegal infiltration and terrorism since 1965 Singh also cautioned Pakistan to dismantle all the existing 'terrorist training camps operating from PoK. Addressing a gathering of veteran soldiers on the occasion of the 9th Armed Forces Veterans' Day programme at Tanda Artillery Brigade, Akhnoor, the Defence Minister described PoK as the crown jewel of

India, which is nothing more than a foreign territory to Pakistan. He said, "J&K is incomplete without PoK. The people living there are being deprived of a dignified life. Efforts are being made by Pakistan to mislead and provoke them against India in the name of religion. PoK's land is being used for terrorism. Training camps for terrorists are running and launch pads have been built in the areas adjacent to the border. The Indian government is well aware of the situation. Pakistan will have to put an end to its nefarious designs."

Referring to the glorious history of the Indian army, Rajnath Singh said, "2025 is the diamond jubilee year of the 1965 Indo-Pak war, and India's victory was the result of the valour & sacrifice of the Armed Forces. "Pakistan has lost every war it fought with India, whether it was the attack in



1948, the war of 1965, the war of 1971 or the Kargil war of 1999. Pakistan has been promoting illegal infiltration and terrorism since 1965 and has tried to influence the local population in J&K.

"Our Muslim brothers have sacrificed their lives fighting against terrorism. Even today, more than 80% of the terrorists entering India are from Pakistan. Cross-border terrorism would have ended in 1965 itself, but the then central government was unable to convert the tactical advantage gained in the war into a strategic advantage," he said. The situation on the ground has significantly improved since the abrogation of Article 370," he added.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh also reiterated the government's top priority is bridging the gap between Kashmir and the rest of India. "Kashmir was treated differently (by previous govern-

ments) in the past as a result our brothers and sisters in the region could not get connected with Delhi as it should have been. I do not want to go into the past as our government's biggest achievement is that we have been working to bridge 'dil ki duri' (distance between hearts) between Kashmir and the rest of the country. "I congratulate Chief Minister Omar Abdullah for taking the right steps to help overcome the little bit of gap (which is still there)," the defence minister said.

The event was also attended by Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha, Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan; General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Northern Command Lieutenant General MV Suchindra Kumar and other civil and military officers. During his visit to Akhnoor, Rajnath Singh inaugurated a

heritage museum and also hoisted a 108-foot national flag. The museum showcases weapons used in various wars in J-K and sculptures of war heroes. Certain mobility equipment in terms of Motorised Wheelchairs, Tri Scooters, Scooters and Auto Rickshaws were handed over to the ex-servicemen on the occasion. More than 40 stalls/help desks of various Records Offices, Defence & Government Welfare Organisations, Banks & Employment Agencies were established at the venue for in-situ grievance redressal and awareness. The Defence Minister also interacted with the ex-servicemen and expressed gratitude to the Armed Forces personnel, both retired & serving, for their selfless service towards protecting the borders with unmatched bravery, dedication, sacrifice and patriotism.

## 'One nation, one election' to be milestone towards achieving 'Viksit Bharat', says Chouhan



**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

One nation, one election will be a milestone towards achieving the goal of 'Viksit Bharat' or developed India, Union Agriculture and Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said on Tuesday, as he gave a call to people to come out in support of the proposal.

Speaking at an event organised by 'Panchjanya', a magazine associated with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Chouhan said the whole government machinery halts at the time of elections, and frequent polls have become a major disruptor for governments to take decisions in public interest.

Asked about the proposal to hold simultaneous polls that is under the scrutiny of a joint parliamentary panel, Chouhan said, "The makers of our Constitution made a provision for elections every five years, but they never thought that Article 356 will be misused so many times. Elections were held together till 1968 because till 1966, Congress had governments everywhere. When other parties started coming to power, they were toppled."

"At present, there is some election or the other all the time. Now Delhi is going to polls, then it will be Bihar. Political parties are only preparing for elections 365 days, they are not able to work in public interest. "The agriculture minister has to leave his work and focus on

elections of a state... How much time does that waste," said Chouhan, who was BJP's election in-charge for Jharkhand during the Assembly polls held last year.

"Should nothing happen in the country apart from elections? These continuous elections are the biggest barriers in India's development. Looking at the situation today, this (simultaneous polls) is an appropriate step," he added.

Asked about the opposition to the proposal on holding simultaneous polls to Lok Sabha, state assemblies, municipalities and panchayats from a number of parties, Singh said they should all agree as the move is in national interest.

"Any patriot who thinks in national interest would realise that continuous elections have become a disaster for the nation. If elections happen once in five years, people would also be excited," the senior BJP leader said.

"This is the demand of the people. People should take oath supporting simultaneous elections, organisations should pass till 1966, Congress had governments everywhere. When other parties started coming to power, they were toppled."

He also said that voters are mature and they even vote for different parties in assembly and Lok Sabha polls even if they are held together, citing Odisha as an example. Referring to Delhi, where assembly polls will be held on February 5, Chouhan expressed confidence that the BJP would win this time.

## Statistical tools and quantitative techniques play significant role in effective governance: President

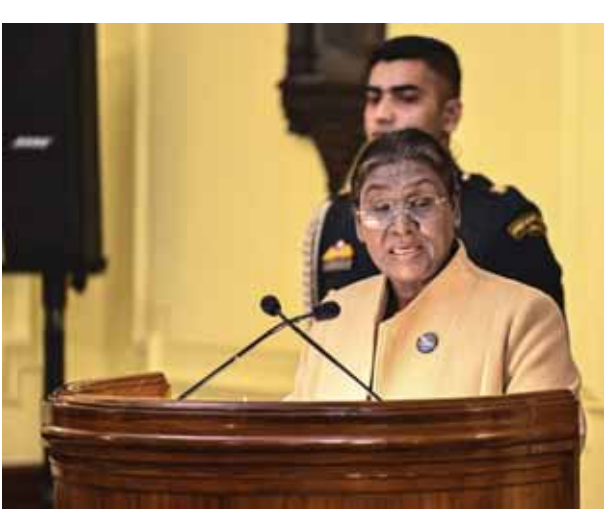
**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday said statistical tools and quantitative techniques play a significant role in effective governance by providing empirical foundation for policy decisions. The governments rely on national statistical systems to collect data on health, education, population size and employment among others, which form the basis for policy-making, she said addressing the probationers of the Indian Statistical Service (ISS), who had called on the president at the Rashtrapati Bhavan here.

President Murmu said statistics were used even in ancient civilisations, when the rulers used basic census data for taxation purposes. "Statistical analysis is a tool to bring in transparency and accountability in governance. Statistics is not only the backbone of efficient governance but also a tool for socio-economic development," the president said.

She said it is their duty to collect accurate data, which can be the foundation for sound and objective decisions. "Government needs data to formulate, implement and monitor policies as well as for policy review and impact assessment. The citizens need data for impartial understanding and assessment of government schemes and programmes. Your job requires high proficiency in statistical methods, which you would use to provide solutions to data and information needs of the country," the President said.

She urged them to be sensitive towards the needs of common people, especially the poor and underprivileged, while collecting data. "Every bit of data that you collect will be processed, analysed and ultimately used for addressing the needs of the people and helping them achieve their dreams. The development of various sections of the society will lead to greater prosperity of the country," President Murmu said.



For example, authentic data in the fields of health and education will serve as the basis for monitoring literacy rates, school enrolment ratios, health infrastructure and prevalence of diseases, she said. President Murmu said the ISS officers are responsible for preparing national accounts, Consumer Price Index, Index of Industrial Production and other such important indices for measuring various aspects

of the health of the economy. "You will also develop and analyse various social statistics on population, human development, employment and social justice, multi-domain statistics on poverty and persons with disabilities, and indicators related to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)," she said.

These authentic data act as key instruments for measuring economic development and mak-

ing effective policies, the president said. "Statistics are like diagnostic tools for policy makers. The accuracy of diagnostic data is critical for effective intervention," she said.

The President also emphasised on the urgent need to learn and utilise latest and advanced technologies. "The growing use of generative AI, augmented reality, predictive analysis and machine learning worldwide has made it imperative for you all to make use of these new technologies effectively. Research is another important area that needs to be focused upon by the Indian Statistical Service officers," she said.

The research conducted by you all will be crucial for developing policies that can respond to the dynamic needs of the country. Through rigorous statistical modeling and forecasting techniques, you can contribute to long-term planning in sectors like agriculture, industry and services, President Murmu added.

By studying patterns in employment, productivity or

income inequality, you can help policymakers generate targeted solutions, the president said. "As India moves towards achieving inclusive and sustainable development, statistical research will play a greater role in monitoring environmental impacts and climate change," she added.

President Murmu said the research conducted by the ISS officers to track indicators related to energy consumption and carbon emissions can enable India to create data-driven strategies for sustainable development and environmental conservation. "These strategies will further help India in meeting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals," the president said.

Murmu said during India's journey to become a global economic powerhouse, the officers will play an important role in driving informed decision-making, promoting transparency and fostering sustainable growth across all sectors of the economy.

## PM Modi to dedicate two frontline naval warships and submarine to the nation today

**T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI**

In a landmark event in the country's history, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will commission two frontline warships Nilgiri and Surat and submarine Vaghsheer into the Indian Navy on Wednesday, adding significantly to the blue water capabilities of the Indian Navy.

This is for the first time that three combatants --- INS Surat, INS Nilgiri and INS Vaghsheer --- will be commissioned into the Indian Navy simultaneously, at a function to be held at the Naval Dockyard in Mumbai. All three combatants have been designed and constructed entirely at Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL) in Mumbai.

"This historic event will provide a significant boost to the Indian Navy's combat potential



while underscoring the country's pre-eminent status in indigenous shipbuilding. The successful commissioning of these advanced warships and submarines highlights the rapid progress made in warship design and construction, cementing India's position as a global leader in defense manufacturing," a defence spokesperson said.

Nilgiri, the lead ship of Project 17A, is a major advancement

over the Shivalik-class frigates, incorporating significant stealth features and reduced radar signatures through state-of-the-art technology, while the Project 15B destroyer, Surat is the culmination of the follow-on class to the Kolkata-class (Project 15A) destroyers, featuring substantial improvements in design and capabilities.

Both ships were designed by the Indian Navy's Warship

Design Bureau and are equipped with advanced sensors and weapon packages developed primarily in India or through strategic collaborations with leading global manufacturers. Equipped with modern aviation facilities, Nilgiri and Surat can operate a range of helicopters, including Chetak, ALH, Sea King, and the newly inducted MH-60R, during both day and night operations.

Both the warships have features like a Rail-Less Helicopter Traversing System and a Visual Aid and Landing System ensure seamless operations under all conditions. These ships also include specific accommodations to support a sizeable complement of women officers and sailors, aligning with the Navy's progressive steps toward gender inclusion in frontline combat roles.

## Our veterans are heroes and enduring symbols of patriotism, says PM Modi

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

On Armed Forces Veterans' Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday hailed the brave women and men who dedicated their lives to safeguarding the nation and said our veterans are heroes and enduring symbols of patriotism.

"On Armed Forces Veterans Day, we express gratitude to the brave women and men who dedicated their lives to safeguarding our nation. Their sacrifices, courage and unwavering commitment to duty are exemplary," Modi said in a social media post.

"Our Veterans are heroes and enduring symbols of patriotism. Ours is a Government that has always worked for the welfare of veterans and we will



keep doing so in the times to come," he said. Armed Forces Veterans' Day is celebrated on January 14 every year to recognise the service rendered by the First Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces Field Marshal KM Cariappa, who retired on this day in 1953. The day was first celebrated in 2016 and it is commemorated every year since by hosting interactive events in the honour of the ex-servicemen.

## 24 Akbar Road: Wrapping within its walls, history of Congress and much more

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

If walls could talk, 24 Akbar Road would write itself a book - of the days of the Raj, of the Burma of the 1960s and mostly of the dramatic ups and downs of the Congress that headquartered itself in its spacious premises 47 years ago. Always more than an address, the Lutyens era bungalow that witnessed many a story and secret cedes its place as a political nerve centre on Wednesday when the opposition party moves to its new office, the Indira Gandhi Bhawan, at Kotla Road a few kilometres away.

The Akbar Road bungalow once housed Sir Reginald Maxwell who was a member of Viceroy Lord Linlithgow's executive council. It was also home to a teen Aung San Suu Kyi in 1961 when her mother was appointed ambassador to India. The Congress has been its mainstay though. More than just an office for the party, the premises set in expansive lawns was witness to the tenure of

seven Congress presidents. It is the constant in the Congress' history - and through it the country's -- as the party navigated the twists and turns of India's politics through the decades.

Party old-timers and romantics agree that modern amenities and a larger area are the need of the hour but the emotional connect and unfolding of history associated with the 24 Akbar Road address will always stay strong.

On a chilly January morning in 1978, a team of 20 workers from the Indira Gandhi-headed breakaway Congress entered its precincts, the first Congress members to do so. It is another cold January. And then, as now, the Congress is again in the opposition, facing mounting electoral challenges as it did post-Emergency under Indira Gandhi and striving to stage a comeback.

A Type VII bungalow in the heart of Lutyens' Delhi, 24 Akbar Road was then allotted to G Venkatswamy, a Rajya Sabha MP from Andhra

Pradesh who chose to side with Indira Gandhi at a time when most Congress leaders had distanced themselves from her for fear of retaliation from the then ruling Janata Party. The story of how and in what circumstances the party moved and the address' previous brush with history is well documented in political commentator Rasheed Kidwai's book "24 Akbar Road".

Suu Kyi, who went on to become a Nobel laureate for peace and leader of the movement for human rights and democracy in Myanmar, was "barely fifteen, her hair in thick long plaits, when she first arrived at 24 Akbar Road with her mother, Daw Khin Kyi, Aung San's widow, who was appointed Myanmar's ambassador to India", Kidwai writes.

"Back then, 24 Akbar Road was called Burma House - so named by Jawaharlal Nehru in recognition of Daw Khin Kyi's special status," he says. The house, built by Sir Edwin Lutyens between 1911 and 1925, is regarded as a singularly



fine example of a blend of British colonial architecture and the new modernist style. As the Congress embraces the new, many would look back at its time at 24 Akbar Road as a mixed bag electorally but acknowledge it had been a witness to shaping India's history for decades.

The period after the Emergency was a testing time for Indira Gandhi. Family loyalist Mohammad Yunus offered

his residence, 12 Willingdon Crescent, to the Gandhi family as their private residence. It thus became home to Indira, Rajiv, his wife Sonia, their children, Rahul and Priyanka, Sanjay, Maneka, and five dogs - all moving in.

Since 12 Willingdon Crescent was filled to capacity, 24 Akbar Road was chosen as the new official Congress headquarters.

"Facing the residence of the

Chief of the Indian Air Force and the Intelligence Bureau's political surveillance unit, it comprised five barely-furnished bedrooms, a living and dining hall, and a guest room. The outhouses were in a state of complete neglect and the garden was a mess of unruly hedges and a riot of weeds," Rasheed says in his book.

As the Congress finally moved to 24 Akbar Road, under Indira Gandhi's leadership, the office quickly became synonymous with the grand old party and the theatre to many historic decisions and drama.

Who can forget the Congress comeback in 1980 when Indira Gandhi stormed back to power, the dramatic developments that saw the ouster of Sitaram Kesri and Sonia Gandhi taking over as party chief, the back-to-back Lok Sabha wins in 2004 and 2009 and the crushing defeats in 2014 and 2019.

Just a few months ago, a picture of party chief Mallikarjun Kharge, former party chiefs Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, and Priyanka Gandhi

Vadra, flashing smiles and victory signs at the party headquarters after the Lok Sabha results went viral. One more of the historic images taken at the address etched in public memory.

The advantage of the house was that it had a wicket gate linking it to 10 Janpath, which was then the office of the Indian Youth Congress and subsequently allotted to Rajiv and then Sonia Gandhi.

Over the years, 10 Janpath and 24 Akbar Road forged an unbreakable link. The two premises next to each other served as the powerhouse of the grand old party and played hosts to many key meetings. Before Independence, Motilal Nehru's Anand Bhavan in then Allahabad was the Congress party headquarters. After 1947, the party moved to the party's headquarters in New Delhi.

India's Congress lost control over 7 Jantar Mantar in 1969 when the Congress suffered its first split. Indira Gandhi set up a temporary party office at Windsor Place at the residence

of Congress party loyalist M V Krishnappa. In 1971, the Congress office moved to 5 Rajendra Prasad Road and from there to 24 Akbar Road in 1978.

And now to another new address. Indira Gandhi Bhawan will be inaugurated by Chairperson of the Congress Parliamentary Party Sonia Gandhi in the presence of party president Mallikarjun Kharge and Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi.

The new state-of-the-art AICC headquarters symbolises the Congress party's continuing mission to uphold the vision of its stalwarts, the party has said. As the Congress moves to the Indira Bhawan, the electoral challenges are daunting, especially on the back of assembly polls defeats in Haryana and Maharashtra.

However, the Congress would be hoping that just like last time when it switched headquarters, lady luck would shine on it and its fortunes would turn for the better.

# MAHAKUMBH 2025: SPECIAL COVERAGE

## Devotees flock to Sangam for Makar Sankranti



**BISWAJEET BANERJEE** ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

As the first rays of dawn broke over Prayagraj, millions of pilgrims gathered at the Sangam—the sacred confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati—to take a holy dip on Makar Sankranti, inaugurating the Amrit Snan. With chants of “Har Har Gange” echoing through the air, the event became a grand celebration of faith, spirituality, and cultural heritage. The sacred ritual commenced at 5:15 a.m. as saints and sadhus from the 13 akharas arrived in a meticulously organized procession. Akhara after akhara marched toward the river, performed their ceremonial dip, and retreated to their camps with military-like precision. By evening, the entire sequence had unfolded seamlessly, leaving devotees in

awe of the orderliness amid the vibrant chaos. Swami Kailashanand Giri, Acharya Mahamandaleswar of Shri Panchayati Niranjani Akhara, described the day’s significance: “The Rajasi Shahi Snan is a rare privilege, even for the gods. Today marks the sun’s transition to Uttarayan, a deeply auspicious occasion that saints across the country eagerly await. Around 3 crore people are expected to participate in this holy dip.” Naga sadhus, the ascetic warriors, captivated the crowd with an electrifying display of martial arts. Armed with swords, tridents, and spears, they performed awe-inspiring feats, showcasing their agility and skill. Spectators watched with bated breath as the sadhus engaged in mock combat, their

movements embodying a blend of discipline and spirituality. “Watching the Naga sadhus is like witnessing history come alive,” said Rajiv Sharma, a pilgrim from Kanpur. “Their dedication is truly inspiring.” Each akhara brought its unique flavor to the ritual. Shri Panchayati Akhara Mahanirvani led the proceedings, with marigold-adorned sadhus chanting hymns as they entered the icy waters. Devotees thronged the ghats, cheering and showering flower petals on the processions. Some akharas arrived on horses, while others came in ornately decorated silver palanquins, adding to the grandeur of the event. “This is not just a dip; it is a divine moment that connects us to the eternal,” said Swami Kailashanand Giri, Acharya

Mahamandaleswar of Shri Panchayati Niranjani Akhara. “Makar Sankranti marks the sun’s transition into Uttarayan, a time of immense spiritual significance. To be here today is a blessing beyond words.” The spectacle extended beyond the riverbanks. The sprawling festival grounds, dotted with over a million tents, buzzed with activity. Families performed rituals, lit diyas, and offered flowers, while the air resonated with the sound of conch shells and temple bells. Young pilgrims captured the scenes on their phones, eager to share the experience with the world. “This is our culture in its full glory,” said 24-year-old Riya Verma from Lucknow. Young pilgrims like Aniket Mishra captured the scenes on their smartphones, eager to share the grandeur with the world. “This is our culture in

its full glory,” said 24-year-old Riya Verma from Lucknow. Young pilgrims like Aniket Mishra captured the scenes on their smartphones, eager to share the grandeur with the world. “This is our culture in its full glory,” he said, smiling as he adjusted his selfie stick. Safety and logistics were paramount for the event, which saw over three crore participants. More than 50,000 police personnel managed the crowds, supported by mounted squads. Makeshift toilets numbering 1.5 lakh ensured sanitation, while 15,000 sweepers maintained cleanliness. Ravindra Puri, President of the Akhara Parishad, praised the arrangements, saying, “The time slots allocated to each akhara have ensured smooth execution. It’s heartening to see such meticulous planning for an event of this scale.”



## Young devotees leave engineering and modelling to embrace ancient Sanatan

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE** ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The ancient Sanatan culture is witnessing a growing attraction among today’s youth, especially those from professional backgrounds. Anchors, models, and engineers, both from India and abroad, are increasingly embracing the Sanatan faith and spirituality. The Mahakumbh has become a platform where such transformations are evident. Several inspiring stories have emerged during the Mahakumbh. Among them, a young woman from Uttarakhand, Harsha, left the world of glamour to embrace spirituality and took initiation from Swami Kailashananda Giri. Similarly, Abhay Singh, known as “Engineer Baba,” a former Aerospace Engineering student from IIT Bombay, is introducing devotees to the profound depths of spirituality using scientific principles.

Harsha, a resident of Uttarakhand, was once a part of the national and international glamour industry. Seeking deeper fulfillment, she took spiritual initiation into Sanatan Dharma during the Maha Kumbh. Sharing her experience, she said, “A life full of show and superficial glamour left me feeling empty. I realized that true happiness and peace lie in the teachings of Sanatan Dharma. After taking initiation from Swami Kailashanand Giri, I have discovered a new purpose in life.” Abhay Singh, famously known as “Engineer Baba,” hails from Haryana and is a former Aerospace Engineering student from IIT Bombay. He has captivated the devotees at Mahakumbh with his unique approach, blending scientific knowledge with spiritual wisdom. Using diagrams and visual presentations, he simplifies complex spiritual concepts,

making them relatable to modern minds. “Science helps explain the physical world, but its deeper study inevitably leads one towards spirituality. A true understanding of life ultimately brings one closer to spirituality,” he shared while engaging with devotees. The ongoing Mahakumbh has not only brought millions together but has also become a space where spiritual transformation is visibly unfolding. Personalities like Engineer Baba and Harsha stand as examples of how individuals, once immersed in modern professions, are seeking the peace and stability offered by Sanatan Dharma. Their journey reflects a growing realization that material success alone cannot provide lasting fulfillment. Mahakumbh not only showcases the greatness of Sanatan Dharma but also highlights the need for spirituality in the lives of professionals and youth.

## Four siblings take leap of faith at Maha Kumbh, leaving home to sell tea and snacks



**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE** ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

A video of Maha Kumbh showing people earning handsome profits, a Rs 10,000 loan from a kind friend, and the grandeur of the largest human gathering on Earth have lured four siblings from Gorakhpur to Prayagraj. While this could be anybody’s story, what sets the four siblings apart is that they left home without informing their parents, bought a pushcart, and set up a tea and snacks stall near Kali Road in Prayagraj, quietly slipping into the sea of humanity that has descended on this holy city for the Maha Kumbh. Requesting anonymity, the 22-year-old elder sister told PTI, “Our father is a policeman, while our mother is a homemaker. My father bears all the expenses for our education and running the household. It is painful to see him struggle so much.” “One day, we came across a video of the Kumbh showing people earning good profits. My younger sister then suggested that we should also set up a stall at the Kumbh. Our father was against the idea. So we ran away from home when he was out for duty, bought a pushcart, and set up a stall near Kali Road.” The runaway brigade comprises her 20-year-old younger sister, and two brothers aged 15 and 17. “My sister borrowed Rs 10,000 from a friend, and I pawned my earrings for Rs 5,000. With this amount, we started this stall,” she said.



## Rose petal shower adds to spiritual fervour at Maha Kumbh’s amrit snan

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE** ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Rose petals were showered on devotees during their ‘Amrit Snan’ at the Maha Kumbh on Makar Sankranti, draping the ghats and akharas at the Sangam bank with flowers. As the rose petals rained down on the devotees, they responded with chants of Jai Shri Ram and Har Har Mahadev.

The Uttar Pradesh government said in a statement, “The Horticulture Department, following the directives of the Yogi Adityanath government, had been meticulously preparing for the flower showers at the Maha Kumbh Mela for weeks. Special arrangements were made to procure and store rose petals to ensure an uninterrupted shower during

the bathing festivals.” “Preparations have been made for flower showers on all major ‘snan parv’ (bathing rituals) of Maha Kumbh, with plans to use around 20 quintals of rose petals for each occasion,” it added. Rose petals were showered on the devotees on Monday, too, during the first bathing festival ‘Paush Purnima Snan.’ The Horticulture Department ensured sufficient

stock for the first two days, arranging over 40 quintals of rose petals, the statement said. The Maha Kumbh, being held after 12 years, started on the banks of Triveni Sangam in Prayagraj on Monday and will continue till February 26. Around 1.75 crore devotees took a dip at the Sangam on Monday and another 1.38 crore till Tuesday afternoon, according to official estimates.

## Sangam nose becomes focal point for holy dip during Mahakumbh

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE** ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

On the auspicious occasion of Makar Sankranti, millions of devotees gathered for the first Amrit Snan of Mahakumbh 2025 at the sacred Triveni Sangam, with the Sangam Nose emerging as the most favored spot for the holy dip. Saints and spiritual leaders from various Akharas also performed their ritual baths at this iconic location, enhancing its spiritual significance. The seamless arrangement at the Sangam Nose was made possible by the relentless efforts of the Irrigation Department’s Mechanical

Barrage Maintenance Section in Varanasi. Over an 85-day period, a dedicated team worked around the clock in three shifts to expand the Sangam area by 26 hectares, with 2 hectares added exclusively to the Sangam Nose. This expansion allowed for a harmonious coexistence of saints and devotees during the sacred event. On January 13, during the first bathing festival of Poush Purnima, and on January 14, during the Amrit Snan, over 3 crore devotees took the holy dip. The Sangam Nose witnessed the highest footfall, with over 3 lakh people bathing every hour at peak time. Crowds began



assembling at the spot late at night, eager to experience the spiritual aura of this sacred confluence. The expansion project was meticulously planned and executed by Chief Engineer (Arrangement and Material Management) Upendra Singh, along with Executive Engineer Sujeet Kumar Singh and his team, which included Surya Bhushan, Pradeep, Anurag, and others. Using four advanced American dredger machines, they placed sandbags along a 1,650-meter stretch to create temporary ghats. This increased the bathing capacity at the Sangam Nose to over 2 lakh devotees per

hour, a threefold rise compared to 2019 when the capacity was 50,000 per hour. The project, which stretched from Shastri Bridge to the Sangam Nose, was completed in record time, showcasing the exceptional coordination and dedication of the team. The improved arrangements ensured a smoother and more inclusive experience for all pilgrims, reinforcing Mahakumbh’s reputation as a celebration of spiritual unity. This year’s Mahakumbh has set a new benchmark for planning and execution, with the Sangam Nose standing out as a testament to the unparalleled efforts of the organizers.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## A Czar in America

Trump has unveiled plans to annex Canada, claim Greenland and reclaim control of the Panama Canal

As President-elect Donald J Trump unveiled his controversial territorial ambitions during a press conference at Mar-a-Lago, the world watched in shock and bewilderment. Proposals to annex Canada, claim Greenland, reclaim the Panama Canal and even rename the Gulf of Mexico have raised serious concerns about the resurgence of imperialistic tendencies in US policy. While Trump's rhetoric aligns with his "Make America Great Again" ideology, this bold expansionism poses significant risks, not just internationally but also domestically. Trump's rhetoric appears rooted in a blend of perceived economic advantages, strategic military considerations and nationalist bravado. By targeting Canada, Greenland and Panama, Trump seeks to project American dominance across North America and the Arctic while countering Chinese influence in Central America. His approach, however, reflects an oversimplification of complex geopolitical realities. Trump argues that the United States subsidises Canada through trade and defence,



portraying annexation as an economic and security measure. Yet, his claims ignore the deeply interdependent trade relationship and Canada's contributions to NATO. Greenland's strategic importance in the Arctic has long been recognised, particularly as climate change opens new shipping routes. Trump's desire for Greenland stems from its untapped resources and its position as a geopolitical chokepoint. Trump's statements on reclaiming the canal, under the guise of countering Chinese influence, invoke a bygone era of US interventionism in Latin America. His assertions about Chinese control, however, lack evidence and risk alienating Panama and other regional allies. Trump's expansionist vision is fraught with potential consequences that could undermine the very goals he claims to pursue. NATO allies like Canada and Denmark view these claims as direct threats to their sovereignty. Such actions could strain alliances crucial to US security and global standing. Mexico and Panama, already wary of US interventions, would likely bolster ties with other global powers like China and Russia to counterbalance American aggression. Annexation or economic coercion could disrupt vital trade relationships, harming industries reliant on Canadian imports and exports. Greenland's acquisition could spark conflicts over Arctic resources, involving not only Denmark but also other Arctic nations like Russia and Norway. Trump's plans may rally his core supporters, but they risk alienating moderates and independents. Opposition from US lawmakers, including those wary of overreach and isolationist policies, could stall any practical implementation of these ideas. Any attempt to annex sovereign nations would violate international law, drawing condemnation from the United Nations and other global bodies. Trump's motivations appear to be a mix of strategic calculus and political theater. By reigniting nationalist fervour, he aims to solidify his support base ahead of assuming office. He must know that imperialism is a relic of the past.

His assertions about Chinese control, however, lack evidence and risk alienating Panama and other regional allies. Trump's expansionist vision is fraught with potential consequences that could undermine the very goals he claims to pursue. NATO allies like Canada and Denmark view these claims as direct threats to their sovereignty. Such actions could strain alliances crucial to US security and global standing. Mexico and Panama, already wary of US interventions, would likely bolster ties with other global powers like China and Russia to counterbalance American aggression. Annexation or economic coercion could disrupt vital trade relationships, harming industries reliant on Canadian imports and exports. Greenland's acquisition could spark conflicts over Arctic resources, involving not only Denmark but also other Arctic nations like Russia and Norway. Trump's plans may rally his core supporters, but they risk alienating moderates and independents. Opposition from US lawmakers, including those wary of overreach and isolationist policies, could stall any practical implementation of these ideas. Any attempt to annex sovereign nations would violate international law, drawing condemnation from the United Nations and other global bodies. Trump's motivations appear to be a mix of strategic calculus and political theater. By reigniting nationalist fervour, he aims to solidify his support base ahead of assuming office. He must know that imperialism is a relic of the past.

### PICTALK



A vendor sells balloons, at the roadside in Surat

## Engaging the Taliban amid strategic challenges

By re-entering the high-stakes game of Afghan diplomacy, India is seeking to protect its security and geopolitical interests



PARUL CHANDRA

Over three years after the Taliban assumed control of Afghanistan, forcing the then President Ashraf Ghani to flee the nation, India is yet to officially recognise the new government. And yet, shedding its misgivings about the new hard-line regime and driven by its strategic concerns, New Delhi has finally decided to step up its engagement with Kabul. In what is a significant policy shift, foreign secretary Vikram Misri met the acting foreign minister of the Afghan government, Amir Khan Muttaqi, in Dubai on January 8.

The two sides chose to meet in a third country because a meeting either in New Delhi or Kabul would not have made for the right optics for India. The Taliban administration has not been recognised by any country so far though several countries, including China, are engaging with it diplomatically, including exchanging ambassadors. While New Delhi had remained in touch with the Taliban leadership with an outreach at the joint secretary level thus far, the Misri-Muttaqi meeting essentially signals India's willingness to take the bilateral relationship forward. With this upgrade in outreach, India has also indicated it's back in the high-stakes game of seeking strategic influence in Afghanistan, an important neighbour in the region even if it means engaging with a UN Security Council-sanctioned entity.

A pariah among Western nations, the Taliban finds itself trying to run an internationally isolated country with a beleaguered economy that's battling crippling economic sanctions. The Taliban's approach to women - their rights and freedom have been severely curtailed - has contributed to Afghanistan's isolation. Amid this backdrop, India's outreach at the foreign secretary level has predictably drawn a positive response from the Taliban leadership. Not only has it assured New Delhi that it will remain sensitive to India's security concerns,



but also described it as a "significant regional and economic partner". What has also impelled New Delhi's diplomatic moves are its security concerns vis-à-vis Afghanistan and the instability in the region owing to the geo-political churn in West Asia.

As for Afghanistan, India has had its worries about the Afghan Taliban and its links to Al Qaeda and other terror outfits though, ironically enough, it now finds itself engaging with it formally. Also fuelling Indian anxieties after the Taliban's takeover was the possibility of its nexus with Pakistan, something a jubilant Islamabad had hoped for in the aftermath of the Islamist group seizing power. Instead, Islamabad-Kabul ties have now nose-dived to a point where the initial bonhomie has given way to heightened tensions and mistrust. Islamabad has accused the Afghan Taliban of allowing the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) - the two have strong links - to use Afghanistan's soil to launch attacks against it. Kabul, of course, has denied the charge. Amid the escalating Islamabad-Kabul tensions, New Delhi saw it as an oppor-



THE TWO SIDES CHOSE TO MEET IN A THIRD COUNTRY BECAUSE A MEETING EITHER IN NEW DELHI OR KABUL WOULD NOT HAVE MADE FOR THE RIGHT OPTICS FOR INDIA

tune moment to reach out to the Afghan Taliban leadership and build on ties thereon. China's moves in Afghanistan and its close strategic clinch with Pakistan are yet another reason for New Delhi seeking to return to a more active role in Afghanistan. India's arch geopolitical rival China took the lead in sending an envoy to Kabul, making it the first country to do so after the Taliban takeover. The China-Pakistan collusion poses a serious threat to India's security interests in the region. China has been seeking to increase its footprint in the beleaguered nation long before the Afghan Taliban's takeover in August 2021. Afghanistan, like many countries in India's neighbourhood, is a vital element of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Afghan Taliban has voiced support for it. A resource-rich Afghanistan seeking friends during its isolation presents strategic opportunities for China.

In its endeavour to forge close economic and diplomatic links with the Taliban, China has already offered the regime tariff-free access to its energy, construction and consumer sectors. In the Great Game involving

Afghanistan, Russia has also been backing Kabul. Moscow, with its complex history with Kabul, has initiated moves to remove the Afghan Taliban from its list of banned terror outfits, while also boosting trade with the country. With all these geopolitical moves centred around Afghanistan in play, India has wisely realised it can no longer afford to remain a mere bystander. A course correction was required to protect its strategic interests, hence the pragmatic decision to engage with the Afghan Taliban. During the Misri-Muttaqi meeting, India indicated its willingness to resume development projects in Afghanistan shortly. In the past, India had undertaken several large and small development projects in Afghanistan despite the security risks they entailed. As India takes its first tentative steps to "normalise" ties with the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, it will be hoping that the Afghan Taliban will keep to its word of not undermining its security interests. India, of course, will need to tread with caution on the difficult road that lies ahead.

(The writer is a senior journalist who writes on foreign affairs; views are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### AAP-BJP POSTER WAR

Madam — The poster war between AAP and BJP has taken an ugly turn. AAP has posted the poster "Gali Baaz Party ke Gaali Baaz CM Chehra," while BJP released the "Sheesh Mahal Wale AAP Da E Azam" poster. While AAP attacked BJP with the "Gaali Baaz Daanav" poster, BJP attacked AAP with the "Purvanchalikon ke Dushman" poster. Previously elections were fought with dignity and respect at the time of Sheila Dikshit and Khurana in Delhi and now Delhi elections have become just like street fighting. The elections for AAP are crucial as it has been in power for ten years and a defeat will seriously damage the party.

The AAP has a popular leader in Arvind Kejriwal, while the BJP party does not have any CM face candidate and is banking on Narendra Modi's charisma. The Congress party is also in a foray, but the fear is it will end up splitting the anti-BJP votes. BJP has its steady vote bank, but still it was unable to grab Delhi for decades. For AAP it is an existential battle for the party that came into being in the national capital more than a decade ago. Narendra Modi, in his election rallies, has raised Arvind Kejriwal's residence into a "Sheesh Mahal" poll plank and AAP was swift enough to counter Modi's residence as "Raj Mahal." BJP faces trouble with his candidate Ramesh Bidhuri's loose talk on Priyanka Gandhi and on Delhi CM Atishi. Now only time will tell who will win Delhi this time. It is sure that the Delhi election results may change the equations of Indian politics.

Zakir Hussain | Kazipet

#### IMD CELEBRATES 150 YEARS

Madam — The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) is completing 150 years of its service on January 15, 2025. India has a rich and well-documented history of astronomical observations that were made in ancient classics such as Varahmihir's Brihatsamhita and Kautilya's Arthashastra. However, the British East India has the credit for laying the founda-

#### PM inaugurates Z-Morh tunnel



PM Narendra Modi inaugurated the Z-Morh tunnel built in central Kashmir at the cost of Rs 2700 cr at an altitude of 8650 ft. It is vital in terms of the defence needs of the country in the Ladakh region and also connecting the Union Territory to the rest of the country. It will enhance all-weather connectivity between Srinagar and Sonamarg en route to Leh, bypassing landslide and avalanche routes and ensuring safer and uninterrupted access to the strategically

critical Ladakh region. The tunnel is equipped with cutting-edge technologies that provide real-time updates and seamless connectivity for users.

This futuristic infrastructure will not only enhance the travel experience but also set a new standard for road connectivity in the region. The Z-Morh tunnel will promote tourism by transforming Sonamarg into a year-round destination, boosting winter tourism, adventure sports, and local livelihoods. This futuristic infrastructure will not only enhance the travel experience but also set a new standard for road connectivity in the region. This enhanced connectivity will boost defence logistics and drive economic growth and socio-cultural integration across Jammu-Kashmir and Ladakh.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

so that disasters may be detected and responded to in a quicker and more accurate manner.

Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

#### CONSERVING INDIAN RIVERS

Madam — India's revered rivers, once considered sacred and life-giving, are facing an unprecedented crisis. Decades of neglect, pollution and exploitation have transformed these natural wonders into toxic wastelands, threatening the health, livelihoods and faith of millions. The alarming levels of industrial waste, pesticides, and heavy metals in our rivers have made them uninhabitable for aquatic life and hazardous for human consumption. It's time for action. We must demand that our governments take immediate measures to restore our rivers to their former glory. The revival of our rivers is not just an environmental imperative, but a sacred duty.

Shreyanshi Jain | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## The battle for Bihar: Can BJP forge unity to win?

As the race for the upcoming assembly elections intensifies, the Bihar elections emerge as the BJP's most formidable test since its victory in Delhi



RAJESH KUMAR SINGH

As preparations for the upcoming assembly elections gather pace, the Bihar elections present the BJP with its most significant challenge since its triumph in Delhi. The key to success lies in maintaining unity within the NDA under all circumstances. However, the question remains: can this unity be sustained?

This concern looms large among NDA leaders. Amit Shah, often referred to as the BJP's election Chanakya, faces a daunting task in Bihar. Much like the lone warrior Abhimanyu, Shah stands against an opposition alliance steeped in socialist ideology. His mission is to keep all NDA factions united and harness their collective strength.

Despite being aligned with the JDU, Shah must devise his unique strategies to secure victory. This entails testing new political equations daily and forging consensus among allies. The BJP is set to confront the formidable Mahagathabandhan, comprising the RJD, Congress, and the Left parties. Historically, Bihar has been a fertile ground for political experi-



ments, but the challenges for the BJP here are substantial. The state lacks leaders with strong grassroots connections and effective leadership skills. Adding to BJP's woes are the growing demands of its allies. According to Sangh sources, the party is inclined to retain the LJP in its traditional form, fearing that a split could fracture its vote base. Leaders like Pashupati Paras, who have long awaited electoral rewards, are now pinning hopes on the 2025 assembly elections. However, with BJP and JDU unlikely to concede additional seats, Paras and Chirag Paswan must reconcile with the limited number allocated to the LJP in the NDA's seat-sharing arrangement. Bihar's political history underscores three key regions that have long shaped its political land-

scape: Munger in Ang, Muzaffarpur in Tirhut, and Nalanda in Magadh. Presently, these regions remain central to the political contest. Mithilanchal, which gained prominence during the Mandal era and Lalu Yadav's social engineering, also remains significant due to the M-Y (Muslim-Yadav) equation. To counter these entrenched dynamics, the BJP plans to extend its influence to these regions.

Amit Shah, spearheading this strategy, has made multiple visits to these areas since the Lok Sabha elections. Notably, JDU-BJP has positioned Sanjay Jha, a leader known for his harmonious approach, as a key figure. Additionally, two Bhumihar leaders from Munger-Begusarai have been inducted into the cabinet to bolster the party's presence in the region. Nalanda, a JDU stronghold, is also in BJP's crosshairs. Winning Bihar is not just a desire but a necessity for Amit Shah and the BJP. The NDA secured 39 MPs from Bihar in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, but JDU's subsequent separation cost the alliance 16 seats. This loss has left Bihar BJP

scrambling to retain its seats while identifying new opportunities for the upcoming elections.

Amit Shah's electoral groundwork began in February last year, with his campaign kickoff in West Champaran. His focus has extended to constituencies like Shivhar, where BJP workers demand new candidates to replace underperforming veterans. In Seemanchal, a critical region where the MY equation holds sway, Shah faces the additional challenge of countering Prashant Kishore's rising Jansuraj movement.

Acknowledging the need for change, the BJP is poised to prioritise fresh faces over its traditional leadership. This shift aligns with Shah's vision of creating a "new BJP" in Bihar. The party's strategy includes an intensified campaign led by Shah, whose upcoming visits are expected to finalise decisions and dispel speculation. The battle for Bihar will test the BJP's adaptability and resilience, with Amit Shah's leadership playing a decisive role in shaping the state's political future.

(The writer is a senior journalist; views are personal)

**FIRST COLUMN**  
**DEALING WITH DOOMSCROLLING**

Doomscrolling is a modern phenomenon that reflects the darker side of digital connectivity



SHAINY SHARMA

In the age of constant connectivity dominated by smartphones and 24/7 access to information, the way people consume information has evolved significantly. While this has brought numerous benefits, such as instant communication and access to a wealth of knowledge, it has also given rise to concerning behaviours like doomscrolling. The term refers to the compulsive habit of endlessly consuming negative news, particularly through digital platforms. It is an act of excessively scrolling through negative news and information, often leading to feelings of anxiety, despair, and helplessness. This phenomenon has become increasingly prevalent in recent years, particularly during global crises, and its impact on mental health, productivity, and societal wellbeing cannot be ignored. While staying informed is an essential aspect of responsible citizenship, the practice of doomscrolling often tips into an unhealthy preoccupation with distressing content, leading to detrimental effects on mental health, productivity, and overall wellbeing.

Doomscrolling stems from the human brain's natural tendency to focus on threats and negative stimuli. This evolutionary trait better known as negativity bias, was historically essential for survival. However, in the



digital era, it has been amplified by the design of social media platforms and news algorithms, which prioritise sensational and emotionally charged content to maximise engagement. As users scroll through their feeds, they encounter an endless stream of distressing headlines, graphic images, and polarising opinions, creating a feedback loop that keeps them hooked. One of the key ways doomscrolling affects mental health is through its impact on dopamine, a neurotransmitter associated with pleasure and reward. While engaging with digital content, even negative content provides brief surges of dopamine, the subsequent emotional toll can lead to a crash, leaving individuals feeling drained and unsatisfied. This cycle of seeking quick dopamine hits through scrolling reinforces the habit, making it increasingly difficult to stop. Beyond mental health, it also affects productivity and overall quality of life.

The habit can lead to procrastination, as individuals become overwhelmed by the weight of the issues they are reading about, making it harder to focus on the tasks at hand. Over time, this can erode personal and professional relationships, as well as hinder personal growth. On a broader scale, the prevalence of doomscrolling has implications for societal well-being too. The constant exposure to divisive and fear-inducing content can deepen political and social polarisation, as people become entrenched in echo chambers that reinforce their existing beliefs. This fragmentation undermines collective action and civic discourse, making it harder for societies to address complex challenges effectively. Addressing doomscrolling requires a multifaceted approach. On an individual level, practising digital mindfulness is crucial. This includes setting boundaries for screen time, curating one's news feed to prioritise reputable sources, and engaging in activities that promote mental wellbeing, such as exercise, meditation, or spending time in nature. Developing a habit of seeking solutions-oriented news content that highlights positive progress and actionable steps can also help mitigate feelings of helplessness. By designing algorithms that prioritize balanced and constructive content rather than sensationalism, these platforms can create a healthier digital environment. Educational initiatives that teach media literacy and emotional resilience can further empower users to navigate the digital landscape responsibly. While it taps into deep-seated psychological tendencies, its effects on mental health, productivity, and society are far-reaching. By fostering awareness and implementing strategies to counteract its impact, individuals and institutions can work together to cultivate a healthier relationship with technology and information. In doing so, they can ensure that the digital age enhances rather than diminishes human well-being.

*(The writer is an educator; views are personal)*

Relief from high power bills: Delhiites are chasing a mirage



UTTAM GUPTA

A significant reduction in the Power Purchase Adjustment Cost levied by Delhi power companies have raised eyebrows due to their timing and magnitude

On December 26, 2024, the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (DERC) announced a reduction in the Power Purchase Adjustment Cost (PPAC) imposed by the three power distribution companies (discoms) in Delhi: BSES Rajdhani Power Limited (BRPL), BSES Yamuna Power Limited (BYPL), and Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited (TPDDL). The reductions, ranging from 50 per cent to 60 per cent, require scrutiny. What is PPAC?

To understand this and its implication for the electricity bills of Delhiites, let us capture some basics. The discoms are expected to sell electricity to the consumers at tariffs - duly approved by the DERC - that are set such that the revenue generated from sale at these tariffs fully covers the power purchase cost plus the cost of wheeling and distribution. The requirement is mandatory under the Electricity Act, of 2003. But, this is rarely complied with. Under a highly complex regime, the tariff charged from households (HHs) consuming up to 200 units a month is Rs 3 per unit which is just about half of the average cost leading to an under-recovery of Rs 3 per unit. Including levies adding to 44.6 per cent, the shortfall comes to Rs 4.3 per unit. For HHs consuming between 201 and 400 units, the tariff is Rs 4.5 per unit implying an under-recovery of Rs 1.5 per unit. Including the levies, this comes to Rs 2.2 per unit. These under-recoveries are cross-subsidised by charging more from industries and businesses for which the tariff can go up to a high of Rs 18 per unit.

The irony is that despite charging exorbitant rates from industries and businesses, a good slice of under-recoveries from HHs consuming less than 400 units a month remains uncovered. Additionally, the Delhi government doesn't want the latter to even pay the small tariff of Rs 3 per unit (courtesy, of Kejriwal's freebies). Discoms are told not to raise any bill on HHs consuming up to 200 units even as HHs consuming up to 400 units get a rebate of 50 per cent of the bill amount subject to a cap of Rs 800 per month. Though the government promises to reimburse them for these subsidies from the state budget, this promise is held more in breach.

This increases discoms' losses which are compounded by large-scale power theft. The discoms have no control over the tariff chargeable from majority of consumers (read: those having consumption less than 400 units a month). They are also helpless when it comes to reining in theft as power thieves have the blessings of their political bosses. Discoms have flexibility only about fixing tariffs on supplies to industries and businesses besides HHs consuming more than 400 units. But, there is a limit to which they can charge more from these consumers. The result is: the total revenue generated from the sale of electricity can never reach a level that will fully cover the cost of the power purchase cost and the cost of wheeling and distribution.

The problem is germane to most of the discoms where the States take recourse



THE IRONY IS THAT DESPITE CHARGING EXORBITANT RATES FROM INDUSTRIES AND BUSINESSES, A GOOD SLICE OF UNDER-RECOVERIES FROM HHS CONSUMING LESS THAN 400 UNITS A MONTH REMAINS UNCOVERED

to indiscriminate power freebies and permit large-scale theft (Delhi is on top of the list). To lend them a helping hand, the Ministry of Power (MoP) issued an order on November 9, 2021, that allowed discoms to impose a surcharge known as PPAC. Levied as a percentage of the 'total energy cost and fixed charge component' of the electricity bill, PPAC is meant to compensate them for variations in the fuel and power procurement cost. The discoms are allowed to revise this surcharge every quarter. In the case of BYPL, the ongoing PPAC applicable till December 20, 2024, was 32.27 per cent. On this, based on changes in the cost of power purchase during the second quarter ending September 30, 2024, of the current FY, the DERC allowed the discom to recover an additional 5.85 per cent for the three months from December 21, 2024, to March 20, 2025. As a result, the existing PPAC (before the announcement on December 26, 2024) for BYPL was 38.12 per cent. Making a similar calculation, the regulator fixed PPAC for BRPL at 35.83 per cent and for TPDDL at 36.33 per cent. Following the DERC's 'unexpected' announcement on December 26, 2024, the PPAC will reduce to 13.62 per cent for BYPL - a reduction of around 65 per cent; 18.19 per cent for BRPL - a reduction of more than 50 per cent, and 20.52 per cent for TPDDL - a cut of 45 per cent. It defies logic. Having hiked PPAC to 38.12 per

cent including 5.85 per cent sanctioned in December 2024 - based on data for the quarter ending September 30, 2024, what is this new/extraordinary development that prompted the regulator to bring the surcharge down by almost 2/3rd? It is absurd to believe that power purchase costs would have decreased by that much. In any case, revisions in tariff/PPAC are made based on available data with a time lag and that is Qr ending September 30, 2024, which was already captured in the extant figure of 38.12 per cent. This gives credence to the possibility that the steep reduction in PPAC has been made with an eye on the impending elections in Delhi; and that the decision could be reversed 'surreptitiously' after the elections are over. There is another compelling reason to believe that this relief (albeit substantial) will be temporary and deceptive. The shortfall in revenue at unrevised tariff and the cost is booked by discom as receivable and classified as RA. The Electricity Act (2003) and the National Power Tariff Policy (NPTT) strictly prohibit RAs. These documents emphatically say "tariffs must reflect costs and regulatory assets should not be created". In

December 2022, the MoP even warned against creating a pile of RAs. Yet, RAs have proliferated. These stand at a monumental level despite the discoms imposing PPAC currently at 38.12 per cent (BYPL) as also levying a surcharge of eight per cent - an ad hoc arrangement intended to Take care of the RAs, which are duly permitted by the regulator. With huge RAs piled up in their books, discoms are leaving no stone unturned in recovering the money say by getting sanction of a steep hike in tariff to make up for the entire cumulative deficit in revenue.

Indeed, the matter had gone right up to the Supreme Court (SC) which in an order given in early 2023 had directed the DERC to let discoms recover their RAs. If the DERC were to act upon it, this could lead to a 100 per cent hike in tariff. So, it decided to contest that order. At present, the matter is in the court.

To conclude, the discoms perennially face huge under-recoveries due to subsidies given to the majority of consumers, power theft and their inefficiencies and irregularities leading to inflated costs.

This loss can't be covered even by making 'paying' consumers viz. industries, businesses, and HHs at the higher end pay more. Unless there is political will to tackle these fundamental maladies, Delhiites won't get any respite from high electricity bills.

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

The Cloud revolution: Real-time insights, sustainability and strategic transformation

In 2025, cloud computing is no longer just a utility—it is the driving force behind digital transformation and innovation

Today, data doesn't just reside in distant servers but operates at the edge, enabling real-time insights while safeguarding privacy. The future of cloud computing in 2025, a technology driven by innovation, scalability, and sustainability.

As we look ahead, the cloud is no longer just a utility but a strategic enabler of digital transformation. Emerging technologies like Kubernetes, Docker, hybrid-multi-cloud architectures, and edge computing are poised to redefine how businesses operate. Additionally, the focus on data security and sustainability will ensure the cloud ecosystem supports not only businesses but also global environmental goals. The right cloud service provider plays a pivotal role in



JESINTHA LOUIS

this transformation. Choosing the right provider ensures businesses get access to the latest technologies, robust security, scalability, and cost efficiency. It also enables organisations to meet regulatory requirements and integrate seamlessly with existing systems, making cloud adoption

a catalyst for innovation. Major trends expected to dominate cloud computing in 2025 **AI-Powered Cloud Solutions:** The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into cloud computing is poised to revolutionise the industry by 2025. Enhanced automation will streamline complex tasks like resource allocation and anomaly detection, freeing businesses to prioritise innovation over operations. Predictive analytics powered by AI will help organisations anticipate market trends, optimise processes, and elevate customer experiences. Additionally, intelligent decision-making capabilities, driven by machine learning models, will enable cloud platforms to provide real-time recommendations, fostering

smarter and more impactful business outcomes. **Edge Computing** With the proliferation of IoT devices and real-time applications, edge computing is set to transform industries by 2025. Critical computations will occur closer to data sources, drastically reducing latency for time-sensitive applications like autonomous vehicles and remote surgeries. **Multi-Cloud Strategies:** By 2025, organisations will increasingly shift to multi-cloud environments, breaking free from single-vendor dependencies to enhance resilience and flexibility. This approach enables businesses to distribute workloads across multiple cloud providers, optimising performance and cost efficiency. Advanced tools for



streamline management will streamline governance, security, and orchestration, making it easier to harness the full potential of multi-cloud setups. **Serverless Computing:** Serverless architecture is set to become the go-to choice for developers, offering unmatched efficiency and convenience. With cost-effective pay-per-use models, business-

es can avoid resource overprovisioning while developers concentrate on coding as cloud providers handle infrastructure. **Kubernetes and Docker:** Containerisation technologies like Kubernetes and Docker are revolutionising cloud computing, setting the stage for 2025. Kubernetes ensures seamless scalability by orchestrating containerised applications across varied environments, while Docker enhances flexibility with consistent application performance across platforms. By automating deployment, scaling, and maintenance, these tools free developers to focus on innovation, enabling more reliable application delivery. **Hybrid-Multi-Cloud Architectures:** Hybrid and

multi-cloud strategies are poised to dominate as businesses aim to optimise their cloud environments. These approaches offer operational flexibility by enabling workloads across on-premises, private, and public clouds, ensuring businesses leverage the best of each. By reducing dependency on a single vendor, multi-cloud setups enhance resilience and continuity while allowing cost-efficient workload allocation without compromising performance. **Data Security in Cloud Computing:** As cyber threats continue to escalate, securing cloud environments has become a top priority. Zero-trust architecture enforces stringent identity verification at every level, reducing the risk

of unauthorised access. AI-driven threat detection leverages machine learning to identify and neutralise potential breaches in real time, while advanced encryption techniques safeguard data both in transit and at rest. **Sustainability in the Cloud** Energy-efficient data centers powered by renewables and AI-driven cooling systems are minimising carbon footprints. Circular hardware models emphasise recycling components, reducing waste, and promoting resource efficiency. The future of cloud computing is not just about technology but the strategic advantages it brings to businesses.

*(The writer is CEO G7 CR Technologies - A Noventiq Company; views are personal)*

# Hamas close to accepting Gaza ceasefire, hostages release

**PTI ■ CAIRO**  
Hamas has accepted a draft agreement for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and the release of dozens of hostages, two officials involved in the talks said on Tuesday. Mediator Qatar said the negotiations were at the "closest point" yet to sealing a deal. The Associated Press obtained a copy of the proposed agreement, and an Egyptian official and a Hamas official confirmed its authenticity. An Israeli official said progress has been made, but the details are being finalized. The plan would need to be submitted to the Israeli Cabinet for final approval. All three officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the closed-door talks. The United States, Egypt and Qatar have spent the past year trying to mediate an end to the 15-month war and secure the release of dozens of hostages captured in Hamas' October 7, 2023, attack that triggered it. Some 100 Israelis are still captive inside Gaza, and the military believes at least a third

of them are dead. Officials have expressed mounting optimism that they can conclude an agreement ahead of the January 20 inauguration of US President-elect Donald Trump, whose Mideast envoy has joined the negotiations. Qatari Foreign Ministry spokesman Majed al-Ansari said at a weekly briefing Tuesday that the ongoing negotiations are positive and productive, while declining to get into the details of the sensitive talks. "Today, we are at the closest point ever to having a deal," he said. Hamas, meanwhile, said in a statement that the ongoing negotiations had reached their "final stage". The offensive has reduced large areas of the territory to rubble and displaced around 90 per cent of Gaza's population of 2.3 million, with hundreds of thousands packed into tent camps along the coast where hunger is widespread. Israeli strikes across Gaza overnight and into Tuesday killed at least 18 Palestinians,

including two women and four children, while Yemen's Houthi rebels fired two missiles at Israel, setting off sirens and sending people racing into shelters. No one was wounded by the projectiles. A three-phase agreement — based on a framework laid out by US President Joe Biden and endorsed by the UN Security Council — would begin with the gradual release of 33 hostages over a six-week period, including women, children, older adults and wounded civilians in exchange for potentially hundreds of Palestinian women and children imprisoned by Israel. Among the 33 would be five female Israeli soldiers, each of whom would be released in exchange for 50 Palestinian prisoners, including 30 convicted militants who are serving life sentences. By the end of the first phase, all civilian captives — living or dead — will have been released. During this first, 42-day phase, Israeli forces would withdraw from population centers,

Palestinians would be allowed to start returning to their homes in northern Gaza and there would be a surge of humanitarian aid, with some 600 trucks entering each day. Details of the second phase still must be negotiated during the first. Those details remain difficult to resolve — and the deal does not include written guarantees that the ceasefire will continue until a deal is reached. That leaves the potential for Israel to resume its military campaign after the first phase ends. The three mediators, however, have given Hamas verbal guarantees that negotiations will continue as planned and that they will press for a deal to implement the second and third phases before the end of the first, the Egyptian official said. The deal would allow Israel throughout the first phase to remain in control of the Philadelphi Corridor, the band of territory along Gaza's border with Egypt, which Hamas had initially demanded Israel withdraw from. But Israel would pull out from the Netzarim Corridor, a belt

across central Gaza where it had sought a mechanism for searching Palestinians for arms when they return to the territory's north. In the second phase, Hamas would release the remaining living captives, mainly male soldiers, in exchange for more prisoners and the "complete withdrawal" of Israeli forces from Gaza, according to the draft agreement. But Hamas has said it will not free the remaining hostages without an end to the war and a complete Israeli withdrawal, while Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has in the past vowed to resume fighting unless Hamas's military and governing capabilities are eliminated. Unless an alternative government for Gaza is worked out in those talks, it could leave Hamas in charge of the territory. In a third phase, the bodies of remaining hostages would be returned in exchange for a three- to five-year reconstruction plan to be carried out in Gaza under international supervision. Growing pres-

sure ahead of Trump's inauguration Israel and Hamas have come under renewed pressure to halt the conflict in the lead-up to Trump's inauguration next week. His Middle East envoy, Steve Witkoff, recently joined US, Egyptian and Qatari mediators in the Gulf country's capital, Doha. Trump said late Monday that a ceasefire was "very close". "I understand... there's been a handshake and they are getting it finished — and maybe by the end of the week," he told the American cable channel Newsmax. Hamas has blamed Israel for the repeated setbacks in the negotiations, saying that on more than one occasion, the militant group had accepted a proposal from mediators only to see Israel reject it or launch a new military operation immediately afterwards. Israel and its close ally the United States have blamed setbacks on Hamas. Hamas-led militants killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, in the October 7 attack and abducted another

250. Around half those hostages were freed during a brief ceasefire in November 2023. Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed over 46,000 Palestinians, more than half of them women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not say how many of the dead were combatants. **STRIKES IN GAZA CONTINUE** Two strikes in the central Gaza city of Deir al-Balah overnight and into Tuesday killed two women and their four children, who ranged in age from 1 month to 9 years old. One of the women was pregnant and the baby did not survive, according to Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, which received the bodies. Another 12 people were killed in two strikes on the southern city of Khan Younis, according to the European Hospital. There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military. Israel says it only targets militants and accuses them of hiding among civilians in shelters

and tent camps for the displaced. **YEMENI REBELS FIRE MISSILES AT ISRAEL** The war has rippled across the region, igniting over a year of fighting between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah militants that ended with a tense ceasefire in November. Israel has also traded direct fire with Iran, which backs Hamas, Hezbollah and Yemen's Houthis. The Israeli military said it made several attempts to intercept the missile launched from Yemen early Tuesday and that "the missile was likely intercepted". It said an earlier missile fired from Yemen was also intercepted. Police said several homes were damaged outside Jerusalem and released a photo of a missile casing that had crashed into a roof. The Houthis, who captured Yemen's capital, Sanaa, and much of the country's north in 2014, have launched a series of missile and drone attacks on Israel and have attacked international shipping in the Red Sea.

## ICC prosecutor calls to reject Israeli objections to Netanyahu warrant

**The Hague (PTI):** The International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor has told judges that Israeli objections to the investigation into the 13-month war in Gaza should be rejected. Karim Khan submitted his formal response late Monday to an appeal by Israel over The Hague-based court's jurisdiction after judges issued arrest warrants last year for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, his former defence minister and Hamas' military chief, accusing them of crimes against humanity in connection with the war in Gaza. The embattled Israeli leader, who is also facing corruption charges in his homeland, called the arrest warrant "a black day in the history of nations" and vowed to fight the allegations. Individuals cannot contest an arrest warrant directly, but the state of Israel can object to the entire investigation. Israel argued in a December filing that it could look into allegations against its leaders on its own and that continuing to investigate Israelis was a violation of state sovereignty. The ICC was established in 2002 as the permanent court of last resort to prosecute individuals responsible for the world's most heinous atrocities — war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and the crime of aggression. The court's 125 member states include Palestine, Ukraine, Canada and every country in the European Union, but dozens of countries don't accept the court's jurisdiction, including Israel, the United States, Russia and China. In Khan's combined 55-page response, he says the Rome Statute, the treaty that established the ICC, allowed it to prosecute crimes that take place in the territory of member states, regardless of where the perpetrators hail from. The judges are expected to render a decision in the coming months.

## Special counsel who investigated Trump says his team 'stood up for rule of law'

**PTI ■ WASHINGTON**  
Special counsel Jack Smith said his team "stood up for the rule of law" as it investigated President-elect Donald Trump's efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 election, writing in a much-anticipated report released on Tuesday that he stands fully behind his decision to bring criminal charges that he believes would have resulted in a conviction had voters not returned Trump to the White House. "The throughline of all of Mr. Trump's criminal efforts was deceit — knowingly false claims of election fraud — and the evidence shows that Mr. Trump used these lies as a weapon to defeat a federal government function foundational to the United States' democratic process," the report states. The report, arriving just days before Trump is to return to office on January 20, focuses fresh attention on the Republican's frantic but failed effort to cling to power in 2020 after he lost to Democrat Joe Biden. With the prosecution foreclosed thanks to Trump's 2024 election victory, the document is expected to be the final Justice Department chronicle of a dark chapter in American history that threatened to disrupt the peaceful transfer of power, a bedrock of democracy for centuries, and complements already released indictments and reports. Trump responded early Tuesday with a post on his Truth Social platform, claiming he was "totally innocent" and calling Smith "a lamebrain prosecutor who was unable to get his case tried before the Election". He added, "THE VOTERS HAVE SPOKE!!!" Trump had been indicted in August 2023 on charges of working to overturn the election, but the case was delayed by appeals and ultimately significantly narrowed by a conservative-majority Supreme Court that held for the first time that former presidents enjoy sweeping immunity from criminal prosecution for official acts. That decision, Smith's report states, left open unresolved legal issues that would likely have required another trip to the

## Hegseth, Trump's defence secy nominee, faces key test at hearing

**Washington (PTI):** President-elect Donald Trump's choice for defence secretary, Pete Hegseth, is heading into a potentially explosive confirmation hearing Tuesday as senators question whether the former combat veteran and TV news show host is fit to lead the US military. Hegseth's former experience in the Army National Guard is widely viewed as an asset for the job, but he also brings a jarring record of past statements and actions, including allegations of sexual assault, excessive drinking and derisive views about women in military combat roles, minorities and "woke" generals. He has vowed to not drink alcohol if he is confirmed to lead the Pentagon. He is among the most endangered of Trump's Cabinet choices, but GOP allies are determined to turn Hegseth into a cause celebre for Trump's governing approach amid the nation's culture wars. Outside groups, including those aligned with the Heritage Foundation, are running costly campaigns to prop up Hegseth's bid. "He will be ripped, he will be demeaned. He will be talked about," said Sen. Tommy Tuberville, R-Ala., at an event with former Navy SEALs, Army special forces and Marines supporting the nominee. "But we're going to get him across the finish line." The hearing at the Senate Armed Services Committee is the start of a weeklong marathon as senators begin scrutinising Trump's choices for

more than a dozen top administrative positions. The Republican-led Senate is rushing to have some of Trump's picks ready to be confirmed as soon as Inauguration Day, Jan. 20, despite potential opposition to some from both sides of the aisle. "We're going to grind them down," Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said on Fox News. Hegseth faces perhaps the most difficult path to confirmation. He will be forced to confront allegations of sexual assault, which he has denied, and his own comments that are far from the military mainstream, though he has the support of some veterans' groups that say his past indiscretions are not as important as his focus on improving military readiness to fight. And Hegseth will have to answer for his comments that women should "straight up" not be in combat roles in the military, a view he has softened following recent meetings with senators. Two former female combat veterans, Republican Joni Ernst of Illinois and Democrat Tammy Duckworth of Illinois, are among those grilling him from the dais. "He can try to walk back his comments on women in combat all he wants, but we know what he thinks, right?" said Duckworth, an Iraq War veteran who lost her legs and partial use of her right arm when the Black Hawk helicopter she was piloting in the Army National Guard was shot down. "He's the most unqualified person to ever be nominated for secretary of defense."

the report focused on Trump's hoarding of classified documents at Mar-a-Lago, actions that formed the basis of a separate indictment against Trump, will remain under wraps for now. The report is unsparing in its details about schemes undertaken by Trump to undo the presidential contest, accusing him of an "unprecedented criminal effort to overturn the legitimate results of the election in order to retain power". It recounts his role in trying to force the Justice Department to use its law enforcement authorities to advance his personal interests, participating in a scheme to enlist fake electors in battleground states won by Biden and having directed "an angry mob to the United States Capitol to obstruct the congressional certification of the presidential election and then leverage rioters' violence to further delay it". And it documents his fallout with his vice president, Mike Pence, over Trump's demands that he refuse



President Joe Biden, left, standing next to Secretary of State Antony Blinken, right, tells the audience to sit as he gets a standing ovation before making a speech about foreign policy at the State Department in Washington, Monday. AP/PTI

## Biden signs executive order aimed at growing AI infrastructure in US

**Los Angeles (PTI):** President Joe Biden on Tuesday signed an ambitious executive order on artificial intelligence that seeks to ensure the infrastructure needed for advanced AI operations, such as large-scale data centres and new clean power facilities, can be built quickly and at scale in the United States. The executive order directs federal agencies to accelerate large-scale AI infrastructure development at government sites, while imposing requirements and safeguards on the developers building on those locations. It also directs certain agencies to make federal sites available for AI data centres and new clean power facilities. Those agencies will help facilitate the infrastructure's interconnection to the electric grid and help speed up the permitting process. In a statement, Biden said AI will have "profound implications for national security and enormous potential to improve Americans' lives if harnessed responsibly, from helping cure disease to keeping communities safe by mitigating the effects of climate change."

"However, we cannot take our lead for granted," the Democratic president said. "We will not let America be out-built when it comes to the technology that will define the future, nor should we sacrifice critical environmental standards and our shared efforts to protect clean air and clean water." Under the new rules, the departments of Defense and Energy will each identify at least three sites where the private sector can build AI data centres. The agencies will run "competitive solicitations" from private companies to build AI data centres on those federal sites, senior

administration officials said. Developers building on those sites will be required, among other things, to pay for the construction of those facilities and to bring sufficient clean power generation to match the full capacity needs of their data centres. Although the US government will be leasing land to a company, that company would own the materials it creates there, officials said. Biden said the efforts are designed to accelerate the clean energy transition in a way that is "responsible and respectful to local communities" and does not add costs to the average American. Developers selected to build on government sites will be required to pay all costs of building and operating AI infrastructure so that development does not raise electricity prices for consumers, the administration said. The orders also direct construction of AI data centres on federal sites to be done with public labour agreements. Some of the sites are reserved for small and medium-sized AI companies, according to government officials. Government agencies will also complete a study on the effects of all AI data centers on electricity prices, and the Energy Department will provide technical assistance to state public utility commissions regarding electricity tariff designs that can support connecting new large customers with clean energy. As part of the order, the Interior Department will identify lands it manages that are suitable for clean energy development and can support data centres on government sites, administration officials said.

## Strong winds forecast for Los Angeles threatens area's fight against fires

**Los Angeles (PTI):** Additional water tankers and scores of firefighters arrived at the Los Angeles area on Monday ahead of fierce winds that were forecast to return and threaten the progress made so far on two massive infernos that have destroyed thousands of homes and killed at least 24 people. Planes doused homes and hillsides with bright pink fire-retardant chemicals, while crews and fire engines were being placed near particularly vulnerable spots with dry brush. Dozens of water trucks rolled in to replenish supplies after hydrants ran dry last week when the two largest fires erupted. Tabitha Trosen and her boyfriend said she feels like they are "teetering" on the edge with the constant fear that their neighbourhood



Firefighters walk along a road in a fire-ravaged community in the aftermath of the Palisades Fire in the Pacific Palisades neighborhood of Los Angeles, Monday. AP/PTI

could be the next under threat. "Our cats are ready to go, we have their carriers by the door prepped with their little stuffed animals and things like that," Trosen said, adding that she's packed things as she thinks

about what she could lose. "It's like, how do I take care of myself, and what are the things that will ground me as a human and remind me of my background and my life and my family."

## NATO launches mission to protect Baltic Sea undersea cables

**Helsinki (PTI):** NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte announced on Tuesday that the alliance is launching a new mission to protect undersea cables in the Baltic Sea region. Rutte said at a meeting in Helsinki with the leaders of NATO countries located on the Baltic Sea that the effort would be dubbed Baltic Sentry. "It will involve a range of assets, including frigates and maritime patrol aircraft, among others, and will enhance our vigilance in the Baltic," Rutte told reporters. He also said that a small fleet of naval drones will be deployed "to provide enhanced surveillance and deterrence". The meeting follows a string of incidents in the Baltic that have heightened concerns about possible Russian activities in the region. Announcing the new operation, Rutte noted that more than 95 per cent of internet traffic is secured via undersea cables, and 1.3 million kilometers (808,000 miles) of cables guarantee an estimated USD 10 trillion worth of financial transactions every day.

## Top aide of impeached S Korean prez pleads for investigators to halt detention efforts

**Seoul (PTI):** The top aide of impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol pleaded with law enforcement agencies on Tuesday to abandon their efforts to detain him over his imposition of martial law last month, as authorities prepared a second attempt to take him into custody. Presidential Chief of Staff Chung Jin-suk said Yoon could instead be questioned at a "third site" or at his residence and said the anti-corruption agency and police were trying to drag him out like he was a member of a "South American drug cartel". However, Yoon Kab-keun, one of the president's lawyers, said Chung issued the message without consulting them and that the legal team has no immediate plan to make the president available for questioning by investigators. Yoon Suk Yeol has not left his official residence in Seoul for weeks, and the presidential security service prevented dozens of investigators from detaining him after a nearly six-hour stand-

off on January 3. The Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials and police pledged more forceful measures to detain Yoon while they jointly investigate whether his brief martial law declaration on December 3 amounted to an attempted rebellion. The National Police Agency has convened multiple meetings of field commanders in Seoul and nearby Gyeonggi province in recent days to plan their detainment efforts, and the size of those forces fueled speculation that more than a thousand officers could be deployed in a possible multi-day operation. The agency and police have openly warned that presidential bodyguards obstructing the execution of the warrant could be arrested. The anti-corruption agency and police haven't confirmed when they might return to the presidential residence, which has been fortified with barbed wire and rows of vehicles blocking entry paths. But Chung said he under-

stood "D-day" to be Wednesday, without specifying the information he had. Anti-corruption agency and police officials met with representatives of the presidential security service on Tuesday morning for unspecified discussions regarding efforts to execute the detention warrant for Yoon, the agency said. It wasn't immediately clear whether any kind of compromise was reached. Yoon declared martial law and deployed troops around the National Assembly on Dec. 3. It lasted only hours before lawmakers managed to get through the blockade and voted to lift the measure. His presidential powers were suspended when the opposition-dominated assembly voted to impeach him on Dec. 14, accusing him of rebellion. His fate now rests with the Constitutional Court, which has begun deliberating on whether to formally remove Yoon from office or reject the charges and reinstate him.



# Zelensky, Macron discuss Western troop deployment

PTI ■ KYIV

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that he has held further discussions with French President Emmanuel Macron about the possibility of Western troops deploying in Ukraine to safeguard any peace deal ending the nearly three-year war with Russia. Zelensky's disclosure came before an official visit to Kyiv on Tuesday by German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius. He arrived in Kyiv on an unannounced visit following a meeting in Warsaw on Monday with his counterparts from France, the United Kingdom, Italy and Poland. Germany and the four other countries are Europe's five top military spenders. Pistorius told German news agency dpa that his visit to Kyiv aims to underscore Germany's strong support for Ukraine at a time when US President-elect Donald Trump's term beginning next week looks set to bring deep changes to Washington's policy on the war. Pistorius said that his visit "is a signal that Germany, as the biggest NATO country in Europe, stands by Ukraine — not alone, but with the group of five and many other allies." Trump has criticised the cost



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, left, and German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius greet each other in Kyiv, Ukraine, Tuesday. AP/PTI

of the war for US taxpayers through major military aid packages for Ukraine, and vowed to bring the conflict to a swift end. He also has made it clear that he wants to shift more of the Ukraine burden onto Europe. Macron prompted an outcry from other leaders, and he appeared isolated on the European stage, after his remarks almost a year ago floated the possibility of putting Western troops in Ukraine. Zelensky has said that

Ukraine needs security guarantees to bolster any peace agreement — an issue he said late Monday that he discussed with the French leader. "As one of these guarantees, we discussed the French initiative to deploy military contingents in Ukraine," Zelensky said. "We considered practical steps for its implementation, possible expansion and involvement of other countries in this process." Potentially sending European

troops as peacekeepers to Ukraine is fraught with risk. Such a move may not deter Russia from attacking Ukraine again in the future, which is the fear of Ukrainian officials, and could drag European countries into a direct confrontation with Moscow. That, in turn, could pull NATO — including the United States — into a conflict. Russia's bigger army has largely pinned Ukrainian forces on the defensive along the around 1,000-kilometre front line. Ukraine's defenses are creaking in the eastern Donetsk region amid a Russian onslaught. Ukraine has built up a domestic arsenal of long-range drones and missiles that it uses to hit targets on Russian soil far behind the front line. The targets are usually infrastructure that supports the Russian war effort, such as arms depots, oil refineries and manufacturing plants. Two industrial facilities in Russia's western Saratov region were damaged after a "massive" Ukrainian drone attack, regional Gov. Roman Busargin said Tuesday. He claimed that Russian air defences downed "a large number" of drones and said that there were no casualties, offering no further details.

# B'desh ex-premier Khaleda Zia's BNP demands election by July-August

PTI ■ DHAKA

Former prime minister Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) on Tuesday demanded that the general election be held by July-August this year, refuting interim government chief adviser Muhammad Yunus's stance to stage it by the year-end or mid-2026. "There is no reason to delay the election that much," said BNP secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir after an overnight meeting of the party's standing committee that was chaired virtually by acting BNP chairperson Tarique Rahman from London. Alamgir said the standing committee held a lengthy discussion on Yunus's planned election deadline but came up with a conclusion that the polls should not be delayed for so long as voters list updating should not take more than a month and other related tasks would take one to two months at most. "We believe, as the Election Commission has already been formed and there is relative stability in governance, there is no reason to delay the national election further. Delays only deepen the political and economic crises," he said. The BNP also opposed the idea propagated by some leaders of the interim government to hold local government elections before parliamentary polls. The party also criticised the interim government's economic policies, particularly plans for gas price hikes and tax increases. "We have repeatedly said there is no alternative to elected government and this is the most important factor for democracy," Alamgir said. He called upon the "government, the Election Commission and political parties" to take steps to hold the elections by mid-2025 in the

"greater interest of the country". Yunus and his advisers or de facto ministers said reforms and preparedness for elections were going on, suggesting that polls should be staged after accomplishment of some basic reforms. But Alamgir said it is a continued process and the BNP was committed to reforms. The BNP secretary general said "there is no question of holding local government elections before the national parliamentary election. Our demand is for the national election first". Alamgir said the last three national elections could not be held properly, and the people want to ensure a democratic transition through elections. Ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina, 77, has been living in India since August 5 last year when she fled Bangladesh following a massive student-led protest that toppled her Awami League's 16-year regime. Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) has issued arrest warrants for Hasina and several former Cabinet ministers, advisers, and military and civil officials for "crimes against humanity and genocide". But this was for the first time that the BNP, visibly the largest organised political party in Bangladesh now, came with a tougher stance over the demand for an early election. Zia, who has previously served thrice as premier, is currently in London for treatment with critical health issues while her son Rahman is also in the British capital as a process was underway to settle several legal cases lodged against him. An interim government headed by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus is running the country and plans to hold elections in December this year or in the first half of 2026.

# Sri Lankan Prez Dissanayake arrives in Beijing on four-day visit to China

PTI ■ BEIJING/ COLOMBO

Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake arrived here on Tuesday on a four-day visit during which he is scheduled to hold talks with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping and other Chinese leaders on deepening bilateral ties. Upon his arrival, the President was accorded a ceremonial welcome by the Chinese military, and he was formally received by China's Deputy Foreign Minister Chen Xiaodong, according to a press release issued by Dissanayake's office in Colombo. This is Dissanayake's second overseas visit - the first being to India - since assuming office in September last year. During his China visit, Dissanayake will hold bilateral talks with President Xi on areas of mutual interest and will also meet Chinese Premier Li Qiang, and Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of China Zhao Leji. Several Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) aimed at strengthening bilateral cooperation between Sri Lanka and China are expected to be signed during the visit, the Presidential office press release said on Tuesday. During this state visit,

Dissanayake is scheduled to participate in several key engagements and undertake field visits focused on technological and agricultural development, as well as initiatives aimed at poverty alleviation. The visit also includes high-level business meetings and discussions, it said. "The visit to the People's Republic of China will further strengthen the longstanding ties between the two countries," the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry said earlier. A host of issues, including permitting Chinese research vessels, regarded as spy ships by India; Sri Lanka's debt commitments to China, stated to be Colombo's largest creditor and expansion of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) investments are expected to figure in Dissanayake's talks with Xi. Sri Lanka expects the visit to result in the digitisation of Sri Lanka's two state TV channels - Rupavahini and ITN. Sri Lanka would also seek Chinese assistance to complete the central expressway, which has been stalled for over a decade, the media division of the Sri Lanka President's Office here said in a press release earlier. The talks would also cover the Chinese industrial zone around the southern port of Hambantota. Qin Boyong, a top Chinese

official who visited Dissanayake immediately upon his return from Delhi in December, said the Chinese companies were eagerly waiting to set themselves up for business at Hambantota. Dissanayake, once a bitter critic of India, chose Delhi for his first visit abroad. During his visit to India in December, where he met Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Dissanayake assured New Delhi that Colombo would not permit its territory to be used in a manner that is detrimental to the interest of India, in an apparent reference to China. China, which expanded its strategic ties with Sri Lanka during the pro-Beijing leader Mahinda Rajapaksa, his brother Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Ranil Wickramasinghe with the acquisition of Hambantota port for 99 years' lease as a debt swap followed by the development of Colombo Port City project, Dissanayake is a new generation leader representing new realities of his island nation. A high-level delegation, including Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Employment and Tourism Vijitha Herath, and the Minister of Transport, Highways, Ports, and Civil Aviation Bimal Rathnayake, has accompanied him to China.

# Imran Khan's wife Bushra Bibi secures bail in over a dozen cases

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's wife Bushra Bibi on Tuesday secured interim bail in more than a dozen cases despite telling the court she has lost faith in the justice system of Pakistan. Anti-terrorism court Judge Tahir Abbas Supra, who presided over the hearing, granted Bushra interim bail until February 7 in 13 cases related to the D-Chowk protests apart from another case involving the killing of paramilitary rangers during the demonstration last year. Apart from Bibi, her spouse Khan, 72, and other party leaders have been nominated

in the first information report (FIR) registered at the Ramna police station under Section 302 (murder) and other sections of the Pakistan Penal Code. According to the FIR, Khan issued instructions to the party leadership, spouse Bushra, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, and his sister Aleema Khan for making all-out efforts to get him released from jail and "set anything on fire or kill anyone for this purpose". Geo News reported the judge in a conversation with Bushra during the proceedings said: "It has taken some time, but legal protocols have been followed." Bushra said: "That is not an

issue, but we have lost faith in the courts." Disagreeing, Judge Supra assured: "It is not like that everywhere. The justice system, despite its flaws, is functioning. If it collapses, society itself will cease to exist. You have appeared before me in other hearings as well." Bushra further highlighted her concerns regarding the judicial process, recounting an instance during a trial where a judge's blood pressure rose to 200 yet he proceeded to pronounce a verdict against her. "There is law in the country but no justice. The PTI founder is imprisoned for upholding the supremacy of the Constitution. What we

have endured has completely shattered our faith in the law," she said. The judge was informed that 13 cases were registered at various police stations in Islamabad against the former first lady. The court subsequently granted her interim bail in all 13 cases until February 7 against surety bonds of Rs 5,000 each. The bail is a major relief to Bushra who married the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder in January 2018, the year he won the election later on and became the prime minister. Bushra, Khan's third wife, was his spiritual heir before marriage.

### LOST & FOUND

I, Suman Sawhney Alias Kitty Sawhney D/o Sh. Som Nath Oberoi W/o Sh. Harish Sawhney R/o M-105, M-Block, Greater Kailash-1, Phase-1, South New Delhi-110048 declare that Share of HUL & Folio No. HLL1153227 Share Certificates No. 47975341 To 47976840 Total 1500 share Certificates has been lost.

### PUBLIC NOTICE

It is informed to the public at large that my client VINOD KUMAR SHARMA S/o SH. HANUMAN SARAI SHARMA and his wife SMT. MEENA SHARMA BOTH R/o A-335-338, DDA COLONY, CHAUKHANDI, TILAK NAGAR, NEW DELHI-11 hereby declaring /debaring/denying/their son namely PRINCE from their properties (moveable or immovable) because he is not under the control of my client. My clients and their family members have also severed all their relations with him as my clients are not be responsible for any act, deed and thing done by him since today.

### THE DELHI GOLF CLUB

Dr. Zakir Hussain Road, New Delhi-110003. Quotations are invited from reputed architectural firms for "Golf Course Architect Services" Detailed RFP can be downloaded from DGC website <https://delhigolfclub.org/tendernotice/> Bids mentioning words "GOLF COURSE ARCHITECT SERVICES" in capital letters on the envelope/email must reach us before 1900 Hrs on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2025.

### PUBLIC NOTICE

My clientess Smt. Rajbati W/o Sh. Sudesh R/o 1/5639/15A, Gali No.1, Tikona Park, East Rohtas Nagar, Shahdara Delhi - 32 has severed her relationship from her son namely Dinesh, from all her movable and immovable properties due to his weak mental situation (depression), misconduct, misdeed, and misbehavior, if any body deals with him, my clientess and rest of the family members shall not be held responsible for the same.

### LOST & FOUND

I, Sunder Lal S/o Lt. Jhandu Singh R/o H.No.6/5, MCD Barracks, Leprosy Colony, Tahirpur, Shahdara, Delhi-110095, place information that original chain papers of property No. A-10, Priyadarshani Vihar, Road No. 64, Tahirpur, Delhi-110095, favouring Parwati W/o Lt. Jhandu Singh have been lost elsewhere and not found till date.

### CHANGE OF NAME

I, Deepshikha, D/o Sh. Hari Lal Sinha, declares that Deepshikha and Deepshikha Sinha both are one and the same person and shall henceforth be known as Deepshikha Sinha for all purposes.

### PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform to all concern that TECKCHAND HARI CHOMAL BHARANI S/O LATE SHRI HARI CHOMAL BANSHIRAM BHARANI R/O D-77, SECTOR-17, NOIDA who is the original allottee of Property No D-77, Sector-27, Noida U.P. whose expired on dated 17.12.2024, WILL was executed on in favour of GOBIND TECKCHAND BHARANI S/O LATE SHRI TECKCHAND HARI CHOMAL BHARANI R/O A-656, SECTOR-19, NOIDA DISTT GAZTAM BUDH NAGAR UTTAR PRADESH & ASHA ASSUDANI D/O LATE SHRI TECKCHAND HARI CHOMAL BHARANI & W/O SHRI PARASRAMBHAI R/O 103, UTSAV COMPLEX, NEAR H.D.F.C. BANK MANINAGAR CHAR RASTA MANINAGAR AHMEDABAD CITY MANINAGAR AHMEDABAD CITY AHMEDABAD GUJARAT-380008 & DEEPA NAMDEO RUPWANI D/O LATE SHRI TECKCHAND HARI CHOMAL BHARANI & W/O SHRI NAMDEO KUNDAN DAS RUPWANI R/O D-77, SECTOR-27, NOIDA DISTT GAZTAM BUDH NAGAR UTTAR PRADESH which is registered in the office of Sub-Registrar Noida in Book No. 111 Volume No. 981 on Pages 41 to 52 at Document No 291 dated 24.07.2024. So it is informed to all concern that the said Property No.D-77, Sector-27, Noida U.P. is going to be transferred in favour of GOBIND TECKCHAND BHARANI & ASHA ASSUDANI & DEEPA NAMDEO RUPWANI through registered WILL. If any one has have objection alongwith the sufficient proof in the Residential Plot of the department of the Noida Authority within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice.

### I, Awadhesh Prasad Singh, Father of Amit Kumar, Resident of SMQ-125/4, Pinto Park, AFS Palam, New Delhi-110010, have changed my name from Awadhesh Prasad Singh to Awadhesh Prasad Singh, vide Affidavit dated 14/01/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

### I, Malatilata Rout, Mother of Dayanidhi Rout, Resident of SMQ-128/9, Pinto Park, AFS Palam, New Delhi-110010, have changed my name from Malatilata Rout to Malati Rout, vide Affidavit dated 14/01/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

### I, Mohini Tiwari W/o No.15422907N Hav/ Amb Asst Deepak Tiwari, R/o- Vill & PO-Shahabad, PS & Teh- Shahabad, Dist- Hardoi, U.P.- 241124, have changed my name from Mohini Tiwari to Moni Tiwari, vide affidavit dated 14/01/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

### BSES Yamuna Power Limited, Delhi

... A Joint venture with Govt. of NCT of Delhi

#### TENDER NOTICE

Date: 15.01.2025

BYPL invites Sealed Tenders from all CERC Approved Traders /Utilities for Banking of Power:-

NIT No.	Brief Item Description	Period	Cost of EMD (₹)	Due Date & Time of Bid Submission	Date and Time of Bid Opening
BYPL/PMG/FY 24-25/Tender/ Banking-2, Date 15-Jan-2025	Banking of Power	1 <sup>st</sup> May-2025 to 31 <sup>st</sup> March-2026	₹ 5,00,000/-	30 <sup>th</sup> January-2025 at 15:15 hrs.	30 <sup>th</sup> January-2025 at 15:30 hrs.

For Further Details, please log on to - <https://www.bsesdelhi.com/web/bypl/power-procurement-tenders>

### ADITYA BIRLA CAPITAL

PROTECTING INVESTING FINANCING ADVISING

#### ADITYA BIRLA FINANCE LIMITED

Registered Office: Indian Rayon Compound, Veraval, Gujarat-362266. Branch Office: 17, 1st Floor, Vijaya Bank Building, Barakhamba Road, New Delhi - 110001

#### DEMAND NOTICE U/S 13(2) OF THE SARFAESI ACT - 2002

You the below mentioned borrower has availed loan by mortgaging the schedule mentioned property and you the below mentioned as stood as borrower / Co - borrower /Mortgagor for the loan agreement. Consequent to the default committed by you, your loan account has been classified as NPA under the provisions of the Securitisation & Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (in short SARFAESI Act). We Aditya Birla Finance Limited has issued Demand Notice u/s 13(2) read with section 13(13) of the SARFAESI Act to the address furnished by you. The contents of the said notices are that you had committed default in payment of the various loans sanctioned to you. Therefore, the present publication carried out to serve the notice as per the provision of Section 13(2) of SARFAESI Act and in terms of provision of the rule 3(1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

Loan Account No./ Name and Address of the account Borrower(s), Co-Borrower(s) & Guarantor(s)	Date of Demand Notice	Amount due as per Demand Notice
Loan Account No. -ABFD13TER0001020495 1.M/s Harshita Wash, Through Proprietor, 2. Mr. Man Singh, 3. Mrs. Sonam Devi, All at - C-1266, Block-C, Street No.14, New Baswala Colony, Old Faridabad, Palwal, Haryana-121002. Also At: House No. B-36, Block B-1, First Floor, B/PF, Sector-85, Kheri Kalan (113), Faridabad, Haryana-121002. Also At: Plot No.34, Village Mawal, Near Kalindi Public School, Faridabad, Haryana-121003. Also at - Property Being Land Measuring 242 sq. yds., (1 Biswa 12 Biswas) Out of Kharsa No. 1783, (2 Bigha 2 Biswa), Situated in Village Baswala Colony, Tehsil and Dist. Faridabad, Haryana-121002	30.12.2024  NPA Date 14-Dec-2024	Rs.87,31,711.57/- (Rupees Eighty Seven Lakh Thirty One Thousand Seven Hundred Eleven and Fifty Seven Paise Only) as on 19.12.2024

"DETAILS OF SECURED ASSETS TO BE ENFORCED" - All that piece and parcel of: "Property Being Land Measuring 242 sq. yds., (1 Biswa 12 Biswas) Out of Kharsa No. 1783, (2 Bigha 2 Biswa), Situated in Village Baswala Colony, Tehsil and Dist. Faridabad, Haryana-121002. Bounded North: 59.6 Ft. Wide, Personal Road 14 Ft. East: 36 Ft Wide Remaining Land, South: 61.3 Ft. Wide, Plot of Pradip, West: 36 Ft Wide, Common Road Gali no. 14"

You are hereby called upon to pay Aditya Birla Finance Limited within the period of 60 days from the date of publication of this Notice the aforesaid amount with interest and cost falling which Aditya Birla Finance Limited will take necessary action under the provisions of the said Act against all or any one or more of the secured assets including taking possession of secured assets of the borrower / Co - borrower / Mortgagor. The power available to Aditya Birla Finance Limited under the said Act include (1) Power to take possession of the secured assets of the borrower / Co - borrower / Mortgagor including the rights to transfer by way of lease, assignment of sale for releasing secured assets (2) Take over management of the secured assets including rights to transfer by way of lease, assignment or sale and realize the secured assets and any transfer as of secured assets by Aditya Birla Finance Limited shall vest in all the rights and relation to the secured assets transferred as if the transfer has been made by you. In terms of the Provisions of the Section 13(13) of the said act, you are hereby prohibited from transferring, either by way of sale, lease or otherwise (other than in the normal course of your business), any of the secured assets as referred to above and hypothecated / mortgaged to the Aditya Birla Finance Limited without prior written consent of the Aditya Birla Finance Limited.

### PUBLIC NOTICE

It is hereby informed to General Public that the Property dispute is pending before the Honble court of Sh. Gaurav, Lt. ADJ, Shahdara Distt Karkardooma Court, Delhi-110032 regarding the ownership of the property bearing No. 9/572, Subhash Road, Krishna Gali No. 4, Gandhi Nagar, Delhi-110031 Vide Suit No. CS 2498/2024, Titled as "Sarika Tuteja Versus Sumit Kumar" and Vide CS No. 2444/2024, Titled as "Sumit Kumar Versus Sarika Tuteja" and Sarika Tuteja wants to sellout the above said property without any right. If anyone purchase the same, the same shall be deemed as null and void and strictly death as per law.

### GURU NANAK DEV UNIVERSITY, AMRITSAR

Tender Notice Reference No.GNDU/Gen/01/2025

The Department of G.N.D.U. Amritsar invites online bids for the following:

Sr. No.1  
Item: Stationery, Crockery etc.  
Quantity: 69 Items  
Closing date & time: 04-02-2025 at 5.00 p.m.

For details log onto [www.eproc.punjab.gov.in](http://www.eproc.punjab.gov.in)

Note: Any corrigendum/s to the tender notice shall be published on the above website only.

### ROTOGRAPHICS (INDIA) LIMITED

CIN : L74899DL1976PLC008036

Regd Off: Shop No. 37 Shanker Market Connaught Place, Central Delhi, New Delhi-110001  
Phone No. 011-47366600, Email id: [info@rotoindia.co.in](mailto:info@rotoindia.co.in), Website: [www.rotoindia.co.in](http://www.rotoindia.co.in).

### ROTOGRAPHICS (INDIA) LIMITED

Notice is hereby given that Extra Ordinary General Meeting of members of RotoGraphics (India) Limited will be held on Saturday, 08<sup>th</sup> February, 2025 at 01:00 P.M through video conferencing (VC)/other audio-visual means (OAVM).

In accordance with Circular No. 14/2020 dated April 08, 2020, Circular No. 17/2020 dated April 13, 2020 read with Circular No. 20/2020 dated May 05, 2020 (MCA) and Circular No. SEBI/HO/CFD/CMD1/CIR/P/2020/79 issued by SEBI ("circulars"), and owing difficulties involved in dispatching physical copies, the Notice of the EGM has been sent to member of the Company, whose email is registered with Company RTA on 3<sup>rd</sup> January, 2025. Members may note that the Company will not send physical hard copies of Notice of EGM.

Since the EGM is being held through VCI OAVM, pursuant to the Circulars, physical attendances of members have been dispensed with. Accordingly, the facility for the appointment of proxies by the members will not be available for the EGM.

Members holding shares in physical mode who have not registered/ updated their email addresses with the Company, are requested to register/ update the same with the company's Registrar and Share Transfer Agent Skyline Financial Services Private Limited (herein referred as 'RTA') at [compliance@skylinefin.com](mailto:compliance@skylinefin.com).

Please note that the aforesaid documents are also available on the Company's website at <https://rotoindia.co.in/> and on the website of the Stock Exchange i.e. BSE Limited and NSDL i.e. [www.bseindia.co.in](https://www.bseindia.co.in/).

Notice is further given that pursuant to the provisions of section 108 of the Companies Act, 2013 read with rule 20 of the Companies (Management and Administration) Rules, 2014 as amended and Regulations, 2015, the Company is providing its members facility to exercise their right to vote by electronic means and the business as set out in the Notice may be transacted through remote e-voting by NSDL. The members may note the following:

- Members holding shares as on cut-off date i.e. Saturday, 01<sup>st</sup> February, 2025 may cast their vote electronically on the Special Business as set out in the Notice of the EGM through electronic voting system of National Securities Depository Limited (NSDL). The e-voting period shall commence on Wednesday, 05<sup>th</sup> February, 2025 at 9:00 AM till Friday, 07<sup>th</sup> February, 2025 at 5:00 P.M.
- Members of the Company holding shares either in physical or in dematerialized form, as on the cut-off date, may cast their vote either electronically during the remote e-voting period. Members who have voted through Remote e-Voting will be eligible to attend the EGM. However, they will not be eligible to vote at the EGM.

The Company has appointed Mr. Vivek Kumar, practicing Company Secretary of M/s V. Kumar and Associates as the Scrutinizer to scrutinize the e-voting process in a fair and transparent manner. In case of any queries, you may refer to the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for members and e-voting user manual for members, available at the Downloads sections of <https://www.evoting.nsdl.com> or contact NSDL at the following toll free No: 1800-222-990. For any further grievance related to the Remote e-Voting, members may contact NSDL at the following contact information: Phone No. +91 22 24945454, +91 22 24945459

By order of the Board (India) Limited will be held on Saturday, 08<sup>th</sup> February, 2025 at 01:00 P.M through video conferencing (VC)/other audio-visual means (OAVM).

For Rotographics (India) Limited  
Name: Gaurav Kumar  
Director  
DIN : 01159459

### Indira Gandhi University Meerpur, Rewari

हिंदिरा गंधी विश्वविद्यालय मीरपुर रेवाड़ी

(A State University Established under Haryana Act No. 29 of 2013)  
Recognized u/s 12 (B) & 2(f) of UGC Act, 1956

### ONLINE ADMISSION NOTICE FOR PH.D PROGRAMME (SESSION - 2024-25)

Online Applications are invited from eligible candidates for admission in Ph.D in various University Teaching Departments for the session 2024-25.

The details regarding subjects, vacant slots (seats), important dates, Online application form, application fee, admission process, reservation policy and other relevant information is available on university website i.e. [www.igu.ac.in](http://www.igu.ac.in). The last date for submission of online application form is 24.01.2025.

Note: Any change/ corrigendum/ notice/ information related to the admission to Ph.D. programmes for the session 2024-25 will be uploaded on University website.

REGISTRAR  
1312/11/39/2025/31662/C/27/7 Dated, 13/01/2025

### ROTOGRAPHICS (INDIA) LIMITED

CIN : L74899DL1976PLC008036

Regd Off: Shop No. 37 Shanker Market Connaught Place, Central Delhi, New Delhi-110001  
Phone No. 011-47366600, Email id: [info@rotoindia.co.in](mailto:info@rotoindia.co.in), Website: [www.rotoindia.co.in](http://www.rotoindia.co.in).

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Please note that the aforesaid documents are also available on the Company's website at <https://rotoindia.co.in/> and on the website of the Stock Exchange i.e. BSE Limited and NSDL i.e. [www.bseindia.co.in](https://www.bseindia.co.in/).

Notice is further given that pursuant to the provisions of section 108 of the Companies Act, 2013 read with rule 20 of the Companies (Management and Administration) Rules, 2014 as amended and Regulations, 2015, the Company is providing its members facility to exercise their right to vote by electronic means and the business as set out in the Notice may be transacted through remote e-voting by NSDL. The members may note the following:

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- Members of the Company holding shares either in physical or in dematerialized form, as on the cut-off date, may cast their vote either electronically during the remote e-voting period. Members who have voted through Remote e-Voting will be eligible to attend the EGM. However, they will not be eligible to vote at the EGM.

The Company has appointed Mr. Vivek Kumar, practicing Company Secretary of M/s V. Kumar and Associates as the Scrutinizer to scrutinize the e-voting process in a fair and transparent manner. In case of any queries, you may refer to the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for members and e-voting user manual for members, available at the Downloads sections of <https://www.evoting.nsdl.com> or contact NSDL at the following toll free No: 1800-222-990. For any further grievance related to the Remote e-Voting, members may contact NSDL at the following contact information: Phone No. +91 22 24945454, +91 22 24945459

By order of the Board (India) Limited will be held on Saturday, 08<sup>th</sup> February, 2025 at 01:00 P.M through video conferencing (VC)/other audio-visual means (OAVM).

For Rotographics (India) Limited  
Name: Gaurav Kumar  
Director  
DIN : 01159459

# Domestic aviation industry likely to clock ₹2,000-₹3,000 Crore net loss in FY25: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The country's civil aviation industry is projected to report a net loss of Rs 2,000 to Rs 3,000 crore in the current and next financial year as supply chain challenges and engine issues are expected to continue for some more time, according to a report.

In the report on Tuesday, rating agency Icria also said that domestic air passenger traffic was estimated at 153 lakh in December, 7.3 per cent higher compared to 142.5 lakh recorded in November last year.

"Further, it grew by ~10.8 per cent on a YoY basis and was higher by ~17.5 per cent than the pre-Covid levels, i.e., December 2019. The airlines' capacity deployment in December 2024 was higher than December 2023 by ~7.5 per cent and by ~3.8 per cent over November 2024," it



added. Giving a stable outlook for the Indian aviation industry, Icria said there are expectations of moderate growth in domestic air passenger traffic and a

relatively stable cost environment in FY25. Moreover, the industry witnessed improved pricing power during FY24, reflected in the higher yields (over pre-

Covid levels) and the revenue per available seat kilometre-cost per available seat kilometre (RASK-CASK) spread of the airlines. "The momentum in the air

passenger traffic growth witnessed in FY2024 is likely to marginally taper to 7-10 per cent in FY2025 (compared to 13 per cent in FY2024), given the high base of FY2024 and lower passenger traffic in H1 FY2025, impacted by severe heat waves and other weather-related disruptions.

"The yields are also likely to be under pressure, as airlines strive to maintain adequate passenger load factor (PLF). International passenger traffic for Indian carriers is expected to grow by 15-20 per cent in FY2025," the report said. For FY 2025 and FY 2026, Icria has projected the industry to register a net loss of Rs 20-30 billion.

Supply chain challenges and engine failure issues impacted the industry capacity over the last 18 months and are expected to continue affecting it this year, it added.

# Union Minister Piyush Goyal launches National Turmeric Board in Telangana

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Union Minister for Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal on Tuesday launched the National Turmeric Board in Nizamabad district of Telangana, a long-awaited dream of turmeric farmers.

Goyal virtually inaugurated the Board and said it is being launched on the auspicious occasion of Sankranti. There is immense potential of increasing productivity of turmeric in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, Goyal noted, according to an official release.

The Board will pay special attention to the welfare of 'Golden Spice' farmers. The Board will develop good varieties and focus on its export, he said. Nizamabad MP Arvind Dharmapuri was also present. The creation of the National Turmeric Board was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on October 1, 2023, during a public meeting



in Telangana. This historic decision reflects PM Modi's commitment to farmers and his visionary leadership in recognizing the importance of turmeric as a vital crop for India's agricultural economy, a release from the office of Arvind Dharmapuri said on Monday. The announcement also fulfilled a 40-year-old demand of turmeric farmers who had long sought dedicated support and infrastructure to bolster turmeric cultivation and trade. Over the last decade, the

average price for Nizamabad turmeric hovered around Rs 6,000 per quintal. However, in 2024, the price touched an all-time high of Rs 18,000 per quintal, a trend that continues this season, it said. The National Turmeric Board will provide targeted support to turmeric farmers by promoting research and development, facilitating infrastructure development such as setting up of processing units, enhancing exports, and ensuring better prices for their produce, the release said.

# Wholesale Price Inflation rises to 2.37 per cent in December



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Wholesale price inflation rose to 2.37 per cent in December 2024, led by spike in manufactured products even though prices of food items eased, government data released on Tuesday showed. The Wholesale Price Index (WPI) based inflation was 1.89 per cent in November 2024. It was 0.86 per cent in December 2023. As per the data, inflation in food items eased to 8.47 per cent in December 2024, as against 8.63 per cent in November. Inflation in vegetable stood at 28.65 per cent, as against 28.57 per cent in November.

Inflation in potato continued to be high at 93.20 per cent, and in onion it spiked to 16.81 per cent in December. Among food items, cereals, pulses, wheat saw easing in inflation in December. The fuel and power category witnessed a deflation of 3.79 per cent in December, against a deflation of 5.83 per cent in November. In manufactured items, inflation was 2.14 per cent, against 2 per cent in November. Retail inflation data released on Monday showed that consumer price index (CPI) based inflation eased to 4-month low of 5.22 per cent in December on easing food prices.



# Government approves alternative payment methods for rooftop solar installation

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of New & Renewable Energy has come out with new guidelines, allowing two more payment methods for the installation of rooftop solar system under PM-Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana. The move will ensure payment security as well as the grant of subsidy to households in case of payments through Renewable Energy Service Company (RESCO) and utility-led aggregation models. The ministry has notified scheme guidelines for implementation of 'Payment Security Mechanism'

component and 'Central Financial Assistance' component for RESCO models/utility-led aggregation models under PM-Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana, an official statement said. Under this scheme, Rs 100 crore has been earmarked for payment security mechanism (PSM) for de-risking investments in RESCO-based grid-connected rooftop solar models in residential sectors, which may be supplemented through other grants, funds and sources after due approval, the statement said. Under the RESCO model, third-party entities invest in rooftop solar installations,

enabling consumers to pay only for the electricity consumed without bearing the upfront costs. Under the utility-led aggregation (ULA) model, power distribution companies or state designated entities install rooftop solar projects on behalf of individual households. The ministry further clarified that these guidelines are in addition to the existing mode of implementation undertaken by consumers (capex mode) through the national portal and said these alternative models will support the national portal-based implementation of the scheme.

# Rupee recovers from record low to settle eight paise higher at 86.62 against US Dollar



PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee rebounded from its lowest-ever level and settled 8 paise higher at 86.62 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday as the American currency retreated from record high. Some recovery in domestic equity markets after the release of macroeconomic numbers also supported the Indian currency even though it remained under pressure due to elevated crude oil prices and continuous outflow of foreign funds. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 86.57 and touched the intraday high of 86.45 before closing for the day at 86.62 (provisional) against the greenback, registering a gain of 8 paise from its previous close. On Monday, the rupee logged its steepest single-day fall in nearly two years and ended the session 66 paise down at its historic low of 86.70 against the US dollar. The currency's previous record one-day fall of 68 paise was witnessed on February 6, 2023. The local unit has plunged more than Re 1 in the past two weeks from the closing level of 85.52 on December 30. It had breached the 85-per-dollar mark for the first time on December 19, 2024. Key imports are petroleum products and urea. These account for over 70 per cent of imports. Other key products are propylene and ethylene polymers, pet coke, gypsum, chemicals, and iron and steel. The bilateral trade stood has declined to USD 8.94 billion in 2023-24 from USD 12.39 billion in 2022-23. India's exports stood at USD 4.42 billion in the last fiscal.

bounce back in the domestic markets and a weak US dollar. Cooling retail inflation and easing dollar brought some respite to the falling rupee, he said, but added that the Indian currency is expected to remain weak as crude oil prices continue to remain elevated, raising inflationary pressures. "Traders may take cues from PPI (producer price index) data from US today and CPI data from US tomorrow. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 86.40 to Rs 86.85," Choudhary added. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.39 per cent lower at 109.38. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.10 per cent to USD 81.09 per barrel in futures trade. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 169.62 points, or 0.22 per cent, to settle at 76,499.63 points, while the Nifty rose 90.10 points, or 0.39 per cent, to 23,176.05 points. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 4,892.84 crore on Monday. Government data released on Tuesday showed, wholesale price inflation rose to 2.37 per cent in December 2024, led by a spike in manufactured products even though prices of food items eased. Retail inflation, however, declined to a four-month low of 5.22 per cent in December amid easing of prices in the food basket, giving headroom to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to reduce the key interest rate in upcoming monetary policy reviews, according to the data released on Monday.



# Jaguar Land Rover, Tata Communications strengthen partnership for connected car tech

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Jaguar Land Rover and Tata Communications have strengthened their collaboration for connected car technologies, the companies said in a joint statement on Tuesday. As part of the enhanced collaboration, Tata Communications will offer its MOVE platform to enhance JLR's connected vehicle ecosystem, transforming the driving experience for customers worldwide. The partnership will empower JLR's next-generation software-defined vehicles with continuous connectivity and access to intelligent services even in the remotest locations across 120 countries, the auto maker said in a statement. The latest tie-up is an extension of their existing partnership to future-proof the carmaker's digital transformation. Leveraging the MOVE platform, JLR's upcoming medium-sized SUVs built on the new electric modular architecture (EMA) will seamlessly transition between mobile networks and operators, enabling non-stop access to personalised connected services, such as media streaming, it said. The platform will also enable greater and more secure data exchange between JLR and its customers' vehicles, delivering more efficient Software Over-the-air (SOTA) updates and supporting the rollout of evolving Advanced Driver Assistance Systems (ADAS), it added.

# India, Oman holding fifth round of talks for free trade agreement

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India and Oman are holding the fifth round of talks for a proposed free trade agreement here to boost bilateral economic ties, an official said on Tuesday. The two-day talks started on January 13, the official said. The negotiations for the agreement, officially dubbed as Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), formally began in November 2023. Oman is the third largest export destination among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. According to the think tank GTRI (Global Trade Research Institute), Indian goods worth USD 3.7 billion like gasoline, iron and steel, electronics, and machinery



will get a significant boost in Oman, once both sides reach a comprehensive free trade agreement.

Currently, over 80 per cent of its goods enter Oman at an average of 5 per cent import duties, a GTRI report

has said. Oman's import duty ranges from 0 to 100 per cent, along with the existence of specific duties.

A duty of 100 per cent is applicable on specific meats, wines and tobacco products. India already has a similar agreement with another GCC member UAE which came into effect in May 2022. On the imports front, India's merchandise imports from Oman dipped to USD 4.5 billion from USD 7.9 billion in 2022-23. Key imports are petroleum products and urea. These account for over 70 per cent of imports. Other key products are propylene and ethylene polymers, pet coke, gypsum, chemicals, and iron and steel. The bilateral trade stood has declined to USD 8.94 billion in 2023-24 from USD 12.39 billion in 2022-23. India's exports stood at USD 4.42 billion in the last fiscal.

# ITC Chairman rejects 90-hour workweek, advocates for flexible work environment and employee empowerment

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Weighing in on the 90-hour workweek controversy, ITC Ltd Chairman Sanjiv Puri said that it is more important for the workers to be aligned to the grander vision of the company rather than the number of hours put in. Giving an analogy of many workers building a castle, he said, "If you ask a mason what he is doing, he might say he is laying a brick, another might say he is building a wall but some might say he is building a castle. It is that vision that workers should have," he told PTI in an interview. Asked if he is saying that



mean if he would rather not put a number to the work hours at ITC, he said, "We would not do that."

"We would rather like people to be part of the journey (of the company) and feel passionately

involved and kind of feel the urge amongst themselves to make a difference to the enterprise. That's how we look at it". The cigarettes-to-consumer goods conglomerate allows a flexible work environment, including work from home on two days every week, he said. ITC, he said, provides a lot of flexibility in working. "Also two days a week, you can work from home," he said. "So it's not so much about, you know, really monitoring each individual's number of hours. It's more about enabling individuals, helping them to actualise their potential, and then reviewing what goals

people have achieved. His comments follow a controversy SN Subrahmanyam, Chairman and Managing Director of India's largest engineering and construction company Larsen & Toubro Ltd, sparked on social media when he said employees should work 90-hour a week including on Sundays rather than sit at home. "I regret I am not able to make you work on Sundays," Subrahmanyam said in an undated video of his discussion with staff. "What do you do sitting at home? How long can you stare at your wife, and how long can the wife stare at the husband." The video, which was

circulated widely on social media platforms X and LinkedIn, led to heated debate about work-life balance. "I know that he (Subrahmanyam) has been debated a lot, but let me tell you the philosophy with which you look at it," Puri said. He then went on to explain how empowering the employees with the company vision and goal was important. Vision, values and vitality are what ITC is all about, he added. "So we put a lot of effort in making sure that everybody understands the vision of the enterprise. We use a part of the vision

and want to contribute to making the vision a reality. And we enable vitality by our processes, by the resources we provide, by the freedom to act, that we provide, the empowerment that we provide, which are very different and very clear goals for individuals to achieve, and these are the primary things that we look at," he said. While Subrahmanyam's comments sparked a heated debate about work-life balance in the country, a Larsen & Toubro spokesperson last week said that the chairman's remarks reflect the company's "larger ambition." "We believe this is India's decade, a time demanding

collective dedication and effort to drive progress and realise our shared vision of becoming a developed nation," the company had said in a statement. L&T head's views drew criticism from some peers in the business community. RPG Group Chairman Harsh Goenka said longer working hours was a recipe for burnout and not success. Subrahmanyam's comments followed Infosys co-founder Narayana Murthy's suggestion of a 70-hour workweek and Adani Group chairman Gautam Adani's "biwi bhaag jayegi (wife will run away)" remark if one spent more than eight hours at home.

# Tanisha, Dhruv revive India's hopes in mixed doubles with strong performances

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The rising duo of Tanisha Crasto and Dhruv Kapila have sparked renewed hope for India in mixed doubles badminton with a series of strong performances while enjoying every bit of their journey together.

Before the two joined hands post the Paris Olympics, Jwala Gutta and V Diju were India's best mixed doubles pair, achieving a career-high world ranking of six. Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Ashwini Ponnappa also made significant strides before parting ways, with the former focusing on men's doubles alongside Chirag Shetty.

"We played a couple of tournaments before the Olympics and saw a lot of potential in this partnership. I think it was a good decision for both of us to start this journey together," Tanisha told PTI.

"Dhruv is a very talented mixed

doubles player. He has a great understanding of the game, and I enjoy playing upfront. It's a combination that works well and makes us a dangerous pair."

Tanisha and Dhruv on Tuesday progressed to the second round of the India Open Super 750 tournament with a 8-21 21-19 21-17 win over Chinese Taipei's Chen Cheng Kuan and Hsu Yin-Hui.

Interestingly, Tanisha, along with Ishaan Bhatnagar, had made a serious push for the Paris Olympics before an unfortunate injury derailed their plans.

"Sometimes, setbacks lead to better opportunities. Mixed doubles is my main focus now. I'm not sure how long Ashwini will continue playing, so I'm fully focused on this event," said Tanisha, who competed in the Paris Games last summer.

The duo had finished runner-up at Syed Modi Super 300 tournament last December and climbed 13 places to reach world



number 56. They also reached the semifinals of couple of Super 100 events in Vietnam and Guwahati last year.

Both Tanisha and Dhruv are seasoned players with notable success at the highest level, albeit with different partners in women's and men's doubles.

Dhruv, known for his mixed doubles style even in his junior days, initially played men's doubles with MR Arjun, with some success.

However, an injury to Arjun led Dhruv to refocus on mixed doubles.

"I wasn't fully into mixed doubles initially because I didn't have a partner, and everyone else was already paired up. Arjun and I were playing well, but eventually, I decided to concentrate on one discipline," Dhruv said.

"Unfortunately, Arjun got injured, but he's fine now and playing with Vishnu."

The return of renowned Malaysian coach Tan Kim Her

has further boosted their confidence.

"He's been a great help to both Dhruv and me," Tanisha said.

"He understands our weaknesses and helps us work on them together. It's very comfortable talking to him, and he helps us refine our game, both individually and as a pair. It's been really beneficial for us."

As for filling the void left by Jwala-Diju, both Tanisha and Dhruv are cautious but optimistic.

"We need to improve further. We can't set expectations too high just yet," Dhruv said.

"Our focus is on this year. We're taking it step by step -- starting with performing well in Super 500 and 700 events."

"We aim to reach the quarter-finals and semi-finals. We're not there yet, but we're learning from every tournament, and our short-term goal is continuous improvement over the next few months."



## Canada football appoints former England captain Casey Stoney as head women's coach

PTI ■ OTTAWA

Former England captain Casey Stoney said she's confident she can move Canada past the drone spying scandal that shook the women's national team at the Olympics last summer.

Stoney was named head coach of Canada's women on Monday. She signed a three-year contract with Canada Soccer that runs through the 2027 Women's World Cup, with an option for 2028.

Stoney takes over the Canadian team from Bev Priestman, who was fired in the wake of a drone surveillance scandal at last year's Olympics.

"It's about now what we can do moving forward, how we can improve the team," Stoney said. "The team's done fantastic. I'm here to just support, make it better and make sure that the players are completely focused on what their job is, which is to win football matches."

Stoney will formally take over Canada ahead of next month's Pinatar Cup in Spain.

She most recently coached the San Diego Wave in the National Women's Soccer League and was named the league's Coach of the Year in 2022, the team's inaugural season. She was dismissed by the Wave last June in the midst of a seven-game losing streak.

Kevin Blue, Canada Soccer CEO and general secretary, said the federation is

committed to learning from the past so that mistakes aren't made going forward.

"This sort of humble approach about understanding what happened and learning from it and then continuing a agenda of change and reform is something that the federation is committed to," Blue said in a conference call with reporters Monday afternoon.

"Hopefully bringing in people obviously like Casey, who is a world class coach with a strong values and character, is an example of what we're trying to do."

Stoney appeared in 130 games for England as a player and was also captain of the Britain squad at the 2012 London Olympics.

She played in three World Cups for England and won the bronze medal at the 2015 tournament in Canada. She also played in three Women's European Championships.

"I think the fact that I played 18 years internationally really helps me with the players. I understand some of the things they've been through, some of the things they've faced. I've faced them in my own career," Stoney said.

"I said to the players on Saturday morning, 'I'm a players' coach,' but I have trust in Kevin and the way he's leading this organization. I know that they've been through a troubled past, but I wouldn't have taken this job if I wasn't confident that it was moving in the right direction."

## Ratchanok Intanon eyes Asian Games medal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Once a formidable force in world badminton, star Thai shuttler Ratchanok Intanon believes her on-court wizardry and handwork is a "god's gift" and she will continue to nurture her skills despite the challenges that come with aging.

With the years catching up, Intanon's focus has shifted towards staying fit. She is eyeing a medal at the Asian Games and a spot in the top-8 of the world rankings.

Intanon is part of a golden generation of players, including PV Sindhu, Carolina Marin, and Tai Tzu Ying, all of whom are in the twilight of their careers but are trying to find a second wind.

The 29-year-old, a 2013 world champion, has faced setbacks in recent years, but her resilience shines through. After struggling for form, she marked a solid it and then continuing the semifinals of the Malaysia Open—her first appearance at a Super 1000 event since June 2023.

On Tuesday, Intanon showed she's still a force to be reckoned with, cruising into



the second round of the India Open Super 750 with a convincing 21-13, 21-15 win over Japan's Nozomi Okuhara, who herself is recovering from an injury and searching for past glory.

"I failed in the Olympic Games, but I have to rise again," Intanon admitted, reflecting on her quarterfinal exit from the Paris Olympics.

"I try not to think too much and just focus on getting back to my fitness. I know it's hard, especially as I get older with each passing year. But I do my best to take care of myself," she told PTI.

"I trust my technical skills and my handwork, and I push harder to improve my fitness. Since last week, it's

been getting better, and I'm happy with my performance now."

I still feel like I'm 18

While Intanon might be in the final stretch of her illustrious career, her approach to the sport remains youthful.

"Everything feels different now," she says.

"Badminton is something I've been playing since I was very young, so it becomes automatic. But the mental side also requires training, and for me, I put extra focus on my fitness. As it improves, my handwork becomes automatic again." I still feel young, like I'm 18 years old. I know all the other players are strong, but I try to change

my mindset and not think I'm too old or too slow. If I want to keep playing, I have to push harder and aim to get back into the top-8. That's my goal for this year."

Her immediate focus is the Asian Games, where she is determined to bag her first individual medal.

"I'm mainly focused on the next two years because my target is the Asian Games. I want to achieve a medal there, that's my main goal. As for the next Olympic Games, I'm unsure about my fitness, but I'll keep working hard and taking care of myself," she shared.

While the younger generation is fast emerging, Intanon believes experience still gives them an edge.

"It depends on mentality and whether you feel ready. If you want to continue, you have to give it 100%. I don't want to just play without a goal. I'm aiming to get back to the top," she said.

"My friends, like Tai Tzu or Sindhu, are also recovering. Carolina Marin is still in her recovery phase, so I hope they all get better, and we can continue playing against each other. That would be very exciting for all of us," she added.



## Some Paris Olympic athletes ask for medals to be replaced after quickly deteriorating

PTI ■ PARIS

Some of the medals from the Paris Olympics seem to be quickly losing their shine. The French mint told The Associated Press on Tuesday that it is replacing a number of medals from the 2024 Paris Games and Paralympics after athletes complained that they have already deteriorated — with some posting pictures on social media.

The Monnaie de Paris declined to say how many medals have been returned, but French website La Lettre put the number at over 100.

Contacted by the AP, the French Olympic committee and the IOC also would not reveal figures.

In total, the French mint produced 5,084 medals for the Paris Olympic and Paralympic Games.

"The Monnaie de Paris has taken the issue of damaged medals very seriously since the first exchange requests in August, and has mobilized its internal teams," the French mint said.

"Since then, the company has modified and optimized its relative varnishing process. The Monnaie de Paris will replace all damaged medals at the athletes' request during the first quarter of 2025."

Parisian jewelry house Chaumet designed the medals, which were part of the Games' lasting legacy. A hexagonal, polished chunk of iron taken from the iconic Eiffel Tower was embedded in each gold, silver and bronze medal.

But concerns about their quality emerged before the Games had even ended last summer when American skateboarder Nyjah Huston posted a video showing how quickly his bronze medal had deteriorated. Many other athletes have since also complained.

French swimmers Yohann Ndoye-Brouard and Clément Secchi recently posted images of their medals on social media, describing them as looking like "crocodile skin," or dating back to 1924.

The IOC told the AP that Paris organizers are in contact with the national Olympic committees of the athletes concerned. It confirmed that the replacement process will start in the coming weeks, and that the French mint is working with Paris organizers to understand the circumstances and cause of any damage.

"Damaged medals will be systematically replaced by the Monnaie de Paris and engraved in an identical way to the originals," the IOC said.

The iron pieces embedded in the center of the Olympic medals each weigh 18 grams (about two-thirds of an ounce).

They were cut from girders and other bits that were swapped out of the Eiffel Tower during renovations and stored for safekeeping, according to Joachim Roncin, head of design at the Paris Games organizing committee.

## Bopanna, Barrientos make first-round exit from Australian Open men's doubles event

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Former world number one Rohan Bopanna and his new Colombian partner Nicolas Barrientos bowed out of the Australian Open men's doubles event with an opening-round loss to the Spanish team of Pedro Martinez and Jaume Munar here on Tuesday.

Bopanna and Barrientos went down 5-7, 6-7 (5) in a match that lasted close to two hours.

The 14th-seeded Indo-Colombian pair began on a promising note but faltered in crucial moments, allowing the Spaniards to capitalise and secure victory.

Bopanna and Barrientos got off to a solid start, holding serve comfortably in the initial games.

However, the Spanish pair



gradually gained momentum, showcasing consistency from the baseline and tactical net play.

The decisive moment came late in the set when Martinez and Munar earned a crucial break to take the opener.

In a roller-coaster second set, both the pairs pushed each

other to the limit.

Martinez and Munar first cruised to a 5-3 lead and appeared poised to close out the match while serving for it.

However, Bopanna and Barrientos staged a spirited fightback, breaking their opponents' serve to level the score at 5-5.

The set ultimately went to a tie-break in which the Spaniards kept their composure, edging past the 14th seeds 7-5 to clinch the match.

The 44-year-old Indian had won the 2024 edition with his Australian partner Matthew Ebden. That historic victory made Bopanna, who was 43 at that time, the oldest man in the Open Era to win a Grand Slam title.

However, the Bopanna-Ebden partnership concluded after the Turin ATP Finals in November last year leading to his new pairing with Barrientos.

Earlier, India's top ranked singles player Sumit Nagal also made a first-round exit, losing to world No.25 Tomas Machac of the Czech Republic in straight sets on Monday.

# Indian community playing big role in popularising kho kho in England

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

For teenage kho kho players from England, Jaian Saunders and Anya Shah, the traditional Indian sport is not just a means to win medals and popularise the game back home but also a way to remain connected to their roots here.

Indian-origin players Jaian and Anya are part of the 30-member England contingent touring India for the Kho Kho World Cup and say their adopted country has a competitive structure to rival India, a powerhouse of the sport.

Jaian, 16, took up the sport because of his grounding in athletics. An accomplished 200m runner, he finished fourth in the U17 age-group national athletics championship and missed making the England team.

But kho kho provided him another opportunity to remain connected with sports.

"I developed a liking for kho kho through my Oshwal community. It

gave me the opportunity to play in the nationals. I made it to the England trials from the nationals, following which I was scouted by coaches.

"I think, my sporty background, being an athlete and a sprinter, helped me in kho kho," said the teenager, proudly informing that his team had beaten Germany in the opening match of the World Cup at the IG Stadium.

Jaian, whose grandparents moved to the UK from Gujarat, said England has a well-established structure, which is helping kho kho prosper.

He said that the sport is played in almost all the top universities in the country and players, predominantly Indians, number in thousands.

"We have a very competitive structure. We have communities playing the sport in almost every part of England... London, Leicester, to name a few."

Jaian comes from the Oshwal community, which has 10 players



in the World Cup contingent.

"The Kho Kho Federation of England hosts the nationals once a year in September. From there we

get scouted for the England trials and the deserving players are then selected to the England team," said Jaian, adding that the team

comprises mostly of Indians and Nepalese settled in England, besides some English players as well.

"I suppose 70 percent of the players are Indian origin and the rest are from different backgrounds. But they are all born in England," said Jaian, whose younger sister too wants to play kho kho competitively.

Anya stated playing kho kho when she was nine years old and said that at 17 she feels she has been playing for ages.

"I am 17 years old now. I took up the sport when I was nine, so have been playing it for quite some time," said Anya, whose team beat Australia in the World Cup opener.

"I got inspired seeing my Indian friends playing the sport in the community. I thought let's give it a try and I really enjoyed it. My parent and grand parents moved to England from Jamnagar in Gujarat," said Anya, who too is from the Oshwal community and got selected into the England side through the national trials.

While she cannot put a number on how many kho kho players are

there in England, but said they would be in thousands.

"I have no idea how many women play kho kho in the country but we play the game all over the country. It could be in thousands. It is community and university-based. Even the top five universities in the UK play kho kho," she said.

One of the major reasons for the sport becoming popular in England is the ease of playing it, said Anya.

"It's easy, it's a fun game with very little equipment required. Besides, social media has played a huge role in popularising it. We are the first national kho kho team from England and we feel we are the big stating names," said the Economics and Physical Education student.

She hoped that with kho kho's popularity growing in the country, the country will have better equipment in future.

"We are not there yet, but hopefully next year we will have that equipment."

# Bumrah named ICC Men's Player of Month for December 2024

PTI ■ DUBAI

India pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah was on Tuesday named ICC Men's Player of the Month for December 2024 after his sensational performance during the recent tour of Australia for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. Leading India's attack single-handedly, Bumrah relentlessly kept Australian batsmen under intense pressure, claiming 22 wickets in three Tests in December last year at an outstanding average of 14.22. He ended with 32 wickets in the five-match series which concluded on January 5. The first match was played in November. His match-winning contributions included a nine-wicket haul in Brisbane and a five-wicket display in Melbourne as he edged out Australian skipper Pat Cummins and South African Dane Paterson for the award, stated the ICC. He also reached a significant milestone, becoming the first



bowler to take 200 Test wickets at an average below 20.

Bumrah's brilliance was evident from the very start, with a standout performance

in Adelaide. His four-wicket haul was instrumental in minimising Australia's lead in

the first innings, keeping India within striking distance.

He followed this up with a sensational display in Brisbane, where his six wickets in the first innings dismantled Australia's batting order. Bumrah added three more scalps in the second innings to complete a nine-wicket match haul. His efforts ensured the rain-affected match ended in a draw, keeping India alive in the series. The Boxing Day Test in Melbourne saw Bumrah deliver yet another stellar performance. He picked up four wickets in the first innings, providing a rare bright spot in an otherwise lacklustre bowling effort by the Indian team. He then secured a five-wicket haul in the second innings, bowling Australia out for 234. Despite his heroics, India's batting faltered, resulting in a 184-run defeat. India lost the Border-Gavaskar Trophy 1-3. In a challenging tour for the Indian team, Bumrah emerged as the lone warrior, earning him the Player of the Series Award.



## Real Kashmir FC hold fort against Sreenidi Deccan FC

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

Down to 10 men in the very first minute of the match, Real Kashmir FC held fort to settle for a 2-2 draw with Sreenidi Deccan FC in a crucial I-League clash that had everything from penalties and goals to a red card here on Tuesday. Sreenidi Deccan took the lead twice in the match through Fayal Shayesteh (2nd minute) and Angel Orelie (15th) only to see Real Kashmir's Paulo Cezar (4th) and Muhammad Hammad (22nd) scoring timely equalisers. Real Kashmir's Cameroonian recruit Aminou Bouba was shown the red card in less than a minute. The draw meant Real Kashmir occupy the eighth spot in the table with 10 points from eight games. Sreenidi Deccan, on the other hand, also have the same number of points after playing an identical number of matches but they see themselves at ninth spot because of an inferior goal difference. The match got off to an intense start when Bouba was dismissed for a foul inside the penalty area, leading to Shayesteh converting a penalty in the second minute to put Sreenidi Deccan ahead. Contrary to expectations, the 10-man Real Kashmir side did not retreat but responded swiftly. In the fourth minute, a cleverly taken short corner

allowed Lalramsanga to assist Cezar, whose precise header restored parity. Undeterred by the setback, Sreenidi Deccan regained the lead in the 15th minute. Following a series of passes that dissected the Kashmir defence, Orelie found himself with space to unleash a fierce shot that found the net, demonstrating the attacking prowess of the Deccan Warriors. The persistent spirit of Real Kashmir shone through yet again as they equalised for the second time in the 22nd minute. From a well-placed Lalramsanga free-kick, the Sreenidi Deccan keeper managed only a partial clearance, and Hammad was on hand to pounce on the rebound, driving the ball home to level the scores. As the match progressed, both teams had opportunities to clinch the win. Sreenidi Deccan, inspired by their recent comeback victory against Aizawl FC, pushed hard. Vanlalremdika struck the woodwork, and Munoz's header was brilliantly saved by the Real Kashmir goalkeeper, who also denied Orelie's long-range effort that rattled the crossbar. Despite playing with a man less for virtually the entire match, Real Kashmir's defence stood resilient, managing to hold off Sreenidi Deccan's late surges to ensure the points were shared.

## SA20: MI Cape Town beats Paarl Royals



PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

MI Cape Town returned to winning ways with a comprehensive 33-run victory over neighbours Paarl Royals in their first home match of the season in Betway SA20 here. Newlands, which was filled to capacity for MI Cape Town's first home game of Season 3, delivered a near-perfect all-round performance to clinch the win here on Monday. New signing Reeza Hendricks led the way with the bat with his first half-century for home side. His 59 off 37 balls provided the foundation for

the team to post a formidable 172/7. Hendricks was ably supported by Rassie van der Dussen (43 off 33 balls). The pair shared a 78-run partnership off 54 balls before the in-form Delano Potgieter smashed another 18-ball 29 to provide the late innings momentum. The Royals' chase began positively with Joe Root (26) and Luan-dre Pretorius (26) smashing 38 runs in just the three overs. However, the introduction of Kagiso Rabada into the attack reaped immediate rewards with the fast bowler dismissing both Root and Pretorius within a couple of overs of each other. Both were wicket maiden overs from Rabada. The Royals never recovered from the double blow with MI Cape Town's spin twins George Linde and Rashid Khan adding to their woes.

## 10,000-run milestone is different beast and played on my mind during India series: Smith

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Star Australian batter Steve Smith has described the elusive 10,000-run mark in Tests as a "different beast" after falling just one run short of touching it at his home ground of Sydney in the fifth and final game against India during which the milestone weighed heavily on his mind. Smith needed 38 runs to achieve the landmark but managed 37 during the game that Australia won by six wickets to reclaim the Border-Gavaskar Trophy after more than a decade. "I don't read too much into stats and stuff, but, 10,000 is a bit of a different beast," Smith told 'SEN 1170 Breakfast'. "It probably was (on my mind), to be honest. Normally I sort of don't buy



into any of that stuff, but pre-game, I was doing lots of media because I was approaching that mark." The 'number 38' played on his mind in such a way that Smith joked he would forever associate it with Josh Hazlewood, whose jersey number is 38. "I knew I needed 38, and all I could actually picture trying

to sleep at night was the back of Josh Hazlewood's shirt because he's number 38 (laughs). It's strange like that, isn't it? "It was probably playing on my mind more than any other game that I've played, to be honest. "But, it is what it is, fortunately, we were able to win that game in the end, so

it didn't really matter," he said. Australia will next tour Sri Lanka for a two-match Test series beginning in Galle on January 29 and Smith hopes to do it on day one of the series itself if Australia get to bat first. "It would have been great to have been able to do it in Sydney in front of all my friends and family because you're joining a pretty elite group there I suppose, but it wasn't to be. "As a kid, I never would have dreamt of that, I dreamt to play cricket for Australia and have a career playing for Australia, but to have been able to get to this mark, it's a dream come true in a way," he added. Smith would become the 15th overall and only fourth Australian Test player ever to achieve the landmark.

# India aim for clean sweep in final women's ODI vs Ireland

PTI ■ RAJKOT

A dominant India will fancy their chances of completing a clean sweep of the women's ODI series against Ireland in the third and final match here on Wednesday, having recorded two convincing wins in the preceding games. With another power-packed batting performance, the Indian team will be aiming to continue their impressive run and finish on a high note. Pratika Rawal, after scoring her third half-century in just four innings, will be eager to translate her start into a maiden hundred. Her blistering opening partnerships with skipper Smriti Mandhana have been the biggest takeaway of the series. The duo added 156 runs for the first wicket in their



previous outing, marking their third century-plus stand in five innings. Mandhana's consistency at the top continues to be a major highlight for India as the flamboyant left-hander has carried on her form across formats from the West Indies series. Harleen Deol, who initially struggled for momentum, found her rhythm later in the innings, scoring an

important 89. Thanks to Jemimah Rodrigues, who displayed patience and composure before accelerating in the final stages of the innings, India smashed their highest-ever ODI total of 370/5 in the last game. Promoted to No. 4 in Harmanpreet Kaur's absence, Rodrigues showed maturity after getting a reprieve on 34, and it took her just 28 balls to

reach her second fifty. "It was an added responsibility... Initially I showed a lot of patience, which was again a big positive for me because it was important for me to spend time there to get those runs," Rodrigues said. "And you know, I was getting

the runs. But I was not spending enough time to make it bigger. So I was happy I could do that today." Seasoned batter Tejal Hasanbis also made a fine comeback with an unbeaten fifty in the opening ODI. In the absence of big hitters like Shafali Verma and Kaur,

who has been rested, the series also highlighted the performance of the emerging talents with Pratika making the most of it. India's bowling though has raised some concerns, as the team has struggled to take wickets consistently in home conditions and allowed

Ireland to post 254/7 in pursuit of 371. While India are missing Renuka Singh, the injury to Pooja Vastrakar has compounded their misery. Deepti Sharma, who played

in her 100th ODI in the last match, has been the standout bowler with four wickets at 19.50, while the likes of Priya Mishra, Sayali Satghare, Titus Sadhu have not been able to impress.

## Struggling Rohit trains with Mumbai team ahead of Ranji resumption

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Embattled India captain Rohit Sharma practised with the Mumbai team here on Tuesday as the side geared up for the resumption of Ranji Trophy from January 23 but there was no clarity on whether he would play for the side in its upcoming fixture. The 37-year-old, who endured a horror run with the bat in the national team's tour of Australia recently, took part in a morning practice session which lasted a couple of hours at the Wankhede stadium here. "As is the process and routine owing to the gaps between tournaments, the management speaks with the players about their availability," a Mumbai Cricket Association official told PTI. "Rohit will also be approached around the time of selection for the Ranji Trophy game against Jammu



and Kashmir from January 23," he added when asked about Rohit's availability for the clash. Rohit batted with Mumbai stalwart and his India teammate Ajinkya Rahane during the session. His participation in the match may not be clear yet but it is learnt that Rohit will continue to practice with the team. The past few weeks have been tumultuous for Rohit. He managed just 31 runs across three Tests during his time Down Under and was forced to drop himself from

the series-deciding fifth and final Test in Sydney due to his poor form. Rohit handed over the leadership duties to Jasprit Bumrah in that game, sparking widespread speculation about his future. However, in an interview to the host broadcaster of the series, Rohit asserted that he was not going anywhere. Despite his future as a red-ball cricketer hanging by a thread, Rohit attended a review meeting on Sunday to assess the team's performance. He was joined by head coach Gautam Gambhir and BCCI's new secretary Devajit Saikia during the deliberations. Mumbai will play their back against J&K at the MCA-BKC ground and the game holds significance as far as advancing to the knockouts is concerned. Rohit last played for Mumbai in a Ranji game way back in 2015 against Uttar Pradesh.

**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA**  
**OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER**  
R.W. (P.H) DIVISION, BHUBANESWAR  
BEHIND ESPLANADE MALL, PO: RASULGARH, BHUBANESWAR, 751010  
TEL: (0674)2301801, E-MAIL: EERWPHDIVN\_BBSR@REDIFFMAIL.COM

**e-Procurement Notice for SI,SD AND WS to Building works**  
e Procurement Notice No. 15 / 2024-25

The Superintending Engineer, R.W. (PH) Division, Bhubaneswar on behalf of Governor of Odisha invites percentage rate bids in single cover system through e-procurement for different work as per Annexure. The bid should be submitted on-line in the website [www.tendersodisha.gov.in](http://www.tendersodisha.gov.in) by eligible class of contractors of Government of Odisha or of equivalent class of other State Government / Railways / CPWD / MES. The bidders should have the necessary Portal Enrolment (With his own Digital Signature certificate)

Name of the work	SI,SD AND WS to Building Works. ( As per Annexure-1)
Estimated cost	Rs 4.06 lakhs to Rs 13.35 lakhs (approximately)
No. of Works	38 Nos. (Thirty eight)
Tender Paper Cost	Rs. 2000.00 to Rs 6000.00 (Non-refundable)
Class of Contractors	'D' & 'C'
Date & Time of Availability of Bid document in portal	Dt. 18.01.2025 from 11.00 A.M.
Date of seeking clarification	During office hours from dt. 18.01.2025 to 25.01.2025.
Last date & time of receipt of Bids through online	Dt. 27.01.2025 upto 05.00 P.M.
Opening of Bid document	Dt. 28.01.2025 at 11.00 A.M.
Digital signature certificate	The bidder must possess a compatible digital signature certificate

Further details can be seen in the bidding documents which is available in the e-procurement portal, subsequent corrigendum if required shall be appeared in the web site. Authority reserves the right to reject any or all tenders without assigning any reason thereof.

(Er. Biraja Prasad Pradhan)  
Superintending Engineer  
R.W. (PH) Division, Bhubaneswar

OIPR-25183/1100152425

**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA**  
**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER**  
0-1230 RURAL WORKS DIVISION: RAYAGADA

**E-Procurement Notice**  
Bid Identification No: EERWRGD - Online - 06/2024-25  
Date: 10.01.2025

No- 255

No.	Name of the Work	Total No. of Works	Estimated Cost	Class of Contractor	Time of Completion	Mode of submission of tender	Other details
1	Maintenance of Road works for the year 2024-25.	08 Nos (Percentage rate tender)	Varies from 24.14 lakhs to 47.75 lakhs	"C", "B"	Specified in DTCN.	Tender should be submitted only in online <a href="https://www.tendersodisha.gov.in">https://www.tendersodisha.gov.in</a>	Detailed tender condition specified in DTCN.

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	No. of works	Availability of Tender online for Bidding	Date & Time of opening of tender
1	2	3	4	5
Executive Engineer, Rural Works Division, Rayagada	EERWRGD - Online - 06/2024-25	08 (Eight)Nos	17.01.25 at 11.00 A.M. up to 5.00 P.M.	28.01.2025 to 28.01.2025 at 5.30 P.M.

Further details can be seen from the website: [www.tendersodisha.gov.in](http://www.tendersodisha.gov.in)

OIPR-25072/1100152425

Executive Engineer  
Rural Works Division

**PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF A PERSON ACCUSED IN S.T.C NO.11 OF 2023, AS PER THE ORDER OF THE HON'BLE JUDICIAL MAGISTRATE COURT NO.II, USILAMPATTI, MADURAI DISTRICT, TAMIL NADU, DATED 06.09.2024.**

Whereas complaint has been made before the Hon'ble Judicial Magistrate Court No.II, Usilampatti, Madurai District., that 1. M/s. Braj Mining Corporation Private Ltd and Its Directors Mr.Jaswant Singh and Mr. Vivek Singh having office at Po-Joda Hudi Sahi Municipality, Keonjihar District, Odisha State -758034 have committed the offences punishable under section 138 & 142 of NEGOTIABLE INSTRUMENT ACT, and on satisfaction that the above Accused persons has absconded or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant, proclamation is hereby made that the above Accused Persons are required to appear at Hon'ble Judicial Magistrate No.II, Usilampatti, Madurai District, Tamil Nadu., to answer the said complaint on the 20th day of February, 2025.

Dated this 10th day of January, 2025  
**ADVOCATE, R.SHANKAR GANESH No.169, LAW CHAMBERS, MADRAS HIGH COURT OF MADURAI BENCH, MADURAI DISTRICT, TAMIL NADU.**

**PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF A PERSON ACCUSED IN S.T.C NO.12 OF 2023, AS PER THE ORDER OF THE HON'BLE JUDICIAL MAGISTRATE COURT NO.II, USILAMPATTI, MADURAI DISTRICT, TAMIL NADU, DATED 06.09.2024.**

Whereas complaint has been made before the Hon'ble Judicial Magistrate Court No.II, Usilampatti, Madurai District., that 1. M/s. Braj Mining Corporation Private Ltd and Its Directors Mr.Jaswant Singh and Mr. Vivek Singh having office at Po-Joda Hudi Sahi Municipality, Keonjihar District, Odisha State -758034 have committed the offences punishable under section 138 & 142 of NEGOTIABLE INSTRUMENT ACT, and on satisfaction that the above Accused persons has absconded or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant, proclamation is hereby made that the above Accused Persons are required to appear at Hon'ble Judicial Magistrate No.II, Usilampatti, Madurai District, Tamil Nadu., to answer the said complaint on the 20th day of February, 2025.

Dated this 10th day of January, 2025  
**ADVOCATE, R.SHANKAR GANESH No.169, LAW CHAMBERS, MADRAS HIGH COURT OF MADURAI BENCH, MADURAI DISTRICT, TAMIL NADU.**

**PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF A PERSON ACCUSED IN S.T.C NO.13 OF 2023, AS PER THE ORDER OF THE HON'BLE JUDICIAL MAGISTRATE COURT NO.II, USILAMPATTI, MADURAI DISTRICT, TAMIL NADU, DATED 06.09.2024.**

Whereas complaint has been made before the Hon'ble Judicial Magistrate Court No.II, Usilampatti, Madurai District., that 1. M/s. Braj Mining Corporation Private Ltd and Its Directors Mr.Jaswant Singh and Mr. Vivek Singh having office at Po-Joda Hudi Sahi Municipality, Keonjihar District, Odisha State -758034 have committed the offences punishable under section 138 & 142 of NEGOTIABLE INSTRUMENT ACT, and on satisfaction that the above Accused persons has absconded or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant, proclamation is hereby made that the above Accused Persons are required to appear at Hon'ble Judicial Magistrate No.II, Usilampatti, Madurai District, Tamil Nadu., to answer the said complaint on the 20th day of February, 2025.

Dated this 10th day of January, 2025  
**ADVOCATE, R.SHANKAR GANESH No.169, LAW CHAMBERS, MADRAS HIGH COURT OF MADURAI BENCH, MADURAI DISTRICT, TAMIL NADU.**

**PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF A PERSON ACCUSED IN S.T.C NO.14 OF 2023, AS PER THE ORDER OF THE HON'BLE JUDICIAL MAGISTRATE COURT NO.II, USILAMPATTI, MADURAI DISTRICT, TAMIL NADU, DATED 06.09.2024.**

Whereas complaint has been made before the Hon'ble Judicial Magistrate Court No.II, Usilampatti, Madurai District., that 1. M/s. Braj Mining Corporation Private Ltd and Its Directors Mr.Jaswant Singh and Mr. Vivek Singh having office at Po-Joda Hudi Sahi Municipality, Keonjihar District, Odisha State -758034 have committed the offences punishable under section 138 & 142 of NEGOTIABLE INSTRUMENT ACT, and on satisfaction that the above Accused persons has absconded or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant, proclamation is hereby made that the above Accused Persons are required to appear at Hon'ble Judicial Magistrate No.II, Usilampatti, Madurai District, Tamil Nadu., to answer the said complaint on the 20th day of February, 2025.

Dated this 10th day of January, 2025  
**ADVOCATE, R.SHANKAR GANESH No.169, LAW CHAMBERS, MADRAS HIGH COURT OF MADURAI BENCH, MADURAI DISTRICT, TAMIL NADU.**

**PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF A PERSON ACCUSED IN S.T.C NO.15 OF 2023, AS PER THE ORDER OF THE HON'BLE JUDICIAL MAGISTRATE COURT NO.II, USILAMPATTI, MADURAI DISTRICT, TAMIL NADU, DATED 06.09.2024.**

Whereas complaint has been made before the Hon'ble Judicial Magistrate Court No.II, Usilampatti, Madurai District., that 1. M/s. Braj Mining Corporation Private Ltd and Its Directors Mr.Jaswant Singh and Mr. Vivek Singh having office at Po-Joda Hudi Sahi Municipality, Keonjihar District, Odisha State -758034 have committed the offences punishable under section 138 & 142 of NEGOTIABLE INSTRUMENT ACT, and on satisfaction that the above Accused persons has absconded or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant, proclamation is hereby made that the above Accused Persons are required to appear at Hon'ble Judicial Magistrate No.II, Usilampatti, Madurai District, Tamil Nadu., to answer the said complaint on the 20th day of February, 2025.

Dated this 10th day of January, 2025  
**ADVOCATE, R.SHANKAR GANESH No.169, LAW CHAMBERS, MADRAS HIGH COURT OF MADURAI BENCH, MADURAI DISTRICT, TAMIL NADU.**