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MURDEROUS ATTACK ON SAIF ALI KHAN

PN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Bollywood actor Saif Ali Khan sustained six stab injuries, including one to his spine, in a knife attack by an unidentified intruder. The attack is suspected to have been part of a burglary attempt at his 12th-floor residence in a posh building in Bandra (West), north-west Mumbai, in the early hours of Thursday. Shortly after the attack, a bleeding Saif was rushed to the nearby Lilavati Hospital, where he underwent surgery to remove the knife and address the leaking spinal fluid. "The actor was brought to our hospital with six injuries, two of which were deep. We performed surgery near his spine and removed a 2.5-inch piece of the knife from the spine," said Dr. Niraj Uttamani, the Chief Operating Officer of Lilavati Hospital. Dr. Nitin Dange, a colleague at the same hospital, elaborated: "The actor sustained a major injury to his thoracic spinal cord due to the knife piercing his spine. We performed surgery to remove the knife and plug the leaking spinal fluid. We also treated two other deep wounds—one on his left hand and another on his neck. He is completely stable now and recovering well. He is out of danger." Known for his roles in films like Dil Chahta Hai, Kal Ho



Bollywood actor Kareena Kapoor at the Lilavati Hospital where actor Saif Ali Khan was admitted after he was injured in an attack by an intruder with a knife, in Mumbai

Naa Ho, Omkara, Parineeta, and Hum Tum, the 54-year-old Saif is the son of legendary cricketer Mansoor Ali Khan Pataudi, popularly known as Tiger Pataudi, and actress Sharmila Tagore. He is also the 10th Nawab of Pataudi. "Saif Ali Khan has come out of surgery and is out of danger. He is currently in recovery, and doctors are monitoring his progress. All family members are safe, and the police are investigating the incident. We would like to thank Dr. Niraj Uttamani, Dr. Nitin Dange, Dr. Leena Jain, and the team at Lilavati Hospital. We also thank all his fans and well-wishers for their

prayers and support during this time," Saif's family said in a statement issued to the media. The incident took place around 2 a.m. at the 12th-floor flat of Saif's "Satguru Sharan" building, located at the junction of 29th and 24th Roads in Bandra (W). Saif and his family occupy the top four floors of the 12-storey building. A housemaid, identified as Eliyama Phillippe alias Lima, was the first to spot the intruder and raised an alarm, prompting Saif to rush out of his bedroom. Upon seeing the actor, the knife-wielding intruder, who is suspected to have broken into the house

for a burglary, pounced on him. The actor attempted to resist, resulting in a scuffle. The intruder stabbed Saif multiple times before fleeing the scene. Taking the attack seriously, the Mumbai police formed seven teams to investigate the incident and arrest the assailant. Former encounter specialist Daya Nayak is one of the key investigators. Investigators are reviewing CCTV footage from the "Satguru Sharan" building and its vicinity to determine how the intruder gained access to Saif's flat. **Continued on page 2**
Developments on page 2

Hindenberg winds up political turmoil

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA/PTI ■ NEW DELHI/ WASHINGTON

Hindenberg Research, the US investment research firm known for short-selling, which primarily targeted Indian billionaire Gautam Adani and created a flutter in the Indian political system by holding hostage the functioning of the Parliament for multiple sessions in last three years, has shut down its operations. Announcement of the closure by Hindenberg Research founder Nate Anderson, who started in 2017, came just days before Donald Trump's inauguration as the new President of the United States. Adani Group CFO Jughesinder Robbie Singh in a cryptic social media post: "Kitne Ghazi Aaye, Kitne Ghazi Gaye". Adani group always denied the allegations. The announcement of disband of Hindenberg once again ignited political duel between the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The Congress said its closure does not mean a clean chit for "Modani" and asserted that without a Joint Parliamentary Committee, the "already-compromised" institutions of the Indian state will continue to act only to protect the powerful. The BJP alleged that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is in the "complete grip" of the thinking process of "urban naxals", and asked if he has now got the "contract" for the Hindenberg Research's closed "shop". Former Union minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said US-based short-selling firm Hindenberg Research "shut its shop" the day the Congress inaugurated its new headquarters building. The sudden and surprising announcement by Anderson comes within days of a Republican Congressman, a member of the House Judiciary Committee, asking the Department of Justice to preserve all the documents and communications related to the investigations of Adani and his companies. "As I've shared with family, friends and our team since late last year, I have made the decision to disband Hindenberg Research. The plan has been to wind up after we finished the pipeline of ideas we were working on. And as of the last Ponzis cases we just completed and are sharing with regulators, that day is today," Anderson announced according to the PTI from Washington. 40 years old Anderson said he looks forward to taking up hobbies, travelling and spending time with his fiancée and their child, adding



that he has earned enough money to provide for them in the future. BJP said it seems the "shop" of US-based billionaire investor George Soros is also going to close down with new administration under President-elect Donald Trump set to take over. Soros, he said, funds Hindenberg. Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh said the closure of Hindenberg Research does not, in any way, mean a clean chit for Modani." The Hindenberg report of January 2023 proved serious enough to compel the Supreme Court of India to set up an Expert Committee to probe the allegation made in it against the Adani Group "whose prime patron is none other than the present Prime Minister of India", he said in a statement. "However the Hindenberg Report covered only one part of securities laws violations - of the hydra-headed Modani MegaScam. Out of the 100 questions on the Adani Mega Scam that the Congress party had asked of the PM in the Hum Adani ke Hain Kaun (HAHK) series during January-March 2023, only 21 questions related to revelations made in the Hindenberg report," Ramesh said. "The matter goes far deeper. It involves the abuse of Indian foreign policy to enrich the PM's close friends at the expense of the national interest. It involves the misuse of investigative agencies to force Indian businesspersons to divest critical infrastructure assets and help Adani build monopolies in airports, ports, defence and cement," Ramesh alleged. The Swiss Public Prosecutors Office has frozen several Adani-linked bank accounts operated by Chang Chung-Ling and Nasser Ali Shaban Ahli that are "suspected of engaging in illicit activities, including money laundering and embezzlement", Ramesh claimed, citing a Swiss Federal Criminal Court order.

Government to constitute 8th Pay Commission

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday approved setting up the 8th Pay Commission to revise salaries of nearly 50 lakh central government employees and allowances of 65 lakh pensioners. The chairman and two members of the Commission will be appointed soon, I&B Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw told reporters here. "Prime Minister has approved 8th Central Pay Commission for central government employees," the minister said. The term of the 7th Pay Commission will end in 2026. Since 1947, seven Pay Commissions have been constituted, with the last one implemented in 2016. As the 7th Pay Commission's term concludes in 2026, initiating the process in 2025 ensures sufficient time to receive and review recommendations before its completion, the Minister added. He said the setting up of the Pay Commission in 2025 will ensure that its recommendations are received before the completion of the term of the seventh pay panel. **Continued on page 2**

MARKETS

SENSEX 77,042.82 ↑ +0.42%

1 US\$ = 86.56 INR

Ceasefire deal hangs in balance in Gaza

PTI ■ TEL AVIV

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Thursday that a "last-minute crisis" with Hamas was holding up Israeli approval of a long-awaited ceasefire that would pause the fighting in the Gaza Strip and release dozens of hostages. Israeli airstrikes, meanwhile, killed at least 72 people in the war-ravaged territory. Netanyahu began signalling there were issues with the deal just hours after US President Joe Biden and key mediator Qatar announced it was complete. The objection created a dual reality: War-weary Palestinians in Gaza, the relatives of hostages held there and world leaders all welcomed an agreement, expected to begin Sunday, even as Netanyahu said it was not yet finalised. It was not yet clear if Netanyahu's statements merely reflected jockeying to keep his fractious coalition together or whether the deal was at risk. Netanyahu's office said his Cabinet won't meet to approve the deal until Hamas backs down, accusing it of renegeing on parts of the agreement in an attempt to gain further concessions, without elaborating.



Izzat al-Rishq, a senior Hamas official, said the militant group "is committed to the ceasefire agreement, which was announced by the mediators." The deal announced Wednesday would see a scores of hostages held in Gaza released and a pause in fighting with a view to eventually wind down a 15-month war that has destabilised the Middle East and sparked worldwide protests. Hamas triggered the war with its October 7, 2023, cross-border attack into Israel that killed some 1,200 people and took 250 others hostage. Israel responded with a fierce offensive that has killed over 46,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, who do not distinguish between civilians and militants but say women and children make up more than half of those killed. Israel says it has killed over 17,000 fighters, without providing evidence. **Continued on page 2**

Delhi residents suffer fluctuating GRAP restrictions

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Residents of the National Capital have no respite either from the hazardous air pollution or from the sudden revocation and imposition of different stages of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) in the recent past, leaving common people to suffer due to the restrictions imposed. Narrating their ordeal, many question the government's action plan, stating that only ordinary people are harassed by this flip-flopping. The Centre's panel on Delhi-NCR's air quality on Thursday revoked curbs under stage 4 of the GRAP amid dip in pollution levels following its invocation on Wednesday as the Air Quality Index (AQI) in Delhi crossed 400. However, stage 3 of GRAP is still in force which prohibits BS-III and BS-IV vehicle from plying on the roads. Moreover, the invocation happens with immediate effect, leaving many office-goers and regular citizens to face fines repeatedly. People say that the constant removal and imposition of GRAP stages causes significant problems in their daily lives. In several instances, Delhi who book a cab in Delhi before boarding a flight from a different city are left in the



Photo: Ranjan Dimri

lurch after receiving a message that the taxi service they hired a few hours ago has been canceled due to GRAP in the city. "I booked a day-long cab service for an official visit to Delhi and boarded my flight early in the morning. The moment I switched on my mobile network, I received a message from the travel service regretting the cancellation of the service due to GRAP implementation overnight," said Ankit Guleria, a media professional who came to the Capital from Chennai. "I drove to my office in my private car in the morning. In the evening, when I was leaving, I heard that GRAP Stage-IV had been implemented. In such a

WEATHER

AQI 302
MAX 10.3°C(+2.7)
MIN 19.6°C(0)

situation, what can we ordinary citizens do? While this is far from reducing pollution, it creates so much chaos. If I get fined because they implemented it while I am on my way, who will pay for that? What is my fault if they keep switching from one stage to another?" said a 30-year-old woman who uses her private vehicle to commute to and from the office. GRAP Stage-III has been implemented three times since last year, and Stage-IV

was enforced after 22 days. It was last enforced on December 16 last year and withdrawn on December 24. The most recent enforcement of Stage-III was on January 9, and it was withdrawn on January 12. People add that they remain unaware of these implementations, questioning the poor dissemination of such news by the CAQM. "How do they expect us to know or keep track minute by minute of these developments? Do you think ordinary people have so much time to keep reading the news to know if this stage of GRAP has been invoked or that stage has been revoked?" said a 35-year-old office-goer, advising the authorities to focus on effectively spreading these updates so people can be aware and plan accordingly. The city has been seeing Stage-I and Stage-II measures since October 14 and October 21, 2024, respectively. The measures under Stage-I and Stage-II include augmenting public transport to reduce the use of private vehicles, impounding or imposing heavy penalties on vehicles with visible emissions, and enhancing vehicle parking fees to discourage private transport, among other restrictions. **Continued on page 2**



Centre keeps NEET-UG in pen-paper format

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has decided against conducting the medical entrance exam NEET-UG in online mode for now, and announced on Thursday it will continue to be conducted in pen and paper mode. The decision comes after detailed deliberations between education and health ministries on whether to conduct the NEET-UG in pen and paper mode or online mode. "As decided by the National Medical Commission(NMC), the NEET-UG shall be conducted in Pen and paper mode (OMR based) in a single day and shift," a senior National Testing Agency (NTA) official said on

Thursday. The National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) is the largest entrance exam in the country in terms of number of candidates appearing for the test. In 2024, a record more than 24 lakh candidates took the exam. The NTA conducts the NEET every year for admission into medical colleges. A total of 1,08,000 seats are available for MBBS course. Of the seats available for the MBBS course, approximately 56,000 are in government hospitals and about 52,000 in private colleges. Admissions to undergraduate courses in Dentistry, Ayurveda, Unani, and Siddha also utilise the results of the NEET for admission. **Continued on page 2**

India joins US, Russia, China with satellite docking success

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BENGALURU

In a major boost to India's ambitious future space missions, ISRO on Thursday successfully performed the docking of satellites as part of the Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX) and announced that post docking, control of two satellites as a single object was also achieved. "India docked its name in space history! Good Morning India ISRO's SpaDeX mission accomplishes historic docking success. Proud to witness this moment!", ISRO said in a social media post. With the successful docking of satellites — Chaser and Target — India has become the fourth country after the US, Russia and China to accomplish the technological feat. In space, docking technology is essential when multiple rocket launches are required to achieve common mission objectives.



The docking experiment is crucial for the smooth conduct of the country's ambitious future missions, including Chandrayaan-4, Gaganyaan, setting up a space station and landing an astronaut on the moon. Last October, the government announced that India will have its own Space Station by 2035, known as the "Bharatiya Antriksh Station". **Continued on page 2**

Indic languages are driving India's internet growth

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The internet user base in India is set to surpass 900 million by 2025, driven by the growing use of Indic languages for digital content. The 'Internet in India Report 2024', jointly prepared by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) and KANTAR, reveals that the number of active internet users in India reached 886 million in 2024, marking a robust 8% year-on-year growth. The report underscores the increasing role of Indic languages in shaping internet consumption patterns. It shows that rural India is leading the way when it comes to internet consumption. Not only that, but news consumption is also

highest among the rural Indian population. The report further highlights the increasing importance of Indic languages in shaping internet consumption patterns. Nearly all internet users (98%) accessed content in Indic languages, with Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam emerging as the most popular due to their extensive availability. Over half (57%) of urban internet users prefer consuming content in regional languages, underscoring the growing demand for local-language content across platforms. The report highlights that the digital gender gap in India is steadily narrowing, with 47% of all internet users in the country being women—so far the highest. Female internet users now form a significant



Representative photo

portion of shared device users in rural India: 58%. This marks substantial progress in making digital access more inclusive and equitable over the years. While internet penetration continues to grow, the pace has moderated, especially in urban areas, compared to the exponential growth seen in

previous years. Rural India, however, continues to witness double the growth rate of urban regions, reflecting the untapped potential in these areas. Urban India leads in the adoption of non-traditional devices such as smart TVs and smart speakers, which have grown by 54% between 2023 and

2024. Concurrently, mobile devices remain the primary means of accessing the internet across both urban and rural demographics. Rural India dominates online engagement for top activities, including OTT video and music streaming, online communication, and social media usage, outpacing urban users in these categories. Conversely, activities like e-commerce, digital payments, and online education are still more prevalent among urban populations. According to the report, rural India, with 488 million users, leads this growth and now accounts for 55% of the total internet population. The report states that Indians spend an average of 90 minutes online daily. **Continued on page 2**

Congress promises free LPG, ration



AICC in-charge of Delhi Qazi Nizamuddin, Delhi Congress President Devender Yadav and Telangana CM and Congress leader A Revanth Reddy

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI
The Congress on Thursday said it would provide Rs 500 LPG cylinders, free ration kits, and free electricity up to 300 units to city residents if voted to power in Delhi. The announcement was made by Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy, who was addressing a press conference here with AICC Delhi in-charge Qazi Nizamuddin and Delhi Congress chief Devender Yadav.

"Congress will fulfill its five guarantees if it is elected to power in Delhi," Reddy said. He also mentioned that his government in Telangana waived farmer loans to the tune of Rs 21,000 crore in one year.

"There is no difference between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal. They have done nothing for the national capital," Reddy said. He added that the Congress guarantees were finalized after getting feedback from the residents of the Capital during Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra and Devender Yadav's Delhi Nyay Yatra.

Urging a change of regime in Delhi, Reddy told voters in the Capital that just like in his state, the Congress will deliver all five guarantees for the welfare of the poor in Delhi as well.

The party on Thursday announced two more guarantees, bringing the total to five. Yadav said the party came up with these promises based on

feedback gleaned from the Delhi Nyay Yatra. "We took out the Delhi Nyay Yatra and learned about the issues of the people, which helped us come up with these five guarantees. Today, we have announced two more guarantees—'Mehangai Mukti Yojana' and 'Free Bijli Yojana.' We will implement these five guarantees in the first cabinet meeting if we come to power," he said.

Reddy stated that the Congress government fulfilled all its promises within 13 months of coming to power in Telangana. Similarly, he assured that Congress would fulfill all its five promises in Delhi immediately after returning to power. He emphasized that the guarantees announced today would free

people from inflation and rising prices. He criticized the Aam Aadmi Party and the BJP for ruining the lives of families in Delhi with skyrocketing inflation, but assured that the Congress guarantee would remove inflation from kitchens. On January 6, the Congress announced its 'Pyaari Didi Yojana,' promising a monthly monetary grant of Rs 2,500 to women if it is voted to power. On January 8, the party announced its 'Jeevan Raksha Yojana,' under which it promised to provide free health insurance of up to Rs 25 lakh. The party on Sunday also promised to give Rs 8,500 every month to educated unemployed youths in Delhi for one year.

BJP calls Arvind Kejriwal's income figures for 2020-21 questionable

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As electioneering is in full swing for the Delhi polls next month, the state BJP on Thursday raised doubts over AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal's declaration about his assets while filing his nomination on Wednesday.

The conference was conducted by media head Praveen Shankar Kapoor, who clarified that no accusations were being made on Thursday. However, it is hard for Delhiites to believe that a retired officer who served as Chief Minister and MLA could have an average income of merely Rs 2.5 lakh.

Kejriwal was first elected as an MLA in 2013, a term lasting until November 4, 2014. Since February 2015, he has served continuously as an MLA. In his income tax returns for 2013-14, Kejriwal declared his MLA salary as his primary source of income.

Interestingly, for the 2013-14 fiscal year, he would have received only two months of Chief Minister salary and allowances, followed by regular MLA salary and allowances from March 2014 to November 4, 2014, the BJP said.

When reelected in February 2015, Kejriwal began receiving the CM salary and allowances until September 17, 2024, when he resigned. Subsequently, he would have been drawing his MLA salary until now. Sachdeva highlighted that before the February 2023 pay hike, Delhi's Chief Minister received Rs 72,000 per month, which rose to Rs 1,70,000 per month after the hike.

When Kejriwal served as a regular MLA for seven months in 2014-15, he earned a salary and allowances of ₹55,000 per month. Post-September 17, 2015, his MLA salary was ₹90,000 per month.

Given these facts, Kejriwal's declared income from 2013-14 to 2024-25 in his affidavit dated January 15, 2025, does not align



Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva questioned Kejriwal's income affidavit in a press conference.

with these figures, the BJP claimed. For example, his declared income for 2014-15 was Rs 7,42,884, despite being an MLA for only 9 months that year. In 2015-16, when his salary, including allowances, was Rs 72,000 per month, he declared an annual income of only Rs 2,46,946. Similar figures were reported in 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19.

In 2019-20, his income suddenly dropped to Rs 1,57,823, which is significantly below the taxable basic salary of Rs 3,60,000 annually as Chief Minister, Sachdeva said.

Kejriwal's 2020-21 income raises the most significant questions. He declared a 40-fold increase, amounting to Rs 44,90,040, during a time when incomes plummeted globally due to COVID-19.

Sachdeva reminded attendees of Kejriwal's new liquor policy during 2020-21 and the unaccounted expenses for constructing the "Sheesh Mahal" during this period.

The next fiscal year, 2021-22, saw Kejriwal's income drop by 40 times to Rs 1,62,976, and in 2022-23, despite the CM salary hike, his income remained almost stagnant at Rs 1,67,066. In 2023-24, his income rose six-fold to Rs 7,21,530.

Sachdeva concluded that Delhiites demand clarification from Kejriwal about his income growth anomalies in 2020-21 (40-fold) and 2023-24 (6-fold), especially since he claims his MLA salary as his only source of income.

In a sharp response to Sachdeva, the AAP said Kejriwal, is a three-time CM and former IRS officer, who does not own a personal house in Delhi or even a car. "This a testament to his simplicity and commitment to public service. He has Rs 50,000 in cash and barely Rs 3 lakh in the bank. While, Parvesh Verma's total wealth is Rs 89 crore—about 27 times more than Arvind Kejriwal.

HC reserves verdict on plea over placing CAG reports in Assembly

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Thursday reserved its order on a plea by opposition MLAs seeking a sitting of the Delhi Assembly for tabling of several CAG reports on the city government. Justice Sachin Datta reserved the verdict after hearing senior lawyers appearing for the petitioners, the Speaker as well as the Delhi government.

"Arguments heard. Judgement reserved," the judge said.

Opposition leader Vijender Gupta and BJP MLAs -- Mohan Singh Bisht, Om Prakash Sharma, Ajay Kumar Mahawar, Abhay Verma, Anil Kumar Bajpai and Jitendra Mahajan -- filed the petition last year and

sought a direction to the Speaker to call a sitting of the assembly for the purpose of immediate tabling of 14 CAG reports. The petitioners led the plea through lawyers Neeraj and Satya Ranjan Swain.

The CAG, in its reports, was critical of some of the AAP-led Delhi government's policies, including its now-scrapped excise policy for reportedly causing losses to the exchequer. The senior lawyers for the Speaker as well as the government on Thursday opposed the passing of such a direction by the court and said there was no urgency to table the reports at a stage when the assembly elections were to be held soon.

The Speaker's counsel questioned whether any "fruitful purpose" would be served if a sitting

of the House was called "hardly 20 days" before its mandate ended. He emphasised that the CAG reports were considered by the assembly in a manner which was set out and included referring them to the public accounts committee (PAC), and there was no bar on the reports being considered by the next assembly poll. The senior lawyer appearing for the Delhi government said there was no urgency in the matter and the hurry was only political in nature.

The petitioners' senior counsel, on the other hand, accused the government of delaying the matter and said the upcoming elections would be held soon. The Speaker's counsel questioned whether any "fruitful purpose" would be served if a sitting

Naresh Balyan withdraws election plea

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Arrested in a case lodged under the stringent MCOCA, on Thursday withdrew an application from a Delhi court seeking permission to sign election related documents, saying his wife was instead contesting the upcoming assembly polls. Special Judge Kaveri Baweja, who on January 15 issued notice to Delhi Police on Balyan's plea for signing documents to open a bank account and other papers required to contest the elections, dismissed the application after his submission.

BJP, Congress finalise Delhi candidates

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Both the BJP and Congress have declared all their candidates for the upcoming Delhi assembly elections, with the former contesting elections on 68 seats and giving one seat each to its allies Janata Dal (United) and Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas).

The BJP on Thursday named nine more candidates for the elections to the 70-member Delhi assembly. The party fielded advocate Shikha Rai, the first woman chairperson of the Standing Committee of the erstwhile South Delhi Municipal Corporation, against AAP government's Transport Minister Saurabh Bhardwaj from Greater Kailash (GK) constituency. Anil Vashisth will contest against Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai in Babarpur constituency in northeast Delhi. Further, the BJP has fielded



Saurabh Bhardwaj files his nomination

of its candidate from the reserved seat of Deoli, as the last date for filing nominations is Friday. The Congress also announced its final list of candidates, with two names revealed on Thursday. According to the latest list, Lokendra Chaudhary has been fielded from Timarpur, while Suresh Wati Chauhan will contest from Rohtas Nagar. On Wednesday, the party had unveiled a list of five candidates. The party fielded Surender Kumar from Bawana (SC), Sumesh Gupta from Rohini, Rahul Dhanak from Karol Bagh (SC), Virender Bidhuri from Tughlakabad, and Arjun Bhadana from Badarpur. On Tuesday, the party released a list of 15 candidates, fielding former Union minister Krishna Tirath from Patel Nagar and councillor Ariba Khan from Okhla. Voting for the Delhi Assembly polls will be held on February 5, with the counting scheduled for February 8.

Two killed after SUV overturns in south Delhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Two friends returning from a trip to Himachal Pradesh were killed after their SUV overturned in the Alipur area of outer north Delhi early Thursday, an official said. The deceased have been identified as Kartik Kakkar (20), a resident of Vikaspuri, and his friend Yashraj Sidhu (23), a resident of Madhya Pradesh's Bhopal, police said. The incident happened on the GT Karnal Road early Thursday when the two were returning after visiting Lahaul and Spiti Valley, and Kasol among other places in Himachal Pradesh. They were returning via Chandigarh.

Parvesh Verma booked for distributing sarees to women voters in Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A day after BJP leader Parvesh Verma was booked for allegedly distributing shoes to voters at a temple in Delhi, another non-cognizable report (NCR) was filed against him on Thursday. This time, the complaint accused Verma, the BJP's New Delhi candidate, of distributing sarees to women. District Magistrate Sunny Kumar Singh, who also serves as the returning officer for the New Delhi Assembly constituency, confirmed receiving the complaint regarding Verma's actions. "The complaint alleges that sarees were being distributed to women at his residence. We have forwarded the complaint to the police for further investigation," Singh said. As a result, an NCR was filed at the Barakhamba police station, and the Delhi Police have launched an inquiry.

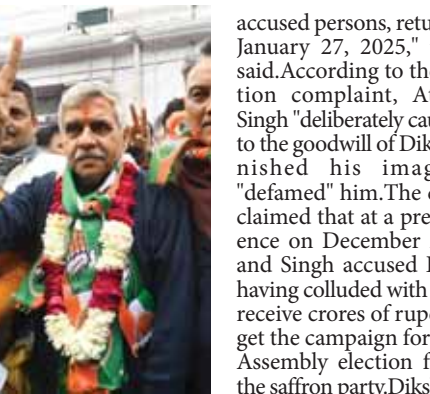


Unlike the earlier case involving the distribution of shoes, where the complaint was filed by a political rival with video evidence showing Verma handing out shoes to voters, the new complaint was submitted by a citizen. An officer on election duty reported that videos had surfaced showing women gathered outside Verma's residence, with some leaving while carrying red bags believed to contain sarees. The complaint, along with the video footage, has been forwarded to the police for further investigation and possible filing of an FIR. On Wednesday, Verma was already facing accusations of violating the model code of conduct and Section 123 of the Representation of People Act, 1951. This section prohibits candidates or their agents from offering gifts, rewards, or any incentives to voters, considering such actions corrupt practices under the law.

Dikshit files defamation complaint against AAP leaders

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A city court on Thursday issued notice to Chief Minister Atishi and AAP MP Sanjay Singh on a criminal defamation complaint filed by former Congress MP Sandeep Dikshit. Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate Paras Dalal said the matter was at the stage of cognizance, and as per law, Atishi and Singh were to be given the opportunity to be heard. The judge directed the AAP leaders to file a reply by January 27, when the court will further hear the matter. "The matter is at the stage of cognizance, and in compliance with the first proviso to Section 223 BNSS, the proposed



Sandeep Dikshit

accused persons, returnable for January 27, 2025," the judge said. According to the defamation complaint, Atishi and Singh "deliberately caused harm to the goodwill of Dikshit," "tarnished his image," and "defamed" him. The complaint claimed that at a press conference on December 26, Atishi and Singh accused Dikshit of having colluded with the BJP to receive crores of rupees and to get the campaign for the Delhi Assembly election funded by the saffron party. Dikshit further alleged that Atishi, with Sanjay Singh's concurrence, publicly claimed that Congress and Dikshit were working with the BJP to undermine AAP's electoral chances. The complaint highlighted that Atishi shared the press conference's live proceedings on her X handle (formerly Twitter) with the caption, "BJP is helping Congress in the Delhi election," a post that has reportedly garnered over 30,000 views. The widespread coverage of these statements by national newspapers and their online circulation was cited as further evidence of reputational harm. The complaint alleged that these remarks were part of a calculated effort to malign Dikshit and the Indian National Congress (INC). Dikshit is contesting the Delhi Assembly polls against former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal from the New Delhi seat.

Delhi's air quality improves slightly after overnight rainfall, coldwave worsens

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Overnight rainfall in the Delhi-National Capital Region brought a slight improvement in air quality and also a rise in temperature. So far, there are no reports of flooding or waterlogging. The national capital recorded a minimum temperature of 11.2 degrees Celsius due to cloud cover, as the cold wave intensified across northern India. Cold wave conditions prevail in Delhi and its surrounding areas. The air quality index of Delhi also marginally improved to 343 from Wednesday's 386, both in the very poor category. According to the India Meteorological Department

(IMD), the rainfall recorded at the Safdarjung observatory was 3.7 mm, while at the Pusa observatory, the recorded rainfall was 7.5 mm. At the same time, the Palam observatory recorded 9 mm of rainfall from midnight, and Mayur Vihar recorded 4 mm. Amid the rain, as many as 29 trains arriving at or departing from Delhi were running late, the Indian Railways said in a statement. The moisture brought by the Western Cyclonic Disturbance resulted in rain in various parts of Delhi and its satellite cities, including Noida, Ghaziabad, Gurugram, and Faridabad, the weather office said. The IMD has forecast a generally cloudy sky with light rain or drizzle for Thursday.



The maximum and minimum temperatures are expected to hover around 17 and 10 degrees Celsius, respectively. The Commission for Air Quality Management on Wednesday reimposed stricter pollution curbs in

the capital and surrounding areas, including the NCR, under GRAP-3 and GRAP-4. According to the India Meteorological Department's (IMD) Annual Climate Summary - 2024, released on Wednesday, extreme weather events caused over 3,200 deaths in the country in 2024—the warmest year on record in India. Lightning and thunderstorms caused the highest number of fatalities (1,374), followed by floods and heavy rains (1,287) and heatwaves (459). Lightning and thunderstorms caused the maximum number of deaths in Bihar, while floods and heavy rains caused the most deaths in Kerala. Besides these two states, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh,

and Maharashtra were also among the top five states reporting the largest number of casualties due to extreme weather events in 2024. The IMD report stated that the annual average land surface air temperature during 2024 was 0.65 degrees Celsius higher than the long-term average (1991-2020). This was the hottest year since nationwide records began in 1901, surpassing the previous highest recorded temperature of 0.54 degrees in 2016. The average temperature across India was above normal, with anomalies recorded as 0.37 degrees Celsius in winter (January-February), 0.56 degrees Celsius in pre-monsoon (March-May), 0.71 degrees Celsius during the southwest monsoon (June-September), and 0.83 degrees Celsius in the post-monsoon period (October-December). In most parts of the eastern coast, heatwave conditions were observed in April, while in May, they were widespread across northwestern India, and in June, most of northern and central India experienced heatwaves. The temperature anomalies in most parts of the country remained within the range of -1.0 degrees Celsius to +1.0 degrees Celsius for maximum, minimum, and average temperatures. In 2024, the highest average monthly minimum temperatures were recorded during July, August, September, and October.

Supreme Court to hear Godhra train burning case on February 13

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday said it will hear on February 13 the appeals filed by the Gujarat government and several other convicts in the 2002 Godhra train burning case. A bench of Justices J K Maheshwari and Aravind Kumar made it clear that no adjournment will be given in the matter on the next date of hearing. On February 27, 2002, 59 people were killed when the S-6 coach of the Sabarmati Express was burnt at Gujarat's Godhra, triggering riots in the state. Several appeals have been filed in the apex court challenging the October 2017 verdict of the Gujarat High Court which had upheld the conviction of several convicts and commuted the death penalties of 11 people to life term. The Gujarat government had in February 2023 told the apex court that it will be seeking death penalty for the



11 convicts whose sentences in the case were commuted to life imprisonment by the high court. When the matter came for hearing on Thursday, a lawyer, appearing for a convict, submitted that no evidence has been put on record. "We don't know. We will hear the matter and we had clarified this earlier. We will not adjourn this case. This case has been adjourned at least five times. (For the) last one year, I have been adjourning this matter," Justice Maheshwari said.

The lawyer told the court that some of the convicts have filed remission pleas that are pending. Refusing to adjourn the matter, the bench said, "We have instructions from the Chief Justice's office that the cases of criminal appeal and remission need not to be heard together." Senior Advocate Sanjay Hegde, appearing for one of the convicts, submitted that the appeal filed by Gujarat against commutation of death penalty to life has to be heard first. "Twenty-two years have

passed... My clients have not been awarded death. This bench will have to first confirm the guilt. Once that is confirmed, then comes the sentencing part. When we go through that, that will possibly take time. There will be repercussion if you were to send to three judges," Hegde said. The court then deferred the matter for hearing to February 13 after the lawyers appearing for the convicts sought time. During the hearing before the apex court earlier, the state's counsel said the 11 convicts were sentenced to death by the trial court and 20 others were awarded life term in the case. The high court had upheld the 31 convictions in the case and commuted the death penalties of the 11 convicts to life term, the counsel had said. While the state has appealed against the commutation of death penalty to life term for the 11 convicts, several convicts have challenged the high court's verdict upholding their convictions in the case.

Government approves setting up of third launch pad at Sriharikota

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The government on Thursday approved setting up of a third launch pad at Sriharikota to send heavier spacecraft in orbit as it aims to build a space station, carry out human spaceflight Gaganyaan and land an astronaut on the moon. The third launch pad will be built at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre at Sriharikota and will be capable of putting 30,000 tonne spacecraft in low earth orbit as against the existing capabilities of 8,000 tonnes as India eyes a larger pie in the global space economy. The Union Cabinet, at a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the setting up of the third launch pad at a cost of Rs 3,985 crore in the next four years with maximum participation from the industry, Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnav said. The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is also developing the Next Generation Launch Vehicle (NGLV) which will be 91 m in height, taller than the 72-m tall



Quotub Minar. The launch pad is designed to have a configuration that is as universal and adaptable as possible that can support not only NGLV but also the LVM3 vehicles with a semicryogenic stage. It will also be able to support scaled up configurations of NGLV with capabilities of hauling 70 tonnes payload to low earth orbit. The launch pad will be built with maximum industry participation fully utilizing ISRO's experience in establishing the previous launch pads and maximally sharing the existing launch complex facilities. The third launch pad is targeted to be

established within a duration of four years, the statement said. The project will boost the Indian space ecosystem by enabling higher launch frequencies and the national capacity to undertake human spaceflight and space exploration missions. As on date, Indian Space Transportation Systems are completely reliant on the first and second launch pads. The first launch pad was built 30 years ago for PSLV missions and continues to provide launch support also for the Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV). The second launch pad was established primarily for

GSLV and LVM3 and also functions as standby for PSLV. The second launch pad has been operational for almost 20 years and has enhanced the launch capacity towards enabling some commercial missions of PSLV/LVM3 along with the national missions including the Chandrayaan-3 mission. The second launch pad is also getting ready to launch the human rated LVM3 for the Gaganyaan missions. The expanded vision of the Indian Space Programme, the government has announced plans to establish the Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS) by 2035 and achieve an Indian crewed lunar Landing by 2040. These ambitions require a new generation of heavier launch vehicles with new propulsion systems, which cannot be met by the existing launch pads, an official statement said. The expeditious establishment of a third launch pad to cater to a heavier class of Next Generation Launch Vehicles and as a stand by second launch pad is highly essential so as to meet the evolving space transportation requirements for another 25-30 years.

Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto to be chief guest at India's 76th Republic Day celebrations

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto will be the chief guest at India's 76th Republic Day celebrations on January 26, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) announced on Thursday. Subianto will visit India from January 25 to 26 in his first trip to the country as president. As a comprehensive strategic partner, Indonesia is an important pillar in India's Act East Policy and its vision of the Indo-Pacific, the MEA said. "At the invitation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, President of the Republic of Indonesia Prabowo Subianto will pay a state visit to India during January 25-26," the MEA said, "President Prabowo will also be the Chief Guest for India's 76th Republic Day celebrations," it said in a



statement. "India and Indonesia share warm and friendly ties spanning over millennia," it said. The MEA said the forthcoming visit of the Indonesian President will provide an opportunity for the leadership of the two countries to undertake a comprehensive review of bilateral ties as well as to discuss regional and global issues of mutual interest. Every year, India invites world leaders to attend its Republic

Day celebrations. Last year, French President Emmanuel Macron was the Republic Day chief guest while Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi graced the occasion in 2023. There was no Republic Day Chief guest in 2021 and 2022 in view of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, then Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro was the chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations. In 2019, South African President Cyril

Ramaphosa was the chief guest at the Republic Day parade, while in 2018, leaders of all 10 ASEAN countries attended the celebrations. In 2017, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan was the chief guest at celebrations, while then French President Francois Hollande graced the occasion in 2016. In 2015, then US President Barack Obama watched the parade. In 2014, then Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was the chief guest at the celebrations, while Bhutan king Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck attended the parade in 2013. The heads of state and government who have attended the Republic Day celebrations include Nicolas Sarkozy, Vladimir Putin, Nelson Mandela, John Major, Mohammed Khatami and Jacques Chirac.

Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH-Dhruv) will not be part of upcoming Republic Day flypast

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The indigenously designed and developed Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH-Dhruv) will not be part of the upcoming Republic Day flypast as the entire fleet of the military helicopters has been grounded following a crash of one of them this month. The Army, the Indian Air Force, the Navy and the Coast Guard are operating around 330 ALHs. A Coast Guard ALH crashed at Gujarat's Porbandar on January five following which the armed forces grounded the entire fleet of the twin-engine helicopters. The ALH Dhruv will not be part of the Republic Day flypast over Kartavya Path on January 26, an IAF official told reporters. The helicopters are likely to remain grounded till a high-level probe panel finds the root cause of the crash that



parade. Manufactured by the HAL, the Tejas aircraft is a potent platform for air combat and offensive air support missions while reconnaissance and anti-ship operations are its secondary roles. In February 2021, the defence ministry sealed a Rs 48,000 crore deal with Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd for the procurement of 83 Tejas MK-1A jets for the IAF. In November last year, the ministry accorded an initial approval to procure an additional batch of 97 Tejas jets for the IAF. The official said the Republic Day flypast will feature 22 fighter jets, 11 transport planes, seven helicopters, and three Dornier surveillance aircraft. A Rafale fighter jet will also be part of the flypast. The IAF's marching contingent at the parade will comprise 144 personnel.

Delhi court on Thursday granted two weeks to authorities concerned to process sanction to prosecute an accused in a case related to the alleged land-for-jobs scam involving former Railway Minister Lalu Prasad. Special Judge Vishal Gogne said if the sanction is not processed by January 30, the next date, "the competent authority shall furnish a written explanation by the next date of hearing."

Lalu case - Court seeks sanction for prosecution in two weeks



The judge passed the directions after the CBI informed the court that the processing of the sanction regarding accused RK Mahajan, a public servant, was at an advanced stage. "The competent authority is directed to process the said matter by the next date as the present proceedings, which are required to be conducted on a weekly basis in terms of previous directions of the Supreme Court and Delhi High Court, are delayed only awaiting the said sanction in charge sheet which was filed in July 2024..." The proceedings in the case are delayed only awaiting the said sanction in charge sheet which was filed in July 2024," the judge said. The judge had on November 26 filed before the court requisite sanctions obtained from authorities concerned to prosecute 30 accused persons in the case, while submitting that sanctions regarding the prosecution of Mahajan was still awaited.

Label AI-generated content for polls: ECI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

With campaigns for the Delhi Assembly elections heating up, the Election Commission on Thursday advised political parties to uphold transparency and accountability in their use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)-generated content, highlighting concerns over the increasing role of artificial intelligence in campaigns and its impact on voter opinion. The poll body asked political parties and candidates to appropriately disclose and label AI-generated synthetic content. This move comes amid the increasing use of AI technologies in political campaigning, raising concerns about their potential impact on voter



perception and the authenticity of campaign messages. The advisory introduces labelling and disclosure norms requiring parties to clearly label any images, videos, audio or other materials generated or significantly altered by AI technologies with a notation such as "AI-Generated"/"Digitally Enhanced"/"Synthetic Content".

It also requires political parties to include disclaimers during dissemination of campaign advertisements or promotional content, wherever synthetic content is utilised. The use of AI has surged in the Delhi elections, with political parties leveraging it to create high-impact campaigns. However, this has also led to the emergence of deepfake videos and misleading content. Recently, the Aam Aadmi Party released an AI-generated video featuring PM Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, critiquing central government policies. While the video went viral, it sparked debates over ethical boundaries in election campaigning. Similarly, the BJP has been deploying AI-driven

strategies to craft targeted advertisements and posters attacking AAP's governance. While these tactics are effective, they also risk spreading misinformation and polarising voters. Social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have become hotbeds of election activity, with AI tools playing a central role. Viral hashtags, memes, and targeted ads are shaping voter opinions like never before. The BJP's #KejriwalFailsDelhi and AAP's #AAPKaManifesto have dominated the digital space, engaging millions of users. Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar had recently cautioned against the potential of AI and deep fakes in compounding the malaise of

misinformation. He had expressed concern that deep fakes and misinformation have the potential to erode trust in electoral processes. During last year's Lok Sabha elections, the Commission had issued guidelines for responsible and ethical use of social media platforms. "In recent years, advances in artificial intelligence have enabled the creation of highly convincing synthetic content, including images, video and audio. "With the increasing use of AI technologies in political campaigning, it is essential to maintain transparency and accountability, as the AI-generated content, including images, videos and audio, has the potential to influence voter opinion and trust," the EC told heads of recognised national and state parties.

Justice (Retd) Arun Mishra appointed as BCCI Ombudsman

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Former Supreme Court judge Justice Arun Mishra has been appointed as Ombudsman of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). Mishra will also function as the BCCI Ethics Officer. He served in the apex court from July 7, 2014, to September 2, 2020 before being appointed as the chairman of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on June 2, 2021, a position he held until June 1, 2024. Mishra, born on September 3, 1955 in Gwalior in a family of lawyers, had decided around 97,000 cases as a judge of high courts of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Calcutta.



He was appointed as a judge of the Madhya Pradesh High Court on October 25, 1999 and was later appointed as the Chief Justice of Rajasthan High Court on November 26, 2010. He was later appointed as the Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court on December 14, 2012. A legal luminary, Mishra has also contributed immensely to betterment of legal education in the country.

PM Modi's stellar start to 2025: Transforming vision into reality

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has begun 2025 with a flurry of transformative initiatives, demonstrating his vision for a progressive, self-reliant, and united India. From advancing infrastructure and scientific research to empowering youth and celebrating India's cultural diversity, his leadership has set the tone for a remarkable year ahead. The year began with a strong focus on the welfare of farmers during the first Cabinet meeting of 2025. The government approved the extension of a one-time special package for Di-Ammonium Phosphate (DAP), ensuring affordable fertilizer prices for farmers. This decision highlights the government's commitment to strengthening India's

agricultural backbone. On the same day, PM Modi met cultural icons such as singer-actor Diljit Dosanjh and chess grandmaster Koneru Humpy, underscoring his focus on promoting arts, sports, and excellence across fields. Modi also handed over 1,675 newly constructed flats under the In-Situ Slum Rehabilitation Project in Delhi, ensuring better living conditions for thousands of families. He also laid the foundation stones for three transformative educational projects worth over Rs 600 crore, including the Eastern Campus at Surajmal Vihar, Western Campus at Dwarka, and the Veer Savarkar College in Najafgarh. These projects aim to enhance educational infrastructure and inspire future generations.

The government's commitment to rural development took center stage during the Grameen Bharat Mahotsav on January 4, promoting GI-certified village products and boosting rural economies. This initiative aligns with the goal of empowering rural India and integrating it into the global economy. Meanwhile, PM Modi engaged with global tech leaders, including Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella, who announced a \$3 billion investment in AI infrastructure in India. These discussions focused on fostering indigenous innovation and creating a self-reliant tech ecosystem. Infrastructure projects gained momentum with the inauguration of the Namu Bharat Train Corridor on January 5, connecting



Sahibabad to Ashok Nagar, and multiple rail infrastructure developments in Odisha, Telangana, and Jammu & Kashmir. These projects symbolize India's rapid progress in modernizing transport networks under PM Modi's leadership. Last week Modi launched two landmark projects in Andhra

Pradesh: the Bulk Drug Park, a Rs 1,877 crore initiative to reduce dependency on imported pharmaceutical ingredients, and the Green Hydrogen Hub, aimed at producing 1,500 tonnes of green hydrogen per day. These efforts position India as a leader in renewable energy and pharmaceutical manufacturing.

A significant step forward in science came with the inauguration of the Genome India Project on January 9, which will map the genetic diversity of Indians and advance healthcare solutions for genetic disorders. On the same day, PM Modi addressed the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Convention in Bhubaneswar, celebrating the achievements of the Indian diaspora and their contributions to the global stage. Thereafter on January 12, PM Modi participated in the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue, coinciding with National Youth Day and Swami Vivekananda's Jayanti. This initiative united young innovators and achievers to exchange ideas and envision a developed India, reaffirming the government's commitment to empowering

youth. On January 13, Modi inaugurated the Sonamarg Tunnel in Jammu & Kashmir, improving connectivity and boosting tourism while enhancing national security. He personally interacted with workers and engineers, expressing gratitude for their efforts. That evening, he celebrated Lohri, Pongal, and Makar Sankranti with diverse communities, emphasizing India's cultural unity and heritage. By January 15, PM reached another milestone with the commissioning of advanced naval combatants, including new ships and submarines, reflecting India's growing maritime capabilities. These additions strengthen India's position as a dominant force in the Indian Ocean and are a testament to the government's commitment to

Aatmanirbhar Bharat in defense. On January 16, PM Modi's vision for India's space program reached another milestone with the successful demonstration of space docking of satellites completed by ISRO which is a significant stepping stone for India's ambitious space missions in the years to come. In just 15 days, Modi's leadership has delivered a transformative beginning to 2025. From scientific breakthroughs and infrastructure projects to youth empowerment and cultural celebration, his actions reflect a vision of a Viksit Bharat. As PM Modi said, "Together, we are shaping a developed India, where every citizen plays a vital role in building a brighter tomorrow."

MAHAKUMBH 2025: SPECIAL COVERAGE

International delegates take a dip at Triveni Sangam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

A 21-member delegation from 10 countries, on Thursday, visited the various Akhadas in the Sangam region during the ongoing Mahakumbh and took the holy dip at Sangam. The representatives not only gained an understanding of the religious significance of the Kumbh but also experienced the extraordinary elements of Indian culture. After taking a dip at the Triveni Sangam, the delegation toured the vast Mahakumbh area, witnessing the immense scale of the event. The international visitors lauded the Uttar Pradesh government for the grand arrangements made for the world's largest religious gathering. They said that the Mahakumbh sends a powerful message of unity to the world and encouraged people from all nations to visit Mahakumbh Nagar to witness and understand Indian culture. Sally Al Azab, a



representative from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), shared that she has come from the Middle East to India for this remarkable

event. She described it as an extraordinary moment, highlighting that the Kumbh Mela is the world's largest religious gathering.

She praised the event's organization and emphasized that it not only spreads a message of unity within India but also to the

entire world. Witnessing millions of devotees and the meticulous security arrangements, she felt deeply moved by the

greatness of Indian culture. The international delegation also toured various Akhadas during the Kumbh Mela, meeting saints and learning

about the historical, religious, and cultural significance of the event. The saints shared insights into the ancient traditions of

the Kumbh, the role of the akhadas, and the glory of Indian culture. The international representatives were profoundly impressed by the saints' teachings and expressed their admiration for Indian religious traditions. This gathering of representatives sent a powerful message to the world, showing that people from different cultural backgrounds can come together in harmony. This included representatives from Fiji, Finland, Guyana, Malaysia, Mauritius, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Trinidad and Tobago, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The international delegation experienced the diversity of Indian culture and the unity in religion during their visit. They were deeply moved by the culture and traditions on display. For them, the trip was not just a religious experience but also a precious opportunity to be part of a historical and cultural heritage.



Wife of Apple co-founder Steve Jobs, abruptly returns from Maha Kumbh due to health issues

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■
MAGAKUMBH NAGAR

Lauren Powell Jobs, wife of Apple co-founder and billionaire entrepreneur Steve Jobs, unexpectedly cut short her visit to the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj after experiencing allergic reactions. Powell Jobs, who had planned a ten-day stay, left just three days into her trip. She is reported to be staying in Bhutan for the next few days. Lauren Powell Jobs arrived in Prayagraj on January 13 to participate in the grand spiritual event. During her visit, she stayed at the camp of Acharya Mahamandaleshwar Swami Kailashanand Giri of the Niranjani Akhara. Her initial plan included taking a holy dip during Makar Sankranti, but she was unable to do so due to health issues. On Wednesday, Powell Jobs

received a spiritual initiation from her guru, Acharya Mahamandaleshwar Swami Kailashanand Giri, who imparted the Mahakali Beej Mantra to her. She has been instructed to chant "Om Kreem Mahakalika Namah" as part of her spiritual practice. Acharya Kailashanand Giri praised Powell Jobs for her humility and simplicity, emphasizing that despite being one of the wealthiest and most famous individuals in the world, she remains free of ego and does not indulge in pretentiousness. He described her as very gentle and kind, adding that her quest for spirituality led her to the Maha Kumbh, where she was given the name "Kamala." He noted her low-key approach to life, often wearing simple clothes and interacting with others in a modest manner. In her journey before the

Maha Kumbh, Powell Jobs visited the Kashi Vishwanath Temple in Varanasi, where she performed a boat ride on the Ganges and received blessings from the temple's outer sanctum, adhering to the traditional practice of not touching the Shiva Lingam as a non-Hindu. The Maha Kumbh also saw a historic milestone on Wednesday with the launch of an international flight from Prayagraj Airport, marking the first such departure in 93 years. The flight, which carried Powell Jobs to Bhutan, was part of a growing trend, as international visitors, including expatriate Indians and foreign nationals, can now travel directly to Prayagraj for the Maha Kumbh. This development also led to the deployment of immigration officers at the airport for the first time.

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■
MAGAKUMBH NAGAR

Data from Radio Frequency (RF) wristbands used at the Maha Kumbh has provided critical insights into crowd behavior, revealing that, on average, each devotee spent 45 minutes at the bathing ghats during significant festival days like Makar Sankranti and Paush Purnima. This duration accounts for the time from a devotee's arrival at the ghat to their departure after performing the ritual bath. The data was collected through wristbands equipped with RFID chips, which were distributed to devotees as part of an effort to better manage the massive influx of visitors to the event. This technology not only helped calculate the average time spent at the ghats but also assisted in accurately counting the total number of visitors at the Maha Kumbh. SSP Rajesh Kumar Dwivedi emphasized the importance of this data for effective crowd management. "The average time spent by devotees at the ghats is invaluable for planning crowd flow and ensuring safety. By understanding how long people spend in the area, we can determine the best times for implementing regular traffic plans or



shifting to emergency measures if needed," he said. Dwivedi further explained that the data will also help in the logistics of entry and exit points. "With this technology, we can better manage when and

where devotees should enter or exit, reducing congestion and improving the overall experience for everyone," he added. The RF wristbands have been a part of the authorities' strategy to

utilize technology for a smoother and safer Kumbh experience. "This year, we are using three different methods to track and monitor the number of devotees, and RF wristband data analysis is a

key part of this," said an official overseeing the event. The information gathered will continue to play a crucial role in managing one of the world's largest religious gatherings.

Devotees flock to Ayodhya and Kashi while taking part in Mahakumbh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

After attending the Mahakumbh in Prayagraj, devotees from across the country and abroad are now flocking to other sacred sites in Uttar Pradesh. In the past three days alone, around 10 lakh devotees visited Ayodhya, 7.41 lakh paid their respects at the Kashi Vishwanath temple, 5 lakh visited Vindhyavasini Dham, and more than one lakh devotees visited Naimisharanya Dham in Sitapur. As over seven crore devotees have bathed and prayed at the Mahakumbh so far, the devotees, following their ritual baths, have visited places like Shringverpur, Chitrakoot, Kashi, Maa Vindhyavasini Dham, Naimisharanya, and Ayodhya for darshan and worship. This surge of devotees is also boosting local employment in these regions. More than 7.41 lakh devotees visited the Kashi Vishwanath temple from January 13 to 15, with 2.19 lakh arriving on the 13th, 2.31 lakh on the 14th, and over 2.90 lakh on the 15th. Meanwhile, over 5 lakh visited Vindhyavasini Dham, and more

than one lakh visited Naimisharanya Dham. Ayodhya, also known as Ramnagari, has seen an overwhelming influx of devotees, radiating a palpable sense of faith. Thousands are gathering to witness the darshan of Ramlala and Hanumangarhi. Under the guidance of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the district administration has ensured all necessary arrangements for the visitors. Over 10 lakh devotees have arrived in Ayodhya in the past three days, drawn by the historic occasion following Ramlala's enthronement after 500 years. A long line of devotees continues to form as they wait to pay their respects. CM Yogi Adityanath has instructed top officials, including Commissioner Gaurav Dayal, IG Praveen Kumar, District Magistrate Chandra Vijay Singh, SSP Rajkaran Nair, and Municipal Commissioner Santosh Sharma, to oversee the administration of key routes such as Dharmapath, Rampath, and Bhaktipath, ensuring that people in need are provided shelter and support.





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PAPER WITH PASSION

Hope and dread

The Gaza truce between Hamas and Israel may be fragile but it is still welcome as it offers some relief to beleaguered people

The recent announcement of a potential truce between Israel and Hamas has brought a mix of cautious hope and lingering fear to those on both sides of the conflict. After months of violence and suffering following the devastating events of October 2023, which saw Hamas's deadly incursion into Israel and the subsequent retaliatory offensive, the prospect of a ceasefire offers a moment of relief. However, the road ahead remains fraught with uncertainty. The conflict has left deep scars on both Israeli and Palestinian communities. For Israelis, the abduction of hostages—including women, children, and elderly civilians—has been a source of immense anguish. The release of 33 hostages as part of the initial phase of the ceasefire would bring some relief, but many fear the fragile agreement could collapse, leaving their loved ones in limbo. In Gaza, the humanitarian crisis is dire. The death toll exceeds 46,000, with women and children accounting for over half of the fatalities. Massive displacement has left 90 per cent of the population—approximately 2.3 million people—homeless. Entire neighbourhoods lie in ruins, and the lack of basic necessities has pushed residents to the brink of famine.



The proposed truce, brokered by the United States, Egypt, and Qatar, outlines a three-phased agreement. The first phase involves the exchange of hostages and Palestinian detainees, with the release of women, children, and the elderly prioritised. Subsequent phases would address the release of soldiers and other male captives, along with broader discussions to halt hostilities. A crucial component of the ceasefire includes a surge in humanitarian aid to Gaza. This would enable displaced Palestinians to return to their homes and help rebuild critical infrastructure. Yet, the long-term success of this agreement hinges on both sides' willingness to engage in meaningful negotiations during the second phase. The fragile nature of previous ceasefires—such as the one in November 2023 that lasted only a week—underscores the difficulty of achieving lasting peace. Key obstacles include Hamas's insistence on maintaining its military capabilities and Israel's objective to dismantle Hamas's governing structures. Both sides are under immense domestic and international pressure, but deeply entrenched mistrust makes compromise elusive. For hostages' families, uncertainty looms large. Many remain haunted by the possibility that their loved ones may not survive captivity if the truce fails. Meanwhile, Palestinians fear that a breakdown in talks could trigger renewed violence, exacerbating an already catastrophic situation. If the ceasefire holds, it could mark the beginning of a much-needed reprieve for Gaza's beleaguered population. Immediate priorities include addressing food insecurity, medical shortages, and the rebuilding of homes and infrastructure. International aid would play a critical role in alleviating the humanitarian crisis, but long-term recovery would require substantial investment, political stability and lasting peace.

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PICTALK



People try to tame a bull as they participate in the 'Jallikattu' event as part of 'Pongal' celebrations, in Tiruchirappalli

India's projector demand soars with eco-friendly innovations

These next-generation projectors not only offer enhanced energy efficiency and sustainability but also excellent output redefining the visual experience

India is rapidly becoming one of the fastest-growing projector markets globally, with an anticipated annual growth rate of 8.10 per cent over the next five years. This surge is driven by the increasing demand for projectors in both commercial and personal spaces. Technological advancements are playing a key role in this trend, as new, more eco-friendly projector alternatives are replacing traditional lamp-based models. These older models, while effective, had significant drawbacks such as high power consumption, reliance on hazardous materials, and limited recyclability. In contrast, modern projectors are designed with sustainability in mind, making them an attractive option for a wide range of applications. The rise in digitization across businesses and households further accelerates the need for effective display solutions. Eco-friendly projectors not only address this need but also offer a greener, more sustainable alternative to conventional options. With advanced production standards grounded in sus-



tainable development, these projectors are perfectly positioned to meet India's growing demand for high-tech, energy-efficient devices. Eco-friendly projectors are designed to tackle many of the issues associated with traditional models. They operate with much higher energy efficiency, significantly reducing power consumption. The manufacturing process also minimizes carbon footprints, with materials sourced responsibly. Innovations such as LED and laser light sources have significantly improved these devices' energy efficiency and lifespan, making them superior to traditional lamp-based projectors. These advancements appeal to environmentally conscious consumers and businesses alike, offering a more sustainable solution to their

display and entertainment needs. Compared to earlier generations, eco-friendly projectors offer several clear advantages. Their energy efficiency makes them much more cost-effective in the long term, as they consume far less power and do not require frequent replacements of parts like traditional bulbs. Additionally, the longevity of these projectors reduces waste, further decreasing their environmental impact. Importantly, many eco-friendly projectors do not contain harmful substances like mercury, which is found in conventional models, thus contributing to safer disposal practices. Furthermore, these projectors are built to last longer and require less maintenance, thanks to technologies like LED and laser, which do not degrade as quickly as traditional bulbs. As a result, maintenance costs are significantly lower, and users benefit from reduced downtime and increased durability. This is an appealing factor for both businesses and consumers, as it translates to lower total ownership costs

over the life of the device. Looking ahead, there are several trends that will further shape the future of eco-friendly display technologies. One of the most promising is the development of even more efficient light sources, such as OLEDs and advanced lasers, which will provide higher brightness while consuming even less power. Another exciting possibility is the use of solar-powered projectors, especially in rural or off-grid areas, which would reduce reliance on conventional power sources and minimize carbon footprints. Additionally, there is growing interest in integrating biodegradable materials into the production of projectors, which would reduce the environmental impact when the product reaches the end of its lifecycle. The future will also likely see the introduction of more smart projectors that can integrate seamlessly with smart home and office ecosystems, featuring energy-saving modes based on usage patterns. (The writer is MD Optoma Technology; views are personal)



VIJAY SHARMA

Diplomacy: The pillar of India's global aspirations



SANTHOSH MATHEW

To fulfill its aspirations as a global leader, India must urgently bolster its diplomatic infrastructure by expanding and modernising the Ministry of External Affairs

India, the world's most populous nation and the largest democracy is emerging as a pivotal force in global affairs. As a leader of the Global South, its growing economic might, strategic autonomy, and commitment to peace have positioned it at the centre of international diplomacy. However, despite these achievements, India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)—the critical institution shaping and executing its foreign policy—remains under-resourced. With only about 850 diplomats, the MEA is inadequately equipped to handle the complexities of a rapidly evolving global landscape. For India to realize its potential as a global leader, it must significantly expand its diplomatic infrastructure, scaling the MEA to at least 5,000 personnel. Such an expansion would align with India's ambitions and its stature as a major international power. India's diplomatic requirements have grown substantially alongside its global ambitions.

As the world's largest democracy and one of its fastest-growing economies, India's foreign policy must address a wide range of global issues. From trade negotiations and climate change to digital diplomacy and global security, the MEA serves as the nerve center of India's international engagements. India's foreign policy has traditionally been guided by strategic autonomy and a commitment to peace, rooted in the Nehruvian tradition of non-alignment. Leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and VK Krishna Menon laid the foundation of an independent foreign policy that prioritized non-violence while asserting India's sovereignty. This legacy of non-alignment, which positioned India as a bridge between competing superpowers, remains a cornerstone of its diplomatic approach. However, the global order is shifting, and India must adapt its foreign policy apparatus to meet modern challenges. Strengthening the MEA is vital not only for safeguarding India's interests but also for crafting a vision capable of influencing global politics. With a population



exceeding 1.4 billion and leadership roles in key international forums, India's current diplomatic infrastructure is insufficient for the demands it faces. Countries like the United States, China and Russia deploy thousands of diplomats and foreign policy experts to maintain their global influence. In contrast, India's diplomatic corps, though skilled, is a fraction of the size required. This gap underscores the urgent need for a larger, more specialised MEA capable of shaping global discussions and providing strategic depth across multiple domains. Expanding the MEA to 5,000 personnel would ensure that India's foreign policy is both proactive and comprehensive. Such an expansion is not merely about increasing numbers; it is about cultivating strategic expertise across diverse fields. India's diplomacy must address trade, defense, environmental sustainability, cybersecurity, humanitarian aid, and more. To achieve this, the MEA must recruit specialists who can navigate these complex issues. During the Cold War, figures like US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger demonstrated the transformative power of strategic brilliance in diplomacy. Similarly, India needs diplomats capable of long-term thinking and crafting policies that reflect its evolving global role. India's for-



THE NEED FOR A DIPLOMATIC CORPS THAT CAN SHAPE GLOBAL DISCUSSIONS AND PROVIDE THE INTELLECTUAL AND STRATEGIC DEPTH REQUIRED IN AN INCREASINGLY COMPLEX INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT HAS NEVER BEEN MORE URGENT

ign policy must anticipate global trends rather than merely react to events. To compete with global powers like the US, Russia, and China, India requires a diplomatic team adept at building alliances, leveraging emerging opportunities, and addressing global challenges. This necessitates investments in strategic thinking and specialised knowledge. The MEA must develop expertise in fields such as space diplomacy, climate change negotiations, global trade, and defense strategy. Moreover, diplomats must engage with governments, businesses, think tanks, and civil society to shape decisions in India's favour. A well-staffed MEA would enable India to better engage with key global issues and deepen its relationships with major powers. Just as the US relied on figures like Robert McNamara and John Foster Dulles to shape its diplomacy, India must nurture a generation of visionary diplomats. These individuals should possess deep understanding of global security, international law, multilateral organisations, and global trade—qualities exemplified by VK Krishna Menon, who championed India's interests on the international stage during the 1950s. Expanding the MEA is not just about addressing immediate challenges but about aligning India's diplomatic capabilities

with its evolving priorities. Experts in climate change, energy security, trade relations, and technology diplomacy are essential to ensuring a forward-thinking foreign policy. The expanded MEA must also prioritise collaboration with think tanks, academic institutions, and media professionals. These partnerships can provide the intellectual foundation for strategic decisions and help India anticipate emerging global trends. Think tanks and universities—both domestic and international—can offer critical insights into shifting geopolitical dynamics, new economic policies, and other global developments. Engaging with these institutions will ensure that India's foreign policy remains agile and informed. Public diplomacy is another critical component of modern foreign policy. Beyond government-to-government negotiations, India must focus on shaping global perceptions and building relationships with international audiences. The MEA should work closely with media professionals to effectively communicate India's vision and policies to the world. Leveraging India's soft power—its rich culture, democratic ideals, and values—can amplify its global influence and ensure its voice is heard. (The writer is an associate professor; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RUPEE LOSING SHEEN

Madam — There is an ongoing concern over the rupee sharply losing value against the dollar. But then a nation's currency intrinsically represents two notions of value: one for the purchaser and seller in the domestic market and the other for the external one. China, in its monetary parlance, has the yuan and the renminbi. In layman's terms, the domestic standing of the rupee is broadly propped up by an incremental rise in GDP and per capita income, with the purchasing power sustained by low inflation. Compared to most economies, we are far better placed. Our current concern would be more reining in inflation and fiscal deficit to retain the value of the rupee. The exchange value of the rupee with other currencies is a matter of the difference between the inflow and outflow of foreign currency for our external buying or selling, be it products, commodities, or services. The crux lies in developing our niche in any one of them to reverse the trade deficit. China found it in manufacturing and commodities and dares to keep its currency highly depreciated. The US despite its huge debt has the privilege of printing the dollar, the global currency. We must find it in diligence, research, and human potential.

R Narayanan | Navi Mumbai

NGO SUSPECTED FOR BOMB THREAT

Madam—Apropos of the headlines 'Police find NGO, political ties in Delhi bomb threats', it is imperative to dig deeply into the conspiracy of scaring 400 Delhi schools with bombing. The 16-year-old boy is only a juvenile shield to escape punishment. This is a heinous crime closely connected with the terrorist act perpetrated by the sympathisers of terrorist Afzal Guru, who had been hanged during Congress's tenure. Delhi CM Atishi is also a potential source of investigation because of her family's sympathy with the terrorist Afzal Guru. All those associated with the NGO should be slapped with NSA under the zero-tolerance policy of the Union Government. The

Meta offers apologies on election remark



Mark Zuckerberg's controversial statement has sparked a new debate across India and the world. His remarks about the functioning of Joe Biden's administration and the 2024 Indian elections have angered the Indian Parliament. Now, Meta India has publicly apologised following backlash over its CEO Mark Zuckerberg's comments on India's 2024 general elections. This issue raises critical questions about the responsibility of tech companies and the impact of their statements

on a global scale. Zuckerberg's comments on Joe Rogan's podcast regarding economic challenges and democracy in India are being seen as damaging to India's image. Particularly, the questions raised about Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government's economic management and COVID-19 strategies are considered serious. India's IT Minister, Ashwini Vaishnaw, has responded strongly, stating that foreign companies must respect India's constitutional dignity. This incident not only scrutinises the social impact of social media giants but also questions their political interference. India's stance highlights that major tech giants are now being held accountable for their actions. This development sends an important message that strict action against misinformation is essential to upholding the dignity of democracy.

R K Jain | Barwani

Jaish-e-Mohammad terrorist who carried out the Parliament attack in 2001 earned sympathy for those vying for Delhi rule. It is the most unfortunate for the country and the ugliest face of our political ecosystem. Hitherto, a part of the INDIA bloc, AAP must clarify the role of its Delhi CM. The Khalistani links of the Aam Aadmi Party and Arvind Kejriwal are already in public awareness. There seems to be no end to the revengeful acts of sympathisers of the terrorists, so the strongest punishment should be ensured against the culprits. We are aware that a team of leading advocates will protect the NGO behind the Delhi school bomb threats. Such an ecosystem should be exposed. Delhi has been targeted by the extremist forces; it is very obvious and evident.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

B'DESH AG'S ANTI-SECULARISM PITCH

Madam — Bangladesh's Attorney General Mohammad Asaduzzaman has demanded the removal of the word secularism from the Constitution. He has said that 90 per-

cent of Bangladesh's population is Muslim, so it should be a Muslim country by removing the word secular. The Attorney General has said that words like socialism and secularism do not present the correct picture of Bangladesh. He has suggested making major changes in the constitution and removing 'secularism.' He will make these changes before the next elections. Because Yunus is an educationist later and is first a fundamentalist Muslim. Earlier, in the year 2010, the Supreme Court of Bangladesh had ruled that the removal of secularism in 1977 was illegal. The court had reinstated secularism in the constitution. Just as Bangladesh is attacking temples in its country, similarly in India too, deities are being searched for in mosques. The destination of both the neighbours is the same. Bangladesh wants to become an Islamic nation while preparations are on in India to make it a 'Hindu Rashtree'.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

US EXPORT CONTROLS: IMPACT ON INDIA'S AI

US export controls pose new challenges for India's AI and tech ambitions



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

The Biden administration's Interim Final Rule (IFR), effective January 2025, introduces strict regulations on the export, reexport and in-country transfer of advanced computing integrated circuits (ICs) and artificial intelligence (AI) model weights. These measures aim to limit the proliferation of advanced technologies with potential military and intelligence applications, particularly in AI-driven systems. While this move marks a significant policy step from the outgoing administration, its future under the next presidency remains uncertain, as the new administration could pause the implementation for review. India, a nation rapidly advancing its AI infrastructure, faces significant challenges under the IFR. Here are the key implications:

The IFR enforces licensing requirements for exporting advanced computing ICs and AI model weights, particularly those integral to high-performance AI models. For India, which is heavily investing in AI research and infrastructure, these restrictions may hinder access to state-of-the-art U.S. technologies. A "presumption of denial" applies to licenses for advanced ICs used in training AI models, limiting India's ability to obtain cutting-edge hardware essential for its AI development.

The regulations impose stringent controls on advanced closed-weight AI models, while open-weight models are exempt. Since closed-weight models often drive groundbreaking AI research, this limitation could slow India's progress in leveraging advanced US AI models. Restricted access to these critical technologies could delay breakthroughs in AI-driven applications.



Although the IFR provides exceptions for low-risk destinations, India is not included in the list of preferred nations. As a result, Indian entities face capped allocations on advanced computing capacity based on total processing performance (TPP). Over the next three years, these limitations could restrict the computational resources available for Indian researchers and developers, potentially stalling AI initiatives.

Indian companies seeking US technology will face heightened scrutiny under the IFR, including stringent checks on supply chain security, personnel vetting, and cybersecurity compliance. These requirements will increase the complexity of partnerships with US firms and may delay India's efforts to scale its AI ecosystem.

India's plans to establish advanced data centers and high-performance computing clusters will be directly affected by the new regulations. The IFR mandates compliance with US security standards, such as NIST guidelines, adding operational costs and potential delays.

India's ambition to lead global AI collaborations, as demonstrated by its participation in initiatives like the Global Partnership on AI (GPAI), faces friction under these controls. With international partnerships playing a crucial role in India's technological growth, the restrictions on high-performance computing components and AI models could disrupt progress.

To mitigate these challenges, India must consider alternative strategies, including strengthening domestic research and development, partnering with non-US technology providers, and leveraging diplomatic channels to negotiate favorable terms with the US. The path forward will require Indian companies to adapt rapidly, focusing on self-sufficiency and fostering collaborations beyond traditional partnerships. While the IFR offers limited flexibility through license exceptions and potential adjustments, India's advanced computing and AI ambitions will require resilience and innovation to overcome the regulatory hurdles imposed by these new export controls.

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

The war they waged, the price we paid

With Trump's return, the stage is set for continuation of the bloodstained legacy, with devastating consequences for the world's most vulnerable



NILANTHA LANGAMUWA



The Vietnam War should have been the United States' breaking point—a humiliating defeat that exposed the futility of projecting brute force in a world that had long learned to resist imperialism. But instead of becoming a sobering moment of reflection, it ignited a chain reaction of conflicts, interventions, and proxy wars that would devastate nations and leave millions dead. From Ronald Reagan to Joe Biden, the American war machine has not only endured but expanded, thriving on chaos and suffering. With Donald Trump poised to return, his new administration promises to perpetuate this bloodstained legacy, consolidating power at home while unleashing destruction abroad. Reagan's tenure marked a revival of the Cold War mindset, framed by a simplistic, almost cartoonish view of global politics.

His administration orchestrated covert operations and military interventions with reckless abandon, leaving a trail of devastation across continents. In Grenada, a minuscule island nation, the U.S. flexed its muscle in a laughable display of overkill. Yet, the price for the people of Grenada was far from humorous—hundreds of civilians died in an operation sold as a "rescue mission." In Lebanon, Reagan's deployment of U.S. Marines ended in catastrophe, with 241 servicemen killed in a suicide bombing. The retaliatory shelling of Lebanese villages left countless civilians dead, their stories erased from the official narrative. George H. W. Bush brought the carnage to Panama and Iraq. Operation Just Cause in Panama left at least 3,000 civilians dead, according to independent estimates—numbers far higher than the official U.S. tally. The Gulf War of 1991 killed tens of thousands of Iraqi soldiers and civilians, with entire neighbourhoods flattened by American airpower. The sanctions that followed—a form of economic warfare—led to the deaths of an estimated 500,000 Iraqi children, as reported by UNICEF. But these deaths were dismissed by then-Secretary of State Madeleine Albright as a price worth paying.

Bill Clinton's presidency, often remembered for its charm and centrism, was any-



THE GULF WAR OF 1991 KILLED TENS OF THOUSANDS OF IRAQI SOLDIERS AND CIVILIANS, WITH ENTIRE NEIGHBOURHOODS FLATTENED BY AMERICAN AIRPOWER. THE SANCTIONS THAT FOLLOWED—A FORM OF ECONOMIC WARFARE—LED TO THE DEATHS OF AN ESTIMATED 500,000 IRAQI CHILDREN

thing but peaceful. Under his watch, NATO's bombing campaign in Kosovo killed an estimated 500 civilians, while strikes on critical infrastructure plunged the region into chaos. In Somalia, Clinton inherited and expanded a disastrous intervention that culminated in the infamous Black Hawk Down incident. The fallout was not limited to American soldiers—it cost the lives of an estimated 10,000 Somali civilians caught in the crossfire. The Bush-Cheney years saw the bloodbath reach industrial levels. The 2003 invasion of Iraq, based on falsified intelligence, unleashed a catastrophe of staggering proportions. By conservative estimates, 200,000 Iraqi civilians died in the war, though many argue the real number exceeds half a million. Afghanistan, initially framed as a righteous response to 9/11, turned into a graveyard for American credibility. The war cost over 70,000 Afghan civilian lives, with many more lost to starvation and disease caused by the destruction of infrastructure.

These numbers, while horrifying, barely scratch the surface. Barack Obama, heralded as a harbinger of change, instead became the drone king. Under his administration, drone strikes killed an estimated 3,800 people in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia. These numbers include as many as 800 civilians, though independent investigations suggest the real toll is much higher. Libya, once a stable if repressive state, was reduced to a failed state after NATO's intervention, with Obama admitting it was his greatest foreign policy mistake. Yet his admission did nothing to rebuild Libya, now a haven for human traffickers and militia warlords. Donald Trump's first term shattered even the pretence of restraint. Civilian casualties from U.S. airstrikes in Syria and Iraq

soared, with independent monitors estimating at least 4,500 civilians killed in 2017 alone.

In Somalia, Trump's loosening of drone strike protocols led to a surge in civilian deaths, including women and children obliterated in remote villages. Yemen's civil war, fueled by U.S.-supplied bombs and logistical support to Saudi Arabia, created what the U.N. calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis. By some estimates, over 377,000 Yemenis have died—many of them from famine and disease exacerbated by the relentless bombing campaigns. Joe Biden's administration, while promising a pivot to diplomacy, has only perpetuated the violence.

The withdrawal from Afghanistan, while ending America's longest war, was executed with callous disregard for human life. At least 170 civilians were killed in a single ISIS-K bombing during the chaotic evacuation. Biden's continued drone strikes and military presence in Syria ensure that civilians remain collateral in America's unending "war on terror." In Ukraine, US military aid fuels a war that has already claimed tens of thousands of lives on both sides, with no end in sight. Across these decades, the pattern is unmistakable: the United States does not fight wars for freedom or democracy.

It fights for hegemony, resources, and geopolitical advantage, with human lives as expendable currency. The statistics are staggering but fail to capture the depth of the tragedy. From Vietnam to Yemen, from Iraq to Libya, the human cost is always paid by those least equipped to bear it: the poor, the displaced, and the voiceless. In just days, Donald Trump will return to the White House, his second administration poised to escalate the already relentless machinery of American war. This time, the

gloves are off—his power more consolidated, his team of loyalists more ruthless, and his ambitions unrestrained. The team surrounding him will be battle-hardened ideologues with little patience for opposition.

Trump has openly embraced authoritarian impulses, and his foreign policy will likely mirror his domestic ambitions—unapologetic, ruthless, and geared toward consolidating dominance. For the impoverished, this is a death sentence. The costs will not be borne by those who plan wars from air-conditioned offices or justify them in press briefings but by the powerless: Yemeni mothers sifting through the rubble for scraps, Syrian children cowering as drones circle above, and Gazan families freezing to death amid the ruins of their bombed-out homes. These are not accidents of war; they are deliberate outcomes of a global system that treats human life as expendable in the pursuit of dominance over dignity.

The bombs will continue to fall, the starving will continue to die, and the architects of this destruction will dine in opulence, their hands stained with the blood of the voiceless.

We collectively absorb these atrocities—not with shock or outrage, but with numbed detachment, anaesthetised by the relentless churn of media cycles and the droning rationalisations of pundits. It is not that we do not care—it is that we have been conditioned not to. Once our souls have been amputated by decades of warmongering, by a system that normalises suffering as the cost of 'security', we survive in resignation, compelled by the machinery of indifference to keep moving forward.

(The writer is a journalist and policy analyst. Views expressed are personal)

Uttarakhand's initiatives to strengthen climate resilience in the Himalayas

The State's efforts, encapsulated in the Dehradun Declaration, highlight the importance of collaboration and community empowerment

The Uttarakhand Council of Science and Technology (UCOST) recently organised a significant workshop in Delhi, focusing on climate resilience and disaster management, with a particular emphasis on Himalayan states. This workshop attracted eminent scientists, disaster management experts, and advocates of climate resilience, underscoring the pressing need to address environmental challenges in the region. This initiative follows Uttarakhand's landmark 2023 International Conference in Dehradun, which drew participants from approximately 50 countries.

The conference culminated in the adoption of the "Dehradun Declaration," a comprehensive action plan

aimed at fostering collaboration, innovation and effective strategies to mitigate the impact of climate change and natural disasters in Himalayan states. Uttarakhand's proactive approach to uniting stakeholders on these critical issues is both commendable and necessary.

Rationale Behind Uttarakhand's Initiatives

Uttarakhand's unique geographical and cultural significance drives its commitment to addressing climate resilience. With the second-largest Himalayan boundary after Arunachal Pradesh, the state plays a pivotal role in supporting Northern India's vast hinterland. The region's popularity as a hub for tourism, religious pilgrimages such as the Char



DINESH KUMAR TYAGI

Dham Yatra, and adventure activities exerts considerable pressure on its fragile ecosystem.

The state faces recurring natural calamities, including forest fires, landslides, cloud-bursts, and glacier shrinkage. These disasters significantly impact local communities, strain state resources, and demand robust measures to minimise their devastating

effects. By organising international workshops and fostering collaborations, Uttarakhand aims to raise awareness, share best practices and leverage technology, such as data analytics and artificial intelligence, to design both preventive and responsive strategies.

Highlights of the Dehradun Declaration

The Dehradun Declaration lays out a comprehensive framework for building climate resilience and disaster preparedness in Himalayan states. Its key features include: **Strengthening Preparedness** Integrating disaster resilience into educational curricula. Framing regulations to protect vulnerable populations. Developing financial tools and frameworks to advance the "science of survival."



Protecting the Himalayan Ecosystem

Merging indigenous knowledge with traditional community practices.

Promoting nature-based solutions and active community engagement.

Enhancing institutional collaboration for project monitoring and execution.

Empowering Communities Establishing community-

based early warning systems. Educating and equipping communities to take local measures.

Strengthening livelihoods and building local networks of like-minded individuals.

Policy Integration

Establishing an Institute of Disaster Management and a global center for climate resilience.

Formulating policies based on national and international best practices.

Coordinating among state, central, and international organisations.

Promoting Innovation Supporting startups and entrepreneurs in developing tools and technologies for climate resilience.

The Delhi Workshop and Global Consensus

The Delhi workshop served as a follow-up to the Dehradun Declaration and brought together disaster management scholars, international organisations, and corporate representatives engaged in CSR activities. Participants praised Uttarakhand's efforts to convene diverse stakeholders, emphasising that protecting the Himalayan ecosystem is a shared responsibility.

The Himalayas, often referred to as the "Soul of India" and the "Third Pole," are crucial for maintaining ecological balance. Workshop attendees agreed on the need for collective action to address challenges such as unchecked tourism and resource exploitation. Recommendations included regulating plastic use, promoting organic farming,

imposing green taxes on vehicles, and training locals to mitigate post-disaster damage.

National Perspectives on Climate Resilience

The recently concluded COP 29 in Baku included an agenda to establish a global fund for addressing climate change. Developed nations were urged to allocate higher budgets to support developing and poorer countries in reducing carbon emissions.

Training volunteers at the village level and connecting them through a centralised platform can foster trust and confidence in disaster preparedness efforts.

(The writer is a retired IAS officer and president of Society of Digital Entrepreneurs; views are personal)

Trump and Biden both claim credit for Gaza ceasefire deal

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden and President-elect Donald Trump are both claiming credit for a ceasefire deal in Gaza on Wednesday after the White House brought Trump's Middle East envoy into negotiations that have dragged on for months.

While Biden's refusal to impose meaningful restrictions on sending arms to Israel may have helped the key U.S. ally seriously degrade Hamas and fellow Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah in Lebanon, it also came with enormous suffering for innocent Palestinians and Lebanese who have been caught in the crossfire of the 15 months of grinding war.

Jonathan Panikoff, director of the Scowcroft Middle East Security Initiative at the Atlantic Council, said Biden deserves praise for continuing to push the talks despite repeated failures. But Trump's threats to Hamas and his efforts through Witkoff to "cajole" Netanyahu deserve credit as well, he said.

Without both pushing for it." In his White House remarks, Biden said his administration negotiated the deal but that Trump's team will soon be charged with making sure it's implemented.

latest round of talks alongside McGurk, these U.S. officials have downplayed Trump's relevance to the process, apart from the importance of ensuring his support for a deal painstakingly negotiated over the past year.

involved in the talks. Negotiations intensified over the past four days, according to the official, who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The official described McGurk and Witkoff's coordination as a "fruitful partnership" in which the two closely coordinated and they pressed parties to come to terms. At a critical point last week, Witkoff left talks in Doha for Israel to meet with Netanyahu.

New US NSA signals continuation of Biden policies, calls India key partner

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Incoming national security advisor Mike Waltz has indicated that the Trump administration will continue with several elements of Joe Biden's policies, particularly on China and India, which he described as a critical partner for the US in the future.

Waltz was quick to point out to the moderator Stephen J Hadley, former national security advisor, that he was also the Republican chair of the US-India Caucus, in the last Congress.

The Quad is a multilateral framework comprising India, Australia, Japan, and the US, with a shared commitment to upholding a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific, amidst China's aggressive behaviour in the strategically vital South China Sea.

Standoff in South Africa ends with 87 miners dead

PTI ■ STILFONTEIN

The death toll in a months-long standoff between police and miners trapped while working illegally in an abandoned gold mine in South Africa has risen to at least 87, police said Thursday.

would not help the hundreds of miners because they were "criminals." The miners are suspected to have died of starvation and dehydration, although no causes of death have been released.

Authorities now believe that nearly 2,000 miners were working illegally in the mine near the town of Stilfontein, southwest of Johannesburg, since August last year.

Police announced Wednesday that they were ending that operation after three days and said they believed no one else was underground.

Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin launches massive New Glenn rocket on first test flight

Cape Canaveral (PTI):



Blue Origin's New Glenn rocket lifts off from Launch Complex 36 at the Cape Canaveral Space Force Station, Thursday in Cape Canaveral. AP/PTI

13 minutes later, a feat that drew quick praise from SpaceX's Elon Musk. Bezos — taking part in the launch from Mission Control — declined to disclose his personal investment in the program.

Sunita steps out on Spacewalk after 7 months in orbit

Cape Canaveral (PTI):

'Many Americans doubt Trump can lower prices in first year'

Washington (PTI):

Worries about everyday expenses helped return President-elect Donald Trump to the White House. But with his second term quickly approaching, many US adults are sceptical about his ability to bring down costs.

Biden, a Democrat, was to blame for inflation and whether Trump could fix it. AP VoteCast, an extensive survey of voters and nonvoters that aims to tell the story behind election results, showed that about 4 in 10 voters in the November election identified the economy and jobs as the most important issue facing the country and that about 6 in 10 of those voters cast their ballot for Trump.

Oligarchy taking shape in America, warns Biden in his farewell address

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Outgoing President Joe Biden has warned of a rising ultra-wealthy "oligarchy" in America that poses a threat to the nation's democracy, as he prepared to cede power to President-elect Donald Trump.

President Kamala Harris in both popular votes and the electoral college. Biden said that he wanted to warn the country of dangers that are concerning him. "That's a dangerous concentration of power in the hands of a very few ultra-wealthy people," he said.



President Joe Biden hugs Vice President Kamala Harris after giving his farewell address from the Oval Office of the White House Wednesday, in Washington. AP/PTI

"We see the consequences all across America, and we've seen it before," said the president seated behind the resolute desk in the Oval Office. First Lady Jill Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris, Second Gentleman Doug Emhoff, President's son Hunter and some of the senior officials in his administration were also present in the room.

pose real dangers for our country as well," Biden said in the 17-minute speech "Americans are being buried under an avalanche of misinformation and disinformation, enabling the abuse of power," he said, referencing Mark Zuckerberg's recent announcement his company Meta would stop fact-checking on its social media platforms such as Facebook.

abuse of power," said the president. Noting that unless safeguards are in place, Artificial Intelligence (AI) could spawn new threats to human rights, way of life, privacy, how they work and how to protect the nation.

grandchildren. We must keep pushing forward and push faster. There's no time to waste," he said. In his remarks, Biden also talks about the works and reforms that need to be done in the months and years ahead. "In the years ahead it's going to be up to the president, the presidency, the Congress, the courts, the free press and the American people to confront these powerful forces. We must reform the tax code. Not the need to get dark money, that's that hidden funding behind too many campaign contributions," he said.

NCLAT admits Meta, Whatsapp pleas against CCI's ₹213-Crore penalty

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Appellate tribunal NCLAT on Thursday admitted the petitions filed by Meta Platforms and Whatsapp against an order passed by fair trade regulator CCI which imposed a penalty of Rs 213.14 crore for abuse of market dominance. After hearing the initial submissions from Meta and CCI (Competition Commission of India), a two-member bench of the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) said the issue requires consideration. "We find that the submission raised by the parties needs consideration. We admit both the appeals," said the NCLAT bench which also comprised its Chairperson Justice Ashok Bhushan. However, over the interim relief to stay the CCI order, NCLAT said it will decide next week. During the proceedings, the counsel appearing for Whatsapp and Meta Platform requested the appellate tribunal to stay the CCI order. However, this was opposed by the counsel appearing for the



Competition Commission of India. On November 18, the CCI imposed a penalty of Rs 213.14 crore on social media major Meta for unfair business ways with respect to the WhatsApp privacy policy update done in 2021. Meta Platforms and Whatsapp have challenged this order before the NCLAT,

which is an appellate authority over the orders passed by the CCI. Senior Advocates Kapil Sibal and Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for Meta and Whatsapp, contended that the CCI had overstepped its jurisdiction by ruling on WhatsApp's privacy policy as the matter is sub-judice before a Constitution Bench

of the Supreme Court. "CCI has gone into the entity's privacy policy. It is before 5 judges of the Supreme Court. It has no jurisdiction to deal with it," he said. Moreover, there is no complaint in this case and CCI has come to an "erroneous conclusion" on dominance but it did not take into account 'effect analysis' of

that. "Without an effect analysis, you cannot come to the conclusion," said Sibal, adding the CCI has not even examined what is the data that is being shared. He further said CCI has barred WhatsApp from sharing data collected on its platform with other Meta companies or Meta company products for advertising purposes for five years and alleged: "they are trying to destroy the business model." "No app can survive without monetisation," he said, adding the similar platforms as Telegram and Signal have their own models of monetisation. Moreover, search apps also monetise in their own ways. He further sought an immediate stay on the CCI order, which was directed to be implemented by February 19. Sibal said: "Let the Supreme Court decide on the privacy policy and let the statutory rules come, then you can (NCLAT) take up the matter and decide. Moreover balance of convenience in our favour as we have been operating this for years."



Contractors responsible for accidents due to bad roads: Union minister Gadkari

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari on Thursday said faulty road construction should be made a non-bailable offence and road contractors and engineers should be held responsible for accidents and sent to prison. Addressing an event organised by industry body CII, Gadkari further said India is number one in road accidents in the world. "Faulty road construction should be a non-bailable

offence and road contractors, concessionaires and engineers should be held responsible for accidents and sent to prison," he said. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways aims to reduce road accident fatalities to half by 2030. According to the minister, the ministry data of road accidents in 2023 shows five lakh mishaps in the country resulting in 1,72,000 deaths. "Of this, 66.4 per cent, or 1,14,000, were in the 18-45 years age bracket while 10,000 deaths were of children,"

Gadkari said. He pointed out that 55,000 deaths were reported due to absence of helmets and 30,000 were due to non-use of seat belts. Gadkari also said the highways ministry is spending Rs 40,000 crore to rectify black spots on highways. Gadkari urged the industry and other stakeholders to partner with the government for setting up of driver training and fitness centres to address the acute shortage of drivers in the country.

Sensex, Nifty extend gains for third day on strong global cues



PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty rallied for the third session on the trot on Thursday, helped by a rally in global markets after lower-than-expected consumer inflation in the US ignited hopes of more rate cuts by the Federal Reserve. Intense buying in Reliance Industries, ICICI Bank and HDFC Bank also boosted sentiments, traders said. The 30-share BSE index climbed 318.74 points or 0.42 per cent to revisit 77,000 level at 77,042.82. During the day, it jumped 595.42 points or 0.77 per cent to 77,319.50. On the similar lines, the NSE Nifty rallied 98.60 points or 0.42 per cent to 23,311.80. As many as 2,778 stocks advanced, while 1,188 declined and 101 remained unchanged on the BSE. Unabated foreign fund inflows, weakness in the rupee and elevated global crude prices continue to weigh on domestic equity markets, traders said. "Benchmark indices continued to trade in the positive, albeit off highs, driven by positive investor sentiment following mild US inflation data, which raised hopes for a potential rate cut by the Federal Reserve. "Additionally, favourable developments in the Israel-Hamas ceasefire and a reduced trade deficit further boosted the market's upward movement. However, weak economic growth data from the UK dampened some of this optimism," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Adani Ports, State Bank of India, Bajaj Finserv, Bharti Airtel, Tata Motors, IndusInd Bank, NTPC, Maruti, Reliance Industries and Axis Bank were the biggest gainers. In contrast, HCL Tech, Nestle, Infosys, Hindustan Unilever, ITC and Tata Consultancy Services were among the laggards. IT services major Infosys on Thursday reported an 11.46 per cent year-on-year increase in consolidated net profit to Rs 6,806 crore in the October-December quarter of FY25. Shares of Infosys slipped 1.21 per cent to settle at Rs 1,926.20 apiece on the BSE. Meanwhile, Adani group stocks rallied on Thursday after Hindenburg Research founder Nate Anderson announced that he would disband the firm, which made international waves with campaigns targeting billionaire Gautam Adani that wiped billions from the market value of his group companies. Shares of NDTV surged 9.15 per cent, Ambuja Cements jumped 3.88 per cent, Adani Green Energy rallied 3.35 per cent, Sanghi Industries climbed 3.34 per cent and Adani Power went up by 2.45 per cent on the BSE. The stock of Adani Ports advanced 2.03 per cent, Adani Total Gas (1.78 per cent), Adani Enterprises (1.74 per cent), Adani Energy Solutions (1.54 per cent) and ACC (0.77 per cent). Shares of Adani Wilmar, however, declined 1.19 per cent. "Nifty has regained momentum, closing at 23,312, buoyed by demand and reclaiming the 23,300 mark, as Wall Street's strong performance helped bulls take charge. Risk-on sentiments were sparked by cooler-than-expected US CPI inflation data for December, easing concerns about rising inflation and boosting expectations that the Fed might continue its rate-cutting cycle throughout the year.

India's economy to grow at 6.4 per cent in current fiscal: FICCI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Industry body FICCI on Thursday lowered India's growth projection for the current financial year to 6.4 per cent from 7 per cent estimated earlier. According to FICCI's Economic Outlook Survey, the revised projection is in line with the broad expectations and reflect a notable slowdown vis-à-vis 8.2 per cent GDP growth recorded in 2023-24. "...FICCI's Economic Outlook Survey projects an annual median GDP growth forecast of 6.4 per cent for 2024-25. The forecast in the current survey marks a moderation from 7.0 per cent estimate (for 2024-25) put out in the previous round conducted during the month of September last year," it said. The survey was conducted in December 2024 and drew responses from leading economists representing industry, banking and financial services sector. The participating economists observed global economy in 2025 to present a reasonable growth



trajectory, with an underlying note of caution. Sharing their perspective on the expected impact of US President Donald Trump's policies on the Indian economy, the economists indicated the possibility of short-term disruptions through channels like exports, foreign capital flows, and input costs for the US trading partners including India. The likelihood of tax cuts

(personal and business) could inflate the US fiscal deficit, while higher tariffs and stricter immigration norms could push up labour costs and inflation, they observed. The Federal Reserve, in response, could cut the policy rates by less than what was anticipated. This may reduce capital inflows into emerging markets, including India, causing rupee fluctuations.

Trade tensions, including a potential US-China trade conflict, could disrupt supply chains and raise input costs in the short term. However, economists expect US to take a calibrated approach towards India, the economists opined. The Union Budget for 2025-26, set to be presented on February 1, arrives amidst global economic uncertainties and moderating domestic

growth. Against this backdrop, economists shared their expectations that could shape the government's policy in the upcoming budget. Reviving private consumption emerged as a key priority. A review of the current tax structure including rates (both direct and indirect taxes) in the Union Budget 2025-26 is called for with a view to enhance disposable income and stimulate consumer spending, they said. Additionally, continued investments in welfare programmes such as MGNREGA, PMGSY, and PMAY were recommended. Further, the participating economists expect continued capex expansion, given its strong multiplier effects. An increase between 10-15 per cent in capex over 2024-25 is being looked at in the upcoming budget. Economists also recommended initiatives to increase agri productivity, improve rural infrastructure, and strengthen agricultural value chains. Investments in cold storage facilities and

supply chain efficiency were underscored as critical to managing inflationary pressures and minimizing food wastage. According to the participants, India's economic outlook for 2025 presents cautious optimism, amidst the backdrop of persisting external headwinds. Consumer spending is expected to gain momentum, driven by an improved outlook for the agriculture sector, which is likely to bolster rural consumption and sentiment in the first half of the next fiscal year. Food inflation which has remained elevated for over a year and strained household budgets, is expected to ease. Furthermore, monetary easing by the RBI, resulting in lower interest rates, could also provide an additional impetus to consumption. To address risks and unlock opportunities, economists recommended that India should evaluate reducing tariffs on select and specific US imports while ensuring revenue stability and minimal domestic impact.

Rupee declines 16 paise to settle at 86.56 against US Dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee depreciated 16 paise to close at 86.56 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, dragged down by a strong American currency overseas, elevated crude oil prices and foreign fund outflows. However, positive domestic equity markets provided some cushion at the lower level, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 86.42 and touched the intraday high of 86.37 before ending the session at 86.56 (provisional) against the greenback, 16 paise lower from the previous



close. The local unit settled with a gain of 13 paise at 86.40 against the dollar on Wednesday, a day after

rebounding 17 paise from its lowest-ever level. Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said the rupee

declined due to increased demand for dollars by importers. "Importers may continue to buy dollars, which may further pressurise the rupee. Traders may take cues from retail sales and weekly unemployment claims data from the US. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 86.35 to Rs 86.75," he said. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.05 per cent higher at 108.97. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.12 per cent but stayed elevated at

USD 81.93 per barrel in futures trade. Analysts said concerns over geopolitical uncertainties are likely to add volatility in the dollar and crude until the US gets a new administration under President Donald Trump next week. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 318.74 points, or 0.42 per cent, to settle at 77,042.82 points, while the Nifty rose 98.60 points, or 0.42 per cent, to 23,311.80 points. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 4,533.49 crore on Wednesday.

Gold rallies ₹500, silver soars ₹2,300

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices rallied Rs 500 to hit over a two-month high of Rs 81,300 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid fresh buying from jewellers and retailers and rupee depreciation, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal had closed at Rs 80,800 per 10 grams on Wednesday. The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity climbed Rs 500 to Rs 80,900 per 10 grams. It settled at Rs 80,400 per 10 grams in the previous trading session. Silver also surged Rs 2,300 to Rs 94,000 per kg from the previous close of Rs 91,700 per kg on Wednesday. Gold contracts for February delivery rose Rs 297, or 0.38 per cent, to Rs 79,007 per 10 grams in the futures trade on the MCX on Thursday. "Gold surged higher trading above Rs 79,000 in MCX, supported by a rupee depreciation," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst of Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, said. On Thursday, the rupee depreciated 16 paise to close at 86.56 (provisional) against the US dollar, dragged down by a strong American currency overseas, elevated crude oil prices and foreign fund outflows.

DB Corp Q3 profit down 4.6 per cent to ₹118 Crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Media house DB Corp Ltd on Thursday reported 4.65 per cent decline in consolidated net profit at Rs 118.21 crore for the third quarter ended December 2024. The company had posted a profit of Rs 123.97 crore for the October-December period a year ago, according to a regulatory filing from DB Corp. Revenue from operations was marginally down to Rs 642.65 crore from Rs 644.71 crore. Total expenses were Rs 495.58 crore as against Rs 497.38 crore earlier. Revenue from Printing, Publishing and Allied



business was down marginally to Rs 594.17 crore in the quarter. However, revenue from the radio business was up 5.47 per cent at Rs 48.64 crore. Total income of DB Corp, which includes other income, was down 1.37 per cent to Rs 655.64 crore in

the quarter. Meanwhile, in a separate filing, DB Corp informed about management changes. It has appointed Runit Kishor Shah as an Additional Director and Vijay Kumar TV as Chief Operating Officer in Ad sales. DB Corp is one of the largest print media companies and publishes five newspapers - Dainik Bhaskar, Divya Bhaskar, Divya Marathi, Saurashtra Samachar and DB Star. It also owns 94.3 MY FM radio station. Shares of DB Corp Ltd were on Thursday trading at Rs 267.15 apiece on BSE, down 1.06 per cent from the previous close.

Spencer's Retail Q3 loss narrows to ₹47.3 Crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Spencer's Retail Ltd on Thursday reported narrowing of consolidated net loss to Rs 47.34 crore for the December quarter. The company posted net loss of Rs 51.20 crore in the October-December period a year ago, according to a regulatory filing from Spencer's Retail, a RP Sanjiv Goenka firm. However, its revenue from operations was down 20.9 per cent at Rs 516.97 crore during the quarter under review. It was at Rs 654.01 crore in the year-ago period. The company had a "soft festive quarter with respect to consumer spending," said Spencer's Retail in its investor



presentation. Total expenses of Spencer's Retail was down 20.2 per cent to Rs 567.44 crore in the December quarter as against Rs 711.54 crore a year ago. Spencer's Retail's total income, which includes other income, was marginally down 21.23 per cent to Rs 520.03 crore in the December quarter.

"Despite a soft festive trading environment wherein LFL sales growth was flat, Spencer's delivered a very strong operational performance on the back of good delivery (19.7 per cent), strong control on all operational cost lines resulting in a milestone EBITDA positive achievement," Chairman

Shashwat Goenka said. "This is a strong validation of our decision to focus on core geographies, exit from loss-making, non-strategic regions & drive improvement across all operating metrics such as margins, sales productivity, and costs and to bring the business to operational profitability," he added. Spencer's started its quick delivery proposition JIFFY and opened two stores during the quarter for Natures Basket. Its total store count, along with Natures Basket, is 131 with a total 10.34 lakh square feet in over 27 cities in India. Shares of Spencer's Retail Ltd on Thursday were trading at Rs 86.76 on the BSE, down 6.48 per cent from the previous close.



NEW LAUNCH



Honouring Legal Luminaries

Through its pages, the book recounts the lasting legacy of lawyers who championed justice and equality, says **ABHI SINGHAL**

The Society of Indian Law Firms (SILF) commemorated the 75th anniversary of the Republic of India with a memorable event that highlighted the significant contributions of lawyers to the nation's democratic journey. The occasion witnessed the launch of an extraordinary book titled *Lawyers of India in Freedom Struggle & in Independent India (1872-2022): 150 Years and Continued Glorious Contribution Toward the Centennial - 2047*. The launch brought together luminaries of the legal fraternity. The highlight of the evening was the book's formal launch by K.K. Venugopal, former Attorney General of India, who presented the first copy to his successor, R. Venkataramani, the current Attorney General of India. Addressing the distinguished gathering, K.K. Venugopal praised the legal profession's crucial role in shaping India's democratic ethos. "The contributions of lawyers have always transcended the courtroom. They have been instrumental in guiding India towards its democratic ideals, especially during times of struggle," he said. The



researched book chronicles 150 years of the legal profession's impact on India's socio-political landscape, from the colonial era to the present day. It pays homage to legendary figures like Mahatma Gandhi, Lala Lajpat Rai, and Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, whose advocacy during the independence movement laid the foundation for India's freedom. Equally, it sheds light on post-independence lawyers and educators who have fortified the country's legal framework. Dr. Lalit Bhasin, President of SILF, emphasised the book's significance in preserving the history of Indian legal professionals. "This book is an homage to the lawyers who



ABOUT THE BOOK
Compiled, Edited and Authored by Dr. Lalit Bhasin (President) Society of Indian Law Firms

have played a vital role in the independence movement and, more importantly, in the development of a legal system that is the backbone of India's democracy," he said. The book highlights Lala Lajpat Rai's leading advocacy for social reform and the rights of Indians and explores how post-independence legal professionals have upheld the principles of democracy, justice, and fairness in the evolving Indian Republic. As India approaches its centennial of independence in 2047, the book serves as both a historical record and a call to action. It underscores the continuing role of lawyers in addressing modern challenges and ensuring the rule of law prevails.

A Literary Prelude

Curtain-Raiser for Jaipur Literature Festival 2025



By **SAKSHI PRIYA**

The curtain-raiser for the Jaipur Literature Festival 2025 at The Leela Palace New Delhi offered an engaging preview of what promises to be another remarkable edition of the world's most celebrated literary gathering. Hosted at one of Delhi's most prestigious venues, the event celebrated the enduring power of literature and its ability to spark meaningful conversations. This year marks the fourth consecutive partnership between the Jaipur Literature Festival and Teamwork Arts with The Leela Palace New Delhi. The event brought together distinguished authors, poets and intellectuals, creating an atmosphere filled with creativity and inspiration.

The evening featured insightful speeches by key figures associated with the festival, who reflected on the significance of literature in contemporary society. Their words highlighted the festival's mission to preserve cultural heritage and encourage dialogue through storytelling and ideas. The venue provided a fitting backdrop for discussions about the role of literature as a bridge between the past and the present. The event underscored the Jaipur Literature Festival's role as a global platform for literary excellence and its dedication to the written word. As a preview of the main event, the curtain-raiser successfully built excitement among attendees. It highlighted the festival's significance for readers and writers alike, continuing to inspire and promote intellectual exchange.



(Left to right): William Dalrymple, celebrated historian, author and co-founder & co-director of the Jaipur Literature Festival; Anupam Dasgupta Area Vice President (North India) and General Manager at The Leela Palace, New Delhi; and Sanjoy K. Roy, Managing Director, Teamwork Arts. In its fourth year of partnership with Teamwork Arts, The Leela Palace New Delhi hosted the curtain-raiser dinner for the Jaipur Literature Festival 2025, scheduled from January 30 to February 3. The collaboration culminates with the prestigious Writer's Ball at The Leela Palace Jaipur, showcasing The Leela's dedication to celebrating India's rich cultural heritage and traditions.

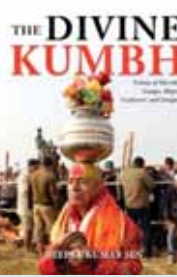
JANUARY READS



Book: Ananda: An Exploration of Cannabis in India
Author: Karan Madhok
Publisher: Alpha book company
Price: ₹999



Book: Love in Action: Writings on Nonviolent Social Change
Author: Thich Nhat Hanh
Publisher: Alpha book company
Price: ₹399



Book: The Divine Kumbh Echoes of Eternity: Ganga, Shipra, Godavari, and Sangam
Author: Deepak Kumar Sen
Publisher: Niyogi books
Price: ₹695



Book: The Gown and the Gavel: Life Journey of a Former Chief Justice of India
Author: G.B. PATNAIK
Publisher: Niyogi books
Price: ₹695



Book: Urban Leopards of Jhalana
Author: Soham Chakraborty
Publisher: Niyogi Books
Price: ₹650

In *Contemplating Gandhi: Essays on Mahatma's Life and Thought*, Chandrashekar Dharmadhikari, a notable jurist and Gandhian thinker, presents a deeply reflective and insightful account of the Mahatma's life, philosophy, and enduring significance. The essays, thoughtfully compiled and expertly translated by Ramchandra Pradhan, present an intimate and vivid portrayal of Gandhi, seamlessly mixing historical insights with poignant personal reminiscences. This volume transcends the bounds of academic discourse, becoming a heartfelt and reverent tribute to a legacy that continues to inspire and guide generations, both past and present. Ramchandra Pradhan's preface is a heartfelt and expansive memoir detailing his serendipitous and deep association

with Justice Chandrashekar Dharmadhikari and the Institute of Gandhian Studies in Wardha. Through his reflective and eloquent writing, Pradhan reveals a deep and abiding respect for Dharmadhikari's unwavering dedication to Gandhian values and principles. Pradhan's preface is not merely an introductory passage; rather, it chronicles his decade-long journey of engaging with Gandhian thought, a journey characterised by mutual affection, intellectual camaraderie, and a shared reverence for the Mahatma's enduring legacy. Pradhan affectionately recounts Dharmadhikari's poignant anecdotes, including the inspiring words spoken by Dharmadhikari's mother to his father, Dada Dharmadhikari, during the pivotal Non-cooperation Movement. Such compelling narratives serve to enrich the book's historical context, offering readers a valuable glimpse into the familial and philosophical underpinnings that have so profoundly shaped Dharmadhikari's own work and perspective. Moreover, Pradhan's translation, which Dharmadhikari himself has described as enhancing the original text, underscores Pradhan's vital role in preserving the nuances and essence of Gandhian philosophy for a contemporary audience. The essays in this collection, written on various occasions, range from reflections on Gandhi's principles to portraits of significant figures in the Gandhian movement, including Jinnah's wife, Jankidevi. They explore themes like the Non-cooperation Movement, the challenges of India's independence, and Gandhi's response to partition. While Dharmadhikari's writings exhibit repetition, as acknowledged by the translator, this reiteration reinforces the profundity and timelessness of Gandhian ideas. Dharmadhikari emphasises the dynamic

The Relevance of Principles

Contemplating Gandhi uncovers the depth of Gandhian philosophy, inspiring future generations, says **SHALEEN KUMAR SINGH**



nature of Gandhian philosophy. Drawing on his father's wisdom, he argues that ideas must evolve with the times to remain relevant. This approach challenges readers to engage critically with Gandhi's teachings, urging them to reinterpret his principles in contemporary contexts. The book's philosophical core lies in Dharmadhikari's insightful and nuanced reflections on the profound concepts of Anasakti Yoga and Karma Yoga, which Gandhi himself so eloquently embodied and exemplified throughout his life. These essays also powerfully highlight Gandhi's unwavering humanism, his inspiring ability to transcend personal sorrow during times of immense national crisis, and his steadfast commitment to living amidst and in service of the people. Dharmadhikari's deeply personal



recollections and experiences with the Mahatma himself, such as the cherished moments of walking alongside Gandhi and the profound anguish of mourning his tragic assassination, add an indelible emotional dimension to the essays. These poignant accounts elevate the book from a mere academic endeavour, transforming it into a living, breathing bridge that connects the revered past with the present day, allowing readers to forge a genuine, visceral connection to Gandhi's enduring legacy. Hence, the book titled *Contemplating Gandhi* is not merely a collection of essays; rather, it is a profound philosophical exploration and a heartfelt, reverent homage to the life and enduring legacy of the Mahatma. Through the insightful writings of Chandrashekar Dharmadhikari, enriched by the meticulous and evocative translation of Ramchandra Pradhan, this volume inspires readers to view Gandhi's teachings not as relics of the past, but as a living, dynamic philosophy that continues to guide and shape the present-day world. This book is a necessary read for scholars, students, and anyone deeply interested in Gandhian thought and principles. It challenges readers to think critically, to embrace the fluid and evolving interpretations of Gandhi's ideas, and to strive to embody his timeless values and principles in their own lives. Through this reflective work, Dharmadhikari and Pradhan remind us that the true relevance of Gandhi's legacy lies not in the provision of ready-made solutions, but in the offering of a transformative framework for ethical, purposeful and meaningful living in an ever-changing, dynamic global landscape. A book that deserves serious reading.

— Shaleen Kumar Singh (shaleensingh.in) teaches English at Swami Shukdevanad College, Shahjahanpur, India, edits creativesaplings in an online journal

Contemplating Gandhi
Essays on Mahatma's life and thought
Chandrashekar Dharmadhikari

ABOUT THE BOOK
Book: Contemplating Gandhi: Essays on Mahatma's Life and Thought
by Chandrashekar Dharmadhikari
Translated and Edited by Ramchandra Pradhan
Publisher: Anugya Books

Australian Open: Iga Swiatek moves into third round against Emma Raducanu

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Iga Swiatek rushed through the first set in 26 minutes and completed her 6-0, 6-2 second-round win over Rebecca Sramkova in an hour at the Australian Open. The five-time Grand Slam champion makes a habit of advancing quickly through the early rounds at the majors. She's won almost 12 per cent of her sets in Grand Slams by 6-0, which puts her in exclusive company. So when No. 49-ranked Sramkova ended a seven-game losing run by holding serve on Thursday, she raised her arm to acknowledge the applause from the Rod Laver Arena crowd. It was one of the few chances she had to celebrate. "It was good to play in such an efficient way and just finish it quick," Swiatek said. "Also, you know, just feel the court and how it is in RLA." Second-seeded Swiatek next faces 2021 U.S. Open champion Emma Raducanu, who recovered from

an early break in the second set to hold off Amanda Anisimova 6-3, 7-5. Taylor Fritz hasn't wasted any time advancing to the third round, dropping just eight games across two rounds and spending just over three hours on court. The 2024 U.S. Open runner-up and No. 4 seed beat Cristian Garin 6-2, 6-1, 6-0 to move into a third-round match against 38-year-old Gael Monfils, who last week became the oldest player to win an ATP Tour title. Also advancing on the men's side were local hope Alex de Minaur, seeded 8th, No. 16 Lorenzo Musetti, No. 19 Karen Khachanov and No. 21 Ben Shelton, who beat Pablo Carreno Busta 6-3, 6-3, 6-7 (4), 6-4. Raducanu has struggled with injuries since her breakthrough major in 2021, when she became the first qualifier to win a Grand Slam singles title. She didn't play a warmup tournament ahead of this year's Australian Open because of a muscle strain and needed time



during her match against Anisimova to get treatment on her back from a trainer. After advancing beyond the second round for the first time at Melbourne Park, the No. 61-ranked Raducanu was confident she'd recover in time for her next challenge against Swiatek. "It'll be a very good match for me, another opportunity to test my game," she said. "Going into it, I

have nothing to lose. I'm just going to swing." Swiatek is moving on from the doping infringement which led to her one-month ban last year. And she's not showing any signs of it being a distraction. She did everything at pace in the second round, including quick claps of her racket to acknowledge the crowd after her win. Swiatek didn't face a break point against Sramkova and converted five of the six she had. She finished off points with winners off both sides, and also hit some clean volleys on her ventures to the net. She's feeling slightly less pressure this year, too, after losing the No. 1 ranking to two-time defending Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka. "Yeah, there was a lot of pressure starting the year as No. 1, but I think overall last year I didn't think about it this much anyway," she said. "Also, I realized last year that I don't have 100% influence on what happens with my ranking sometimes. So now I just

focus on tennis." Emma Navarro, a U.S. Open semifinalist last year and seeded in the top eight for the first time at a major, was in trouble after two service breaks early in the third set before she reeled off four straight games to beat Wang Xiyu 6-3, 3-6, 6-4. She hopped from the baseline toward the net, and made a big, swirling swing of her arm to underline another tough, three-set victory. "It was really tough the whole time ... Super tough there at the end," Navarro said. "Found some good tennis there in the last games." She'll next play Ons Jabeur, a three-time Grand Slam runner-up, who struggled with asthma but held off Camila Osorio 7-5, 6-3. Sixth-seeded Elena Rybakina, the 2022 Wimbledon champion and runner-up in Australia two years ago, registered her 50th win in a Grand Slam main draw singles match when she beat American qualifier Iva Jovic 6-0, 6-3.



Barcelona reaches Copa del Rey quarterfinals with a 5-1 victory over Real Betis

PTI ■ BARCELONA

Barcelona followed up its rout of Real Madrid in the Spanish Super Cup final with a comfortable 5-1 victory over Real Betis in the round of 16 of the Copa del Rey. Gavi and Jules Koundé scored a goal each in the first half-hour and Raphinha, Ferran Torres and Lamine Yamal added to the lead in the second half to give the Catalan club the win and a spot in the quarterfinals. It was the fourth straight victory in 2025 for Barcelona, which on Sunday defeated Madrid 5-2 in Saudi Arabia to win the Spanish Super Cup. "We wanted to keep the momentum from the Super Cup here at home in front of our fans," Barcelona defender Pau Cubarsi said. "We continue like this and keep the foot on the throttle. The (Christmas) break did well for us, we were able to refresh." Barcelona had lost its last two games in 2024 before going on a winning streak against Barbastro in the Copa del Rey and Athletic Bilbao and Madrid in the Spanish Super Cup. Playmaker Dani Olmo, registered in the last minute after a long battle between Barcelona, the Spanish league and Spain's federation because of a missed deadline by the club, helped set up Gavi's opening goal in the third minute at Montjuic stadium. Yamal gave the pass for Koundé's goal in the 27th. Koundé thought he had added to the lead in first-half

stoppage time but his effort was disallowed by video review because he was offside. Yamal also had one called back by the VAR because of offside early in the second half. Barcelona's third goal finally counted when Raphinha found the net in a breakaway in the 58th. Torres scored the fourth from inside the area in the 67th, a few minutes after coming off the bench, and Yamal sealed it after a nice run in the 75th. Vitor Roque scored Betis' lone goal by converting an 84th-minute penalty kick. **ATLETICO KEEPS WINNING** Atletico Madrid, playing without many regular starters, routed second-division club Elche 4-0 to extend its record winning streak to 15 matches. The club had never won more than 13 games in a row across all competitions before. Alexander Sorloth scored from close range in the eighth and converted a 29th-minute penalty kick. Rodrigo Riquelme scored the third from long range in the 61st, and Julián Álvarez closed the scoring in the 75th. Elche played a man down from the 50th after Nicolás Fernández was sent off with a second yellow card. **OTHER RESULTS** Alvaro Rodríguez scored two minutes into the match as Getafe won 1-0 at fourth-division club Pontevedra. The visitors played a man down from the 41st after a straight red card was shown to Rodríguez.

India women must make this year their best in ODIs: Smriti Mandhana

PTI ■ RAJKOT

Smriti Mandhana believes India's back-to-back 3-0 series wins against the West Indies and Ireland have provided the perfect momentum for making it their "best year in one-dayers" as the team gears up for the 50-over World Cup at home. India will host the women's ODI World Cup later this year and the team, which has been able to rediscover its form with six consecutive ODI wins, should drive home the advantage now, says Mandhana. "Two 3-0 sweeps are definitely really good in a World Cup year especially. We have to like keeping going and have this for the best year for one-days (dayers)," Mandhana said in a video



shared by BCCI. Mandhana (135) and Pratika Rawal (154) put on 233 for the first wicket for the third highest opening wicket partnership for India in ODIs, setting up their highest ever total of 435/5 and eventually for their biggest ever ODI win by 304 runs on Wednesday. "I wanted to go out and bat with a lot of freedom. I said in the dugout before I went in about that you know, I'm going to try and play my shots because not many times you get an opportunity to do that," Mandhana said. Rawal, who notched up her first hundred to make 154 off 129 balls with 20 fours and

one six, admitted she slowed down nearing her century but gained pace of scoring once she was past the landmark. "As a batter I always wanted to score more runs and doing that for your country is actually a privilege and I am very happy," she said. "After (crossing) 70 (runs) I was a bit conscious that there was a hundred (on the cards). I was taking singles and going slow but when I got the hundred, I was like, let's just go for it. The 50 runs after the hundred came a bit quicker. I was able to score the way I score," she said. Talking about her 233-run opening stand with the senior batter, Rawal said, "It felt like that it was happening with the flow, we didn't think about it." "We got to know stats now, actually," Mandhana added.



Leroy Sané answers critics by scoring two goals as Bayern routs Hoffenheim

PTI ■ MUNICH

Leroy Sané answered critics by scoring two goals as Bayern Munich routed Hoffenheim 5-0 to restore its four-point lead in the Bundesliga. Sané is subject to increased attention with his contract due to expire at the end of the season. Pundits including former Bayern great Lothar Matthäus say he hasn't lived up to expectations since joining from Manchester City in 2020, making a contract extension unlikely. Matthäus was speaking to broadcaster Sky before kickoff. Sané wasted little time in responding with the opener in the seventh minute when he fired a fierce shot inside the far post after Thomas Müller laid the ball off. Sané's celebrations showed the criticism had perhaps taken its toll. "You always want to shake him, that he just does something and doesn't think too much. And today he did a lot and didn't think too much and he looked good," Müller said. Raphaël Guerreiro was celebrating five minutes later as a long evening beckoned for Hoffenheim. Guerreiro played a one-two with Harry Kane before scoring his first Bundesliga goal of the season. Kane made it 3-0 with a penalty in the 26th. It was his 16th goal of the season. Sané got his second after the break, set up by Mathys Tel,

and substitute Serge Gnabry scored minutes after going on for Kane. Sané went off to applause from the Bayern fans after Gnabry's goal. "In the end, you get praised if you give a good performance and you might get a bit of flack if things don't go so well," Sané said. "I always try to help the team, to give a good performance. And I'm the first one who's unhappy when I don't give a good performance and can't help the team." **S T U T T G A R T PRESSURING LEIPZIG FOR CHAMPIONS LEAGUE QUALIFICATION** Fourth-place Leipzig finished with nine players after squandering a lead to lose 2-1 at Stuttgart, which moved a point behind the visitors. Benjamin Šeško gave Leipzig an early lead, but the home team was irate that play had continued after an apparent foul by Ridle Baku on Deniz Undav in the buildup. Referee Sascha Stegemann booked Stuttgart assistant coach David Krecidlo for complaining. Undav set up winter signing Jacob Bruun Larsen to equalize in the 50th and Nick Woltemade completed the comeback 10 minutes later when he poked home the rebound from an Undav effort. Šeško and Lois Openda were sent off late as Leipzig slumped to its fifth defeat of the season. Both will miss the next match at Bochum on Saturday.

India men, women hockey teams to commence season with Pro League matches next month

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Indian men's and women's hockey teams will commence their international assignments this year with the high-profile FIH Pro League matches here from February 15. The Indian men's team will face Spain, while their women counterparts will take on England on February 15 at the Kalinga Stadium. Most of the Indian men's and women's team players are currently playing in the Hockey India League (HIL) in Rourkela and Ranchi respectively. The Bhubaneswar leg of the FIH Pro League will be after the Australia leg (February 04-09) in Sydney. Between February 15 and 25, the men's teams of India, Spain, England, Germany and Netherlands," FIH said in a release. "With 24 matches over the 11 days, the action will be unceasing among the top ranked teams in the world, which will be a true showcase of the 'League of the Best'."



The FIH Pro League action this year will begin in Australia. The Kookaburras, who won the title in the previous edition, will start off their defence against reigning Olympic champions Netherlands, and Spain. The Hockeyroos will also start their 2024/25 campaign simultaneously, facing off against China and Spain. Both the Spanish teams will play their first matches of the season in the Sydney stage of the Pro League, with the women's team making their first appearance since 2020 having qualified for the current season by winning the FIH Hockey Nations Cup in 2024. China women will look to continue their strong start to the season after taking eight points from the opening four games of their season, played at home in Hangzhou. Netherlands men, meanwhile, will be hoping to return to their best, after an uncharacteristic start slow saw them pick up no wins in their opening four games, totalling six points through three draws and a loss. The FIH Pro League action will also simultaneously continue in Argentina as the Bhubaneswar stage goes on, with Santiago del Estero hosting the final stage of the first half of the season from February 19 to 24. Locking horns in front of the large crowds will be Argentina, Belgium and Australia, in both the men's and women's competition.

Arsenal closes in on Premier League leader Liverpool after 2-1 win over Tottenham

PTI ■ LONDON

Arsenal closed the gap on Premier League leader Liverpool to four points after a 2-1 victory over Tottenham. Mikel Arteta's team took advantage of Liverpool's draw with Nottingham Forest on Tuesday, with Leandro Trossard firing the winner in the north London derby at the Emirates Stadium. "Everybody knows you need to win these games, the fans are buzzing and it's a great night for us," Trossard said. "It's an amazing feeling, especially to get the winner as well, it had to come and now we need to look forward." Arsenal was runner-up to Manchester City in the last two seasons and is in

contention for the title again this year. But it was given a fright by Spurs when Son Heung-min opened the scoring for the visitors in the 25th minute. A Dominic Solanke own goal when trying to defend a corner leveled the game in the 40th and Trossard struck low from just inside the box four minutes later to put Arsenal ahead. Liverpool still has a game in hand on second-place Arsenal but has dropped points by drawing its last two league matches and is on a run of just one win in four in all competitions. That was against fourth-division Accrington Stanley in the FA Cup. Arsenal bounced back quickly

after the disappointment of being knocked out of the FA Cup by Manchester United on penalties and opened up a two-point lead over Forest in third. "Less than 72 hours ago we played 120 minutes in another competition that we went out of — that is not easy psychologically. So the way we performed and played today was exceptional," Arteta said. Tottenham has won just one of its last nine games in the league. "The losses hurt me but they aren't acceptable. We have had too many losses this year and too many games that have got away from us. That needs to stop," head coach Ange Postecoglou said.



ISAK ON TARGET AGAIN Alexander Isak scored for the eighth straight league game to propel Newcastle into the top four. The Sweden international struck twice in a 3-0 victory over Wolverhampton to take his season total to 17 in all competitions. He became the fourth player to score in eight consecutive games in the

Premier League, following Ruud van Nistelrooy, Jamie Vardy and Daniel Sturridge. Vardy scored a league record 11-straight games. "Like most strikers, Isak wants to practice his finishing. It is an art form. He is there after training every day trying to do more," Newcastle manager Eddie Howe said. Isak's form has pushed Newcastle into Champions League contention. He's scored 12 in his last 10 games in all competitions and Newcastle is on a nine-match winning streak. Isak opened the scoring in the 34th against relegation-threatened Wolverhampton at St James' Park. He got his second in the 57th and

Anthony maintained his own scoring form with his fourth goal in successive games. Howe's team is now one point ahead of fifth-place Chelsea. **UNHAPPY HOMECOMING FOR MOYES** David Moyes' return to Everton didn't get off to the start he wanted after a 1-0 loss to Aston Villa. In his second spell at the Merseyside club, Moyes took charge of his 519th game as Everton manager and was welcomed by the Goodison Park crowd. But he couldn't inspire his relegation-threatened team to victory as Ollie Watkins' goal six minutes into the second half sealed Villa's win. Everton is 16th in the standings and a point above

the bottom three. Moyes' immediate priority is to find goals from somewhere. Everton has failed to score in nine of its last 11 league games. **LEICESTER SLUMPING** The hiring of Ruud van Nistelrooy hasn't paid off for Leicester yet. A 2-0 loss at home to Crystal Palace leaves the 2016 champion second from bottom of the standings and without a league win since Van Nistelrooy's first game in charge at the start of December. It's now six straight defeats in the league, with Jean-Philippe Mateta and Marc Guéhi scoring for Palace in the second half at the King Power Stadium.