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INSIDE

WORLD 9
SOUTH KOREAN ANTI-CORRUPTION AGENCY, POLICE DEBATE MEASURES TO DETAIN IMPEACHED PRESIDENT

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States dismiss HMPV scare, as cases rise



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amidst surge in the H1N1 virus (HMPV) in neighbouring China, India on Monday confirmed three cases of pathogen — two in Karnataka and one in Gujarat. However, the Government and health officials have assured that there is no need to panic as it is not a new pathogen, adding that regular flu shots or even the three Covid vaccine doses makes one immune to this infection. In Bengaluru, a three-month-old baby, who has been discharged, and an eight-month-old, who is recovering at a hospital, were the two cases. A two-month-old was also found infected in Ahmedabad in Gujarat with respiratory symptoms and subsequently tested positive for HMPV. All the cases have been detected in children, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) said,

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

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Naxals blow up DRG vehicle, eight dead

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ RAIPUR

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

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



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

hunt down those responsible for the killings, the IPS officer informed. The DRG personnel targeted by Left-wing extremists were involved in an anti-Naxalite operation carried out for three days on the borders of

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

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

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EC tightens scrutiny, as voter registration spikes in Delhi

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The announcement of the Mahila Samman Yojana by the ruling AAP doling out Rs 2100 to eligible women citizens has seen a 'sudden' spike in the electoral roll enrolment in the national Capital. The Election Commission (EC) has directed officials to scrutinize and verify each and every application for new voter registration to identify genuine people amid the ongoing war of words between the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) over the manipulation of voters list. The EC said it has received an unprecedented number of 5.1 lakhs form-6 for new enrolment in the last 20 days. The EC mandates strict verification processes including field checks and personal hearings to ensure authenticity. Notably, the gender ratio also increased from 855 per 1000 to 859 to 1000, an increase of 4 percent. According to a statement from the office of Delhi Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), over 5.1 lakh applications for new voter registration were received in the last 20 days, during the revision period from October 29 to November 28, 2024, 1,35,089 new voters were registered,



69,177 names were deleted, and 83,825 corrections were made to the voter list. The number of voters registered in the national capital has 1,55,24,858 as compared to 1,53,57,529 as on October 29, 2024, marking a net increase of 1.09 percent. Of them, 83.49 lakh of them male, 71.73 lakh female and 1261 transgender. The Delhi electoral roll has witnessed a rise of 8,06,739 voters since the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. On January 22, 2024, before the Lok Sabha polls, the total number of voters in Delhi was 1,47,18,119. "Unprecedented rush of form-6 for new voter registration has been noticed since 16th

December, 2024; as over 5.1 lakhs form-6 have been received in Delhi since this date. This is after adding 3.08 Lakhs new voters since draft publication date 29.10.2024. This trend of unprecedented increase of form-6 and that too after 20 days of last date of receiving claims and objections as scheduled in SSR-2025 (28.11.2024), is unexpected and needs greater scrutiny," the Delhi CEO said. The Delhi CEO office said directions have been issued to all electoral registration officers to scrutinize each and every form strictly as per ECI guidelines. "100% field verification shall be done by EROs and AEROs to identify the genuine eligible persons. EROs are also conducting personal hearing in doubtful cases as per ECI guidelines. Till now, eight FIRs have been filed against 24 people for submission of false/tampered documents for obtaining voter ID. EROs have been directed to take stringent action against the persons, who are submitting false claims and fake documents to get enrolment in the electoral roll," the CEO's office said. The poll officials have denied the claims, saying that all due processes are followed for addition and deletion of voters.

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Congress takes on AAP, promises ₹2,500 to women

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Countering the guarantee of Rs 2,100 under Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana by the AAP, the Congress on Monday announced 'Pyari Didi Yojana' for the women of Delhi, promising an assistance of Rs 2,500 if they win the Delhi assembly elections, with senior party leaders including Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar hitting out at the AAP for not fulfilling their poll promise made to the women in Punjab. To announce the scheme in the Capital, the party brought in Shivakumar with the senior leaders boasting of the scheme rolled out in Karnataka by the Congress government.

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Sensex slumps over 1,250 pts on earnings growth concerns

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty crashed 1.6 per cent on Monday due to an across-the-board selloff, as concerns over third-quarter earnings growth and the continued flight of foreign capital sapped risk appetite. Besides, traders said that the new HMPV scare, depreciating rupee and weak trend in Asian markets further weighed on sentiment. Extending loss for the second straight session, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex tanked 1,258.12 points or 1.59 per cent to close below the 78,000 level at 77,964.99. During the day, it plunged 1,441.49 points or



1.81 per cent to 77,781.62. As many as 3,474 stocks declined, 656 advanced and 114 remained unchanged on the BSE. The NSE Nifty slumped 388.70 points or 1.62 per cent to 23,616.05.

Emerging markets are undergoing consolidation due to uncertainties surrounding new US economic policies, the Fed's hawkish stance on future rate cuts, potential upward revision for CY25 inflation, and a strong dollar, all of which are negatively impacting market sentiment. The primary catalyst for a sharp sell-off in the domestic market appears to be concerns over the human metapneumovirus (HMPV). "Additionally, the initial Q3 consensus earnings estimate suggests a potential gradual recovery in domestic corporate earnings, which could explain the domestic market's underperformance compared to global markets led by premium valuation," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

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IMD issues fog alert, cold wave hit Delhi, Gurgaon

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Rain lashed several parts of the national capital and Gurgaon adding to the intense chill amid the cold wave conditions in the region. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Monday issued a yellow alert for fog for the next three consecutive days as the national capital continues to shiver under cold with a minimum temperature of 9.6 degrees Celsius. The national capital experienced harsh weather and cold wave conditions early Monday morning, with dropping temperatures and biting winds. Moreover, several areas in the city received showers in the early morning hours following western disturbance, the IMD added. Before the rains, several areas were under the grip of a moderate and shallow fog that reduced the visibility affecting rail, air and road traffic. The fog cover thinned out, improving morning visibility. Najafgarh recorded

WEATHER

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MAX	17.7°C(-2.7)
MIN	7.0°C(-0.6)

2.5 mm of rainfall, Pitampura 2 mm, Palam 1 mm and Pusa 0.5 mm between 5.30 am and 8.30 am. According to the IMD, the minimum visibility at Palam airport was recorded at 300 meters at 5:30 am. Despite the fog, flight operations at Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport remained normal, with runway visibility between 1,000 and 2,000 meters. Low visibility procedures were in effect, as general visibility was recorded at 600 meters. Satellite imagery revealed fog over northwest and central India, with clouds forming over parts of Haryana, Delhi, and Uttar Pradesh, indicating a possibility of rain.

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TN Gov sulks, walks out of Assembly without addressing



KUMAR CHELLAPAN ■ CHENNAI

The face-off between the DMK Government and the Governor of the State, worsened on Monday as RN Ravi walked out of the Legislative Assembly without addressing the Budget Session 2025. The Governor, a widely respected former Indian Police Service Officer, was upset over the non-playing of the national anthem at the beginning of the session. This is the fourth incident of such kind happening in the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly since January 2022. "The Constitution of Bharat and the National Anthem were once again insulted in the Tamil Nadu Assembly today. Respecting the National Anthem is the first Fundamental Duty as enshrined in our Constitution.

It is sung in all the State legislatures at the beginning and end of Governor's address. Today on arrival of the Governor to the House only Tamil Thaaai Vaazhthuwas sung. Governor respectfully reminded the House of its constitutional duty. He fervently appealed to the Hon'ble Chief Minister who is the Leader of the House and the Hon'ble Speaker for singing the National Anthem. However, they cursedly refused. It is a matter of grave concern. Not to be a party to such brazen disrespect to the Constitution and the National Anthem, Governor in deep anguish left the House," said the Raj Bhavan in its post on X. Members of the Congress (a partner of the DMK-led alliance) staged a walk out in protest against the Governor's action. Sources in Tamil Nadu Congress Committee said that the walk out by party MLAs followed a directive by the High Command in New Delhi. The refusal of Tamil Nadu Government to play national anthem has become a recurring point of contention between the Raj Bhavan and the government led by the DMK. The Dravidian major has made it known many times in the past that the party was against the post of Governor.

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Trudeau resigns, amid rise in economic, political chaos

PTI ■ TORONTO

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau plans to announce his resignation Monday, an official said, in the face of rising discontent over his leadership, and after the abrupt departure of his finance minister signalled growing turmoil within his government. The official said that Trudeau will stay on as prime minister until a new leader of the Liberal Party is chosen. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to speak ahead of an official announcement later in the day. A different official familiar with the matter said Parliament, which had been due to resume Jan 27, will be suspended until March 24. The timing will allow for a Liberal Party leadership race. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to speak about the matter publicly. It was not clear when nationwide elections would be held to pick a permanent replacement. Trudeau came to power in 2015 after 10 years of Conservative Party rule, and had initially been hailed for returning the country to its liberal past. But the 53-year-old scion of one of Canada's most famous prime ministers became deeply unpopular with voters in recent years over a range of issues, including the soaring cost of food and housing, and surging immigration. The political upheaval comes at a difficult moment for Canada



internationally. US President-elect Donald Trump has threatened to impose 25% tariffs on all Canadian goods if the government does not stem what Trump calls a flow of migrants and drugs in the US - even though far fewer of each crosses into the US from Canada than from Mexico, which Trump has also threatened. Canada is a major exporter of oil and natural gas to the US, which also relies on its northern neighbour for steel, aluminum and autos. Trudeau has kept publicly mum in recent weeks, despite intensifying pressure for him to step down. "His long silence following this political drama speaks volumes about the weakness of his current position," said Daniel Béland, a political science professor at McGill University in Montreal.

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Police fight over jurisdiction as corpse lay on road for four hours

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

In a grim display of apathy, a 27-year-old accident victim's body lay on the road for over four hours as police from Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh argued over jurisdiction. The tragic incident unfolded on the border between the two states, leaving grieving family members and angry locals demanding accountability. Rahul Ahirwar, a resident of Tikamgarh, Madhya Pradesh, was en route to Delhi to seek work as a laborer when tragedy struck. Around 7 PM, while crossing the road, he was hit by an unidentified vehicle. Residents rushed to the spot

and informed Harpalpur police in Madhya Pradesh. The officers arrived but refused to take action, claiming the site fell under Mahobkath police station in Uttar Pradesh's Mahoba district. "When we called Harpalpur police, they came and said it was not their responsibility. They left, saying the area was under Uttar Pradesh police," said Ramdeen, a relative of the victim. "When we called Mahobkath police, they also refused to help, saying it was Madhya Pradesh's jurisdiction. Meanwhile, my cousin's body lay on the road, and we were left crying and helpless."

Frustrated by the lack of action, villagers blocked the road in protest, leaving the body at the accident site. Visuals showed Ahirwar's grieving family members sitting by his body, weeping inconsolably. "Rahul had married just three months ago and was heading to Delhi for work. This is not just negligence; it is inhuman," said Ramdeen. As the hours passed and neither police department acted, the situation escalated. "We want the autopsy done quickly so we can perform the last rites. This delay has only added to our pain," another family member said.

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Delhi tops English proficiency, India above global average

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Pearson Global English Proficiency Report 2024 released on Monday put the national capital in the top in the list of English speaking, followed by Rajasthan, Punjab and Haryana and Karnataka. India ranks above global average in speaking English, according to the report. Delhi led with the highest English speaking score (63) followed by Rajasthan (60), Punjab (58), Haryana (57), Karnataka (57), Maharashtra (57), West Bengal (57) and Uttar Pradesh (57), Telangana (56) and Tamil Nadu (52). The report cited that while India's average English skills score (52) is lower than the global average English skills score (57), the country's average English speaking score (57) is higher (54). The report also said India's average English writing score (61) is equivalent to the global average writing score (61). The report provides invaluable insights into global English proficiency levels and



spotlights regional trends in the Middle East, India, the Philippines, Japan, Egypt, Colombia, and Europe. According to the report, the Indian market has experienced significant growth in English skills in recent years, which is predicted to continue, with an emphasis on voice-based testing. "Indian Business leaders know that accurately testing English skills reduces the cost of mis-hires and protects credibility, particularly when hiring at scale. India's average writing score is 61, matching the global average, reflecting

steady improvements driven by increased digital communication and the necessity for written English in global business contexts," it said. In India, the finance and banking sector leads with the highest speaking score of 63, surpassing the global average of 56, it said. "Conversely, Healthcare has the lowest score (45), influenced by its rapid expansion and the focus on increasing access to jobs... Other sectors like Tech, Consulting and BPO show strong performance, consistently aligning with or exceeding global benchmarks," the report said. "With the rise in global English language testing over the last eight years and proficiency levels holding strong, it's clear that both employers and employees believe English skills are key to thriving in the global workspace. To drive growth, robust English testing has to remain firmly at the top of the recruitment and L&D agenda," according to the report.

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Brief sunny relief amid chilly day

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

There was a brief spell of sunny relief in the afternoon after dense fog in the morning. A heavy layer of fog enveloped the city until 10 am, after which cold day conditions persisted until the sun made an appearance at around 1.30 pm. Senior scientist, Met department, Mohammed Danish, explained that the dense fog occurred due to an approaching western disturbance, which brought moisture, and the winds were calm. "The visibility dropped to zero during the foggy conditions," he said. Danish added that fog would also occur on Tuesday, but the sun would make an appearance. "There will be shallow to moderate fog in the morning, but because of the wind flow, it will clear off," he added. On Monday, Lucknow recorded a minimum temperature of 7 degree Celsius, while Fatehpur at 6.2 degree Celsius was the coldest in the state. The maximum temperature in Lucknow was 17 degree Celsius. Danish noted that although the skies would be sunny for a while on Tuesday, cold winds would bring back the chill fac-

tor. Regarding the forecast for Uttar Pradesh, he mentioned that cold day conditions, when the sun does not make an appearance, and foggy conditions would prevail. Municipal Commissioner Inderjit Singh stated that ample arrangements had been made for bonfires in the city due to the cold weather. "We have set up bonfires at all public places and rain baseras. We carry out this work on an extensive scale, and we have received no complaint, even as the district administration is monitoring the whole exercise," he said. According to the nagar nigam data, there are 307 points in the city where bonfires are being lit. These points include areas near Gaudara Khan Market, Madaon, Kapoorthala crossing, Tedhipulia crossing, Chandrashekhar Park, Hanuman Setu Temple, under Puraniya bridge, Daliganj Unani Hospital, Rahimnagar crossing, Ram Ram Bank crossing, Gomti Enclave Colony, Royal City trisection, Amrapali Market, Civil Hospital, Eldeco crossing, Husadia crossing, High Court gate, Vijayant Khand Mini Stadium, and others. Meanwhile, due to low visibility caused by dense fog, a truck



Commuters on a road amid dense fog during a cold winter morning, in Lucknow on Monday

PTI

collided with a pickup van on Kisan Path under Sushant Golf City police station here on Monday morning, leaving four people injured. Police rushed the injured victims to hospital, though the

truck driver is said to have absconded. Police said that the pickup van driver got stuck in the vehicle after the accident, and he was extricated with much effort before being rushed to the hospital, where

his condition is critical. The pickup van driver, Suraj Kumar (28), son of Ram Prasad, is a resident of Gaura Janpad in Siddharthnagar. His family members have been informed.

Man, nephew open fire at acquaintance's house

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

MONEY DISPUTE TURNS UGLY

A man and his nephew, riding an SUV, allegedly attacked the house of an acquaintance over a money-related dispute in the BBD area here, police said on Monday. The accused attempted to force entry into the house by trying to break the door when the homeowner did not open it, police added. Following this, they allegedly fired several rounds of bullets at the house before leaving the scene while issuing threats. The entire incident has been captured on CCTV. An FIR has been registered based on the victim's complaint. It can be seen in the CCTV footage obtained by the police that the miscreants fired bullets at the wall of the house. Dents caused by the bullets were visible all over the wall, according to the claims made by the family. According to information, Priya Mishra, who lives in Amity Green City, Hansemau village, Chinchhat, told the police that several people came to her house in an SUV on Sunday night. They tried to

open the door while using abusive language. "When the door was not opened, they tried to break it. Upon protest, they fired several rounds and fled the scene," she alleged. The police also recovered shells from the spot. DCP (East) Shashank Singh said Priya had filed a complaint against a dozen people, including Gomti Nagar resident Narendra Nath Shukla and his nephew Sawant Shukla, citing a money-related dispute. "The police have reviewed the footage of the incident. An empty casing has also been recovered from the scene. The investigation is ongoing," the DCP said. It was alleged that the accused had taken Rs 49 lakh in the name of assistance. Priya's husband Atul Mishra stated that he had bought land from Narendra Nath, a resident of Gomti Nagar. Meanwhile, Narendra had asked for Rs 49 lakh as assistance, and an agreement had

been prepared. "Out of this, Rs 39 lakh was returned, but the rest of the money was not being refunded. On December 28, after my mother-in-law passed away, I asked Narendra for the money. Narendra promised to return it soon. When I asked for the money again, Narendra threatened me over the phone and attacked the house," Atul alleged. On the contrary, the accused claimed that Atul was not repaying the money. Police said that there was a dispute over the transaction between the two. The case is being investigated based on CCTV footage and call details. Meanwhile, a 45-year-old farmer allegedly shot himself dead in Muzaffarnagar on Monday, officials said. According to the police, Nirankar took his life while he was returning from his fields in Mukandpur village under Titawi police station limits. SHO Manvendra Singh Bhati said, "The body has been sent for post-mortem and an investigation into the incident is underway." The reason behind the farmer's extreme step is not yet clear, he said.

Chandigarh varsity to launch futuristic campus in Unnao

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chandigarh University (CU) has announced establishment of the first-of-its-kind artificial intelligence (AI) enabled next-gen futuristic campus at Unnao in Lucknow State Capital Region (SCR). The university will provide AI-augmented multidisciplinary education tailored to the evolving needs of 21st century learners. The Uttar Pradesh government had earlier issued an authorisation letter to Chandigarh University for its AI-integrated campus at Unnao in Lucknow SCR. Making the above announcement here, Uttar Pradesh Higher Education Minister Yogendra Upadhyay on Monday also launched the Chandigarh University Lucknow web portal and prospectus for 2025-26 academic session. Upadhyay said under the leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Uttar Pradesh had become a key growth engine for the nation's development. "Uttar Pradesh is on track to become a USD 1 trillion economy within the next five years as the state's gross domestic product (GDP) is projected to reach Rs 32 lakh crore by March 2025, positioning it as the fastest growing economy in India and creating employment opportunities for 1.5 crore youth. In the past seven years, the state's economy, GDP and per capita income have more than doubled due to the double engine government," he said. Upadhyay said Uttar Pradesh was becoming an educational hub in higher education with the establishment of 16 new universities and over 250 colleges in underserved regions over the past seven years under Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's leadership.

"It is a proud moment for us that Chandigarh University has established its AI enabled campus in Uttar Pradesh. The timing of launching an AI-integrated university in Uttar Pradesh could not be more ideal as the state government is already establishing India's first AI City in an area of over 70 acres in Lucknow. While the state government has allocated Rs 500 crore for computing infrastructure, including 10,000 GPUs and an AI centre in Lucknow, the first phase of the AI City project has already attracted preliminary commitments of Rs 2,500 crore from private technology companies and venture capital firms," the minister said. He added, "Funding for local startups in the AI and deep-tech space has increased by a massive 40 per cent over the past 18 months which shows investor confidence in AI. A global player in the data centre industry, ST Telemedia Global Data Centers (STT GDC) India, has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Uttar Pradesh government to develop India's first Artificial Intelligence (AI) City in Lucknow. As a hub for the AI ecosystem, AI City in Lucknow will open doors to 50,000 direct and indirect jobs for youth in AI over the next five years." Upadhyay pointed out that Chandigarh University's AI integrated campus perfectly aligns with the UP government's ambitions for AI-driven growth by preparing the skilled manpower. "The arrival of a world-class education provider like Chandigarh University means that students in Uttar Pradesh can now access quality learning without having to leave their home state, making education more accessible and affordable for all," he added.

Forest officials create three zones to rescue stray tiger

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Forest department team has created three zones to rescue the stray tiger at Rehmankhara. District Forest Officer (DFO) Sitanshu Pandey stated that after intensive patrolling by female elephants in zones 1, 2 and 3, a strategy was devised. "We anticipated that the tiger might move to zone 1, near the Rehmankhara institute (CISH), and attack the live bait. Our plan was to rescue it by forming a circle with a net,"

he explained. He added that as part of the strategy, combing was carried out by the female elephants in zones 2 and 3. On the day of the operation, the tiger hunted an open bait. "The team, along with the doctors, surrounded the vine plantation from all sides using a 900-metre net. After this, elephants Sulochana and Diana patrolled the entire patch of the plantation. Both elephants were accompanied by the doctors. After about 1 to 2 hours of intensive

patrolling, the bait's carcass was found, but patrolling is still ongoing, to ensure the tiger's rescue," he added. The carcass of the bait has been placed near the scaffolding, and the team is closely monitoring the area through the scaffolding. On Monday, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Wildlife, UP, Anuradha Bemuri, conducted a surprise inspection. She directed the team to put in their full effort to make the strategy successful.

Uttar Pradesh sets benchmark in labour welfare

Lucknow (PNS): With the registration of building and other construction workers, along with 1.29 lakh MGNREGA workers on Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare (BOCW) Board portal, the Uttar Pradesh government has taken significant steps in the field of labour welfare, setting a benchmark. The portal has prioritised the registration of building and other construction workers, along with MGNREGA workers. The building and other construction workers welfare schemes provide social and economic security for workers and they receive security through accident assistance and pension schemes. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has mandated the registration of MGNREGA workers on the Uttar Pradesh BOCW Board portal. He has instructed the officials concerned to ensure that all workers are registered so that no worker is deprived of the benefits offered under the BOCW Board's schemes. This proactive initiative not only enables workers to access direct benefits but also plays a vital role in improving their standard of living and providing social security to them. To achieve this goal, a special campaign is underway to register job card holders on the BOCW Board portal under the MGNREGA scheme. District-level officers have received instructions from the rural development headquarters to expedite the registration process, which is being closely monitored. As of the financial year 2024-25, over 1.29 lakh workers have been registered across the state, with efforts continuing to include the remaining workers. The Yogi government remains committed to the welfare of workers, utilising technological means to ensure transparency and efficiency in the registration process.

Three lives saved with high-risk procedure by KGMU doctors

Lucknow (PNS): Three lives with multiple risk factors were saved by a single cardiac procedure at King George's Medical University (KGMU). Doctors at the cardiology department of KGMU stated that pregnancy in a patient with heart disease is risky and may lead to maternal death along with fetal loss. A 28-year-old woman, six months pregnant with twins, from Barabanki, presented to the obstetric clinic with shortness of breath. She was referred to the cardiology department, where it was discovered that she had severe narrowing of one of the heart valves (mitral stenosis). "Pregnancy places extra strain on the heart and is poorly tolerated in women with mitral stenosis, which may even lead to both maternal and foetal loss. This patient had an extremely high-risk pregnancy, as, in addition to severe mitral stenosis, she had other risk factors, including twin pregnancy, being underweight—only weighing 35 kg. On top of that, she was anaemic and had hepatitis C, which carries a risk of transmission to the operators. In short, it was a very critical condition that required a balloon mitral valvotomy if all three lives were to be saved," said Dr Rishi

Sethi. The patient underwent a balloon mitral valvotomy procedure at the cardiology department. The procedure was performed by Dr Praveesh Vishwakarma, guided by Dr Rishi Sethi. The team involved in the procedure included Dr Monika Bhandari, Dr Prachi Sharma, Dr Gaurav Chaudhary, Dr Akhil Sharma, and Dr Umesh Tripathi. The obstetric care of the patient was provided by Dr Amita Pandey, Dr Anjoo Agarwal, Dr Shalini, and Dr Namrata from the obstetrics and gynaecology department. "After the procedure, the patient was relieved of her symptoms, and both the mother and the foetuses are fine. Through this one life-saving high-risk procedure, we were able to save three lives," he said. KGMU Vice-Chancellor Prof. Soniya Nityanand congratulated the entire team. Dr Rishi Sethi noted that operating on a 35 kg pregnant woman carrying twin foetuses was very challenging, but the results are rewarding. He also pointed that the patient was poor and lacked financial means, so the procedure was performed under the Vipanna Scheme, which is funded by the state government.

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NOTICE

I have changed my name from Manoj chhabariya to Manoj kumar chhabariya to be known as Manoj kumar chhabariya in all future references. Manoj kumar chhabariya, Add. Flat no. F-2, Maa Kripa Appt. Ratan Lal Nagar, Kanpur.

NOTICE

The original Allotment letter No- 725/7031/10/KDA dated 26/11/1992 have been lost, the use of which by others would be illegal. VINOD Kumar Mishra S/o Mohan Lal Mishra - R/o HIG 27 VIVEKANAND VIHAR BARRA Kanpur Nagar

NBRI pioneering study to combat urban heat island

SHARMILA KRISHNA ■ LUCKNOW

In a first-of-its-kind study in the country, the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research-National Botanical Research Institute (CSIR-NBRI) is developing a heat map of the city. A brainchild of the Director of CSIR-NBRI, Dr Ajit Kumar Shasany, this study maps the land surface temperatures of various areas of the city to identify a plant species matrix suited to each area, which, when planted, can lower the temperature of the region. The study, which is currently underway, is being carried out by senior principal scientist Dr Soumit Kumar Behera and principal scientist Dr Dibyendu Adhikari. Behera explained that they were creating a heat island map of Lucknow because there is an uneven pattern of land surface temperature (LST) in areas with high-rise buildings compared to adjoining regions. "High-rise buildings or densely

populated settlement areas trap heat within, making them comparatively hotter than the surrounding areas," he said. He further explained that they had mapped this heat pattern using satellite imagery from the past ten years, as these heat zones were not consistent. "Some areas were heat zones one year but not in subsequent years. We used satellite imagery and divided the city into five gradients based on land surface temperature maps. We also conducted ground verification of the temperature using on-site sensors," he added. Adhikari, explaining the satellite imagery, said that through thermal bands, they were able to identify areas in the city with a high heat-radiating capacity due to impermeable surfaces, concrete structures, or lack of vegetation cover. "Our main aim is to understand how vegetation can mitigate the urban heat island effect in Lucknow," he said. He mentioned that they had identified gradients as low,

A brainchild of the Director of CSIR-NBRI, Dr Ajit Kumar Shasany, this study maps the land surface temperatures of various areas of the city to identify a plant species matrix suited to each area, which, when planted, can lower the temperature of the region

mild, and extreme, ranging from 30 degree Celsius to 47 degree Celsius. Behera said that where there is good green cover, the temperature tends to lower. "But even in vegetated areas such as Kukrail, Lohia Park, NBRI Botanical Gardens, and Janeshwar Mishra Park, we are

observing different patterns in land surface temperature profiles. We are now trying to identify which species or group of species will be most effective in lowering temperatures. We are studying the physiological responses of existing avenue trees to determine which plants have a high transpiration rate that could cause cooling," he added. He further noted that Kukrail had emerged as one of the coolest areas on the heat map. "We have screened over 50 plant species across various temperature gradients, and we are studying 20 locations within the city. Within one or two years, we will develop a species matrix best suited for these locations," he said. Behera mentioned that they plan to present their recommendations to the Lucknow Municipal Corporation and the Forest department for afforestation and plantation of these species in densely populated areas of the state capital. "This exercise is important

because there is limited land, and developmental activities must also be considered. We need to work judiciously on the planting of species to mitigate these hot spots, which have the highest temperatures over the past ten years," he added. Adhikari noted that this research aligns with the Smart City Mission of the Government of India by providing recommendations on the best vegetation to plant in urban areas. "By using vegetation that can withstand extreme heat, we can create cooler, greener neighbourhoods that improve quality of life and reduce energy costs. The research highlights where to plant specific vegetation for maximum benefit, ensuring its long-term survival and effectiveness in reducing heat. NBRI's efforts demonstrate how combining science and nature can solve urban problems. Their work not only helps cool our cities but also makes them more beautiful and sustainable for everyone," he added.

CITYBRIEFS

CYCLING EXPEDITION 'SANGRAM 1857', the NCC cycling expedition, was flagged off from Lucknow on Monday. Lt General Anindya Sengupta, GOC-in-C, Central Command, cycled alongside the 15-member team, bidding them farewell at Lucknow's borders as they embarked on their 2000-km journey. Organized by the UP NCC Directorate, the 17-day expedition commemorates the First War of Independence in 1857. The team, led by Brigadier NS Chaaarag, consists of NCC cadets, including five female cadets. The expedition began on January 1 in Meerut and will cover significant battlefields and places of the revolt. The team was flagged in by Lt Gen Sengupta in Lucknow on January 4. The expedition will travel across Uttar Pradesh and culminate at the PM's Rally at the NCC Republic Day Camp 2025 in New Delhi, where it will be flagged in by the prime minister.

SANGHARSH 2025 Indian Institute of Management, Lucknow hosted 'Sangharsh 2025', an inter-IIM sports festival, from January 3 to 5. The event brought together athletes from IIM-Ahmedabad, IIM-Bangalore, IIM-Calcutta, and IIM-Lucknow, celebrating sportsmanship, teamwork, and excellence. With over 900 participants, including 260 from IIM-Lucknow, the event featured intense competition in 20+ sports, including badminton, basketball, cricket, football, hockey, kabaddi, and volleyball. IIM-Lucknow

emerged victorious, securing the coveted trophy with 188 points, ahead of IIM-Calcutta (146), IIM-Bangalore (137), and IIM-Ahmedabad (101). The opening ceremony included a keynote by Simran Sharma, Olympic bronze medalist, who motivated the athletes with her insights on perseverance. Director of IIM-Lucknow, Prof. Archana Shukla, emphasised the importance of sportsmanship in personal growth. The closing ceremony on January 5 was attended by Suhas Yathiraj, world number 1 para-badminton player, who shared his inspiring journey with the participants.

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'Guru Gobind Singh's life inspires people to follow path of service'

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Monday paid tributes to Guru Gobind Singh on his 'Prakash Parv', saying that his life inspires everyone to follow the path of truth, service and sacrifice.

The birth anniversary of the 10th Sikh guru is observed as 'Prakash Parv'.

Born in Patna Sahib in 1666, Guru Gobind Singh established the Khalsa Panth.

Addressing a gathering at DAV College here, the chief minister said Guru Gobind Singh was the son of a martyr and the father of martyred sons who also sacrificed his life for the country.

Adityanath also enquired about the well-being of the children and distributed sweets to them, according to an official statement.

Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak and Minister of State for Agriculture Baldev Singh Aulakh were among the dignitaries present on the occasion. Adityanath said Guru Gobind Singh established the Khalsa Panth to end casteism, untouchability and to save the country and religion.

He asked the heretic forces of that time that were obstructing the path of the country and religion to move away from the path. The glorious history of the tradition established by Sikh gurus Guru Nanak Dev, Guru Arjun Dev, Guru Teg Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh inspires people, he added.

"This year is important for us



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath during an event on the birth anniversary of the 10th Sikh Guru Gobind Singh, observed as 'Prakash Parv', in Lucknow on Monday

as it is the 350th martyrdom day of Guru 'Teg Bahadur', Adityanath said. The way the 550th 'Prakash Parv' of Guru Nanak Dev was celebrated with great enthusiasm, these events also need to be organised on a similar scale.

It will help more people, including future generations, learn about history, he said.

Earlier in the day, Adityanath said in a post on X, "Tribute to the great saint, tenth Guru of the Sikhs and founder of the

Khalsa Panth, Guru Shri Gobind Singh Ji Maharaj on his holy birthday!"

"His heroic life dedicated to the protection of religion and humanity inspires all of us to follow the path of truth, service and sacrifice," he said.

Yogi: A martyr's sacrifice is lifeblood of society

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Monday, said that the sacrifice of a martyr was the lifeblood of that society, emphasising that sacrifices made for the nation and faith had given a fresh lease of life to society since time immemorial.

Speaking at the Shaurya Samman-2025 programme organised by a media group at Hotel Taj, Chief Minister Yogi highlighted Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision during the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav celebrations, which aims to transform India into a developed nation by 2047.

The chief minister reiterated the importance of the Panch Pran, which includes eradication of colonial mindsets, taking pride in national heroes, and respecting the jawans who safeguard the nation.

Chief Minister Yogi inaugurated the event by lighting a ceremonial lamp and honoured the families of martyrs along with individuals who have brought pride to Uttar Pradesh. He paid tribute to soldiers who protect the country's borders under extreme weather conditions, enduring temperatures as low as minus 20 degrees Celsius.

"The brave soldiers of Bharat Mata remain steadfast in their duty, guarding the frontiers day and night. The police personnel are constantly patrolling, ensuring the safety of citizens and instilling a sense of security among the people," he remarked.

Chief Minister Yogi asserted that if a society fails to honour the sacrifices of soldiers from

the army, paramilitary and police forces or neglects the families of martyrs, it reflects a failure in fulfilling national responsibilities.

During the event, families of martyred soldiers and veterans from the 1965 and 1971 wars against Pakistan were honoured. Chief Minister Yogi underlined that a civilised society cannot exist without security and that the first condition of security is good governance, as outlined by Dr BR Ambedkar's constitutional principles. Honouring those who work relentlessly to ensure public safety is, therefore, a national responsibility, he added.

Highlighting the remarkable progress made in Uttar Pradesh since 2017, Chief Minister Yogi stated that the system remained the same, but the face of governance had changed. He compared the pre-2017 period when lawlessness prevailed with the present where the state has transformed into a safe and investment-friendly region. He mentioned that the youth now have access to job opportunities purely based on merit, and the state has become free from communal riots, which were frequent earlier.

Chief Minister Yogi further emphasised the economic progress made under his leadership, citing that while the state earlier struggled to attract Rs 40,000 crore in investments, it has now received proposals worth Rs 40 lakh crore, creating 1.25 crore jobs. He credited the improved law and order situation for this transformation, highlighting that over 1.50 lakh police vacancies were filled and the government pledged to take care of the fam-

ilies of martyred soldiers. The chief minister highlighted Uttar Pradesh's transformation since 2017, stating that earlier, the police would retreat while criminals acted fearlessly, but today criminals are being brought to justice. He emphasised that the state now stands for security, respect and identity.

With the completion of the Ganga Expressway by year-end, Uttar Pradesh will have 55 per cent of the country's expressways and lead in railway connectivity, airports, metro systems and municipal bodies, while proudly upholding its cultural heritage, he pointed out.

Chief Minister Yogi invited everyone to the Prayagraj Maha Kumbh 2025, scheduled for January 13 to February 26, calling it a confluence of Indian culture and spirituality. He highlighted the massive infrastructure developments in Prayagraj and nearby cities in preparation for the event. Over 200 roads have been expanded, 14 new flyovers have been constructed and railway stations and airports have undergone significant upgrades, he added. He pointed out that iconic spiritual sites such as Akshayvat, Saraswati Devi temple, Bade Hanuman temple, and the Patalpuri Corridor will be more accessible to devotees.

The Maha Kumbh is expected to attract a massive crowd, with facilities to accommodate even 10 crore devotees a day. A zero-liquid discharge system has been established for maintaining cleanliness, along with the construction of 1.50 lakh toilets.

Clash between two families after woman's 'abduction', FIRs filed

Gorakhpur (PTI): A dispute between two families from different communities escalated into a clash in Uttar Pradesh's Kushinagar district following the disappearance of a woman, police said on Monday.

Jai Kumar, a resident of Laukariya village in Kushinagar, lodged a complaint with the police after his daughter went missing on December 28, 2024, officials said.

According to the complaint his daughter was married to man in Gorakhpur's Gulriha area. In the complaint, Jai Kumar alleged that Roz Muhammad, who also belongs to Laukariya village, abducted his daughter, leading to heightened tensions and physical altercation between the families, the police said.

Following the clash, Jai Kumar's father Badu alias Ramai Paswan, lodged a complaint on January 2 against four people, including Roz Muhammad, at Gorakhpur's Gulriha police station under sections 115 (2) (voluntary causing hurt), 352 (intentional insult with intent to provoke a breach of peace), and 351(3) (criminal intimidation) of the BNS and the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.

On January 2, the Gorakhpur police questioned Roz Muhammad's father Ali Hasan based on the complaint, the officials said.

Roz Muhammad's mother Airunnisa, after the clash, filed a cross FIR alleging that Jai Kumar's family assaulted her and two other women, Khushbonnisa and Kaisunnisa. In her complaint, she claimed that their clothes were torn and set on fire. However, police clarified that these claims were not mentioned in the FIR.

The cross FIR was registered on January 5 at Nebua Naurangia police station in Kushinagar district against seven accused under sections 191(2) (rioting), 115(2) (voluntary causing hurt), 351(2) (criminal intimidation), 352 (intentional insult with intent to provoke a breach of peace), and 333 (house trespass after preparation for hurt, assault or wrongful restraint) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS).

Khadda Circle Officer Umesh Chand Bhatt said the allegations made by the Roz Muhammad's family appeared exaggerated and aimed at influencing the investigation. He assured that the situation was under control and further investigations were underway.

Uttar Pradesh top performer in TB notifications

LUCKNOW (PNS):

Uttar Pradesh has once again emerged as the top-performing state in tuberculosis (TB) notifications, achieving success in identifying and treating patients in 2024, officials said here.

The state notified 6.73 lakh TB cases by the end of 2024, surpassing the target of identifying 6.5 lakh patients. This achievement follows a similar success in 2023, when UP exceeded the set target, officials added. Maharashtra secured the second position with 2.25 lakh patients identified, followed by Bihar with 2 lakh notifications. Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan reported 1.78 lakh and 1.70 lakh TB patients, respectively, officials said.

Experts believe that the only way to eradicate TB is by identifying and treating as many patients as possible across both the country and the state.

In line with this goal, the Central TB Division set notification targets for all states at the beginning of 2024. Uttar Pradesh was tasked with identifying 6.5 lakh patients, a goal the state not only met but significantly surpassed.

According to official data, all 6.73 lakh identified patients have begun treatment. A key contributor to this success has been the involvement of private doctors, who accounted for the identification of over 2.5 lakh patients, roughly 40% of the total notifications in the state. State TB Officer Dr Shailendra Bhatnagar expressed his satisfaction with the achievement, crediting the effective implementation of initiatives such as the Integrated Nikshay Diwas (held on the 15th of each month), the Active Case Finding (ACF) campaign, and the Dastak campaign.

Currently, a 100-day intensive TB campaign is underway, focusing on detecting high-risk and presumptive TB cases across the state. The role of private doctors has been pivotal in cities such as Mathura, Agra, Kanpur, Gorakhpur, and Jhansi, where their contributions have been commendable.

In cities like Lucknow, Meerut, Moradabad, Bareilly, and Ghaziabad, both government and private sector notifications have been equally balanced. However, Shrivasti recorded only 44 private notifications in the past year, highlighting the need for greater private-sector involvement. Other districts with limited private notifications include Mahoba (255), Sonbhadra (374), Chitrakoot (376), Hamirpur (380), Kannauj (444), Sultanpur (444), Amethi (447), Sant Ravidas Nagar (456), Chandauli (488), and Kanpur Dehat (468).

Sambhal mosque panel challenges survey order in HC

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Shahi Jama Masjid Committee Sambhal has moved the Allahabad High Court, challenging the trial court order passed on November 19 directing an advocate commissioner to survey the mosque in a suit which claimed that the mosque was built after destroying Harihar temple.

The masjid committee had filed a petition in the Supreme Court challenging the survey order of the civil judge (senior division of Chandausi district. Sambhal is part of Chandausi district. The Supreme Court, on November 28, while hearing a plea challenging a court order that allowed the survey of the

Shahi Jama Masjid in Sambhal, had directed the petitioners to approach the High Court for resolution of the matter. A bench of Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar was hearing a plea seeking an ex parte ad interim stay on the operation of the trial court's November 19 order.

The Shahi Jama Masjid Committee has filed the petition in Allahabad High Court while the advocate commissioner appointed by the Chandausi civil judge has submitted the survey report to the trial court in a sealed cover last week. However, as per the Supreme Court's directive, no effective orders, interim or final, can be passed based on the survey report. The High

Court is expected to hear the masjid committee's plea later this week.

It may be noted that the masjid committee has moved the High Court after the Supreme Court directed the Sambhal trial court not to proceed with the suit against the masjid until the committee's petition against the survey order is listed in the High Court. The impugned order was passed by Civil Judge (Senior Division) Aditya Singh on a suit filed by eight plaintiffs, including Mahant Rishiraj Giri, who claimed that the mosque in question was built in 1526 after demolishing a temple that stood there. The survey triggered violence on November 24, which left four persons dead.

According to the Hindu plaintiffs, the mosque in question was originally the site of an ancient Harihar temple, dedicated to Kalki, the last avatar of Lord Vishnu in 1526, and on the orders of Mughal ruler Babar, the temple was demolished and a mosque was constructed over it.

In their suit, the plaintiffs, represented by advocates Hari Shankar Jain and Vishnu Shankar Jain, have claimed the right to access the mosque. Even as the Shahi Jama Masjid Committee has challenged the survey order of the civil court, its own locus standi, as the rightful owner to represent the cause of the masjid, is under question. The Archaeological Survey of India, on November 29, had moved

an application before the civil court in Sambhal, seeking control and management of the Mughal era Shahi mosque as it is a protected heritage structure. The same court had appointed a court commissioner to carry out a survey of the mosque.

The ASI, in its application, also highlighted an incident of January 19, 2018, when a FIR was lodged against the mosque's management committee for installing steel railings on the mosque's steps without proper authorisation. The mosque, notified as an ASI protected monument in 1920, is under the purview of the agency and as such, public access to the structure should be permitted, provided it adheres to ASI regulations.

The ASI argued that control and management of the monument, including any structural modifications, must remain with it. It also raised concerns that unauthorised changes to the mosque's structure by the management committee are unlawful and should be restricted.

Shahi Jama Masjid Committee chief Zafar Ali admitted that the mosque has been an ASI protected monument since 1920. Regarding the ASI statement filed in court, Ali said that the railing was installed in the mosque years ago. Ali admitted that the mosque being a protected monument, the committee requires prior approval from ASI to do any alteration or construction work.

Maha Kumbh: Prayagraj railway stations dazzle with stunning artwork

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The double-engine government is giving a majestic touch to the preparations for Maha Kumbh 2025 with a complete rejuvenation of Prayagraj. The city's beautification is evident, captivating devotees and visitors alike. Indian Railways, through its 'Paint My City' campaign, has played a pivotal role in showcasing Prayagraj's cultural and spiritual grandeur. Prayagraj's railway stations, including Prayagraj Junction, Naini Junction, Phaphamau, Prayag Junction, Jhansi, Rambagh, Chheeki, Prayagraj Sangam, and Subedarganj, have been transformed into vibrant centres of Indian art and heritage.

The walls now feature breathtaking artworks that depict themes such as the Ramayana, Krishna Leela, Lord Buddha, Shiva Bhakti, Ganga Aarti, and women empowerment. These masterpieces offer visitors a glimpse into Prayagraj's rich cultural and spiritual heritage. This initiative is more than just aesthetic enhancement; it reflects Prayagraj's historical and cultural ethos. The artworks celebrate the city's deep-rooted traditions of rishis, guru-disciple bonds, wisdom and sacrifice, highlighting Prayagraj's spiritual significance. As millions of devotees and tourists arrive for Maha Kumbh 2025, these stunning artworks create a seamless blend of art, culture and development, ensuring every visitor experiences the event's grandeur and the cultural richness of Prayagraj.

This effort by Indian Railways symbolises a confluence of tradition and progress, leaving an indelible impression on all who witness it.

OVER 33L USERS VISIT MAHA KUMBH WEBSITE

The Maha Kumbh 2025, renowned as the largest human gathering and an intangible heritage of humanity representing Sanatan culture, has sparked global curiosity. People from across the world are actively seeking information about this grand event through various websites and portals. The official website of Maha Kumbh, <https://kumbh.gov.in/>, has emerged as the primary source for reliable information, witnessing significant traffic from millions of users worldwide. According to the data of the website, as of January 4, over 33 lakh visitors from 183 countries accessed the portal to gather details about Maha Kumbh. This includes visitors from across continents, such as Europe, America and Africa, showcasing the event's global appeal.

A representative from the technical team managing the website confirmed that as of January 4, a total of 33,05,667 users have visited the official Maha Kumbh portal. These users belong to 183 countries, with visits recorded from as many as 6,206 cities worldwide. India remains the top country for website visits, followed closely by significant traffic from the United States, Britain, Canada and Germany. Visitors have not only accessed the website but have also spent considerable time exploring its content.

The technical team noted a substantial surge in traffic since the website's launch, with the number of daily users now reaching millions as the event draws closer. The Yogi Adityanath government of Uttar Pradesh is presenting the Maha Kumbh as a



Beds at the Central Hospital of Maha Kumbh area ahead of the Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, in Prayagraj

PTI

SECURITY FORCES FOR 70+ DISTRICTS MOBILISED

Over 70 districts have deployed forces to ensure the safety of devotees during the Maha Kumbh. Among them, 15,000 civil police personnel will vigilantly monitor every corner of Mahakumbh Nagar. Additionally, 400 women security officers have been assigned to ensure the safety of female devotees. Following the directives of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, arrangements for accommodation and meals for these personnel have been made at the Police Line. Furthermore, a storeroom, a counting office, and an armoury have been set up within the police line premises. Special provisions have been made to safeguard the health of security personnel

arriving from various districts. Hygiene is a top priority at the central canteen in the Police Line, where everything from tea and coffee to clean and nutritious meals is provided. Reserve Inspector of the Police Line, Mahakumbh Nagar, Vilas Yadav, stated that police personnel operate in three eight-hour shifts to ensure smooth operations. He also mentioned that arrangements have been made for the accommodation and meals of jawans arriving from all districts at three Police Lines.

In line with the Digital Maha Kumbh initiative, an app has been developed to securely store comprehensive data of all police personnel deployed at the event. The app enables instant access to details by scanning any security person-

nel's face, providing their name and the district they are assigned from. Additionally, digital attendance for all police personnel is being seamlessly recorded through the app.

Class 11 student from Bihar held for bomb threat

Mahakumbh Nagar (PTI):

Uttar Pradesh Police have detained a Class 11 student from Bihar's Purnia district for allegedly threatening to bomb the Maha Kumbh Mela starting January 13 in Prayagraj, officials said on Monday. SSP (Kumbh) Rajesh Dwivedi said the 17-year-old student, who was brought to Prayagraj on Sunday for questioning, has been sent to a remand home. The accused allegedly created a fake Instagram profile in the name of one his classmates to settle a score, and posted provocative content from it, including a threat to kill 1,000 devotees at the Maha Kumbh, the SSP said. Police took up the probe after filing a case at the Mela Kotwali police station under relevant sections of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (NNS) and Information Technology Act, he added.

undertaken across the country. Dr Sanjay Singh, national convener of the Jal Jan Jodo Abhiyan, shared that after the Makar Sankranti Snan, a special programme will be organised at Maha Kumbh for water conservation workers and organisations. The event will feature discussions and experience-sharing by individuals working in various fields of water conservation. The Jal Sahelis of Bundelkhand are set to participate in this programme, contributing their valuable insights to the national dialogue on water conservation.

Prayagraj-Vns section ready for movement of Mela specials: DRM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Along with Indian Railways, Varanasi Division of North Eastern Railway (NER) has also made full preparations for the transportation and return journey of devotees to Maha Kumbh Mela-2025, which will run for 45 days from January 13 to February 26 at Sangam, Prayagraj. Extensive arrangements have been made for fair passengers and devotees at Prayagraj Rambag and Jhusi stations falling under Varanasi Division. Keeping in mind the heavy influx of passengers, four platforms, three foot over bridges (FOBs) are available for the fair passengers at Jhusi station and six permanent passenger shelter centers have been built in 14,400 square metres (four permanent passenger shelters along the new GT Road and two permanent passenger shelters along the old GT Road) in which 10,000 passengers can rest simultaneously, informed Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) Vineet Kumar Srivastava, adding that, similar-

ly, for the convenience of fair passengers at Prayagraj Rambag station, six permanent passenger shelter centers have been built in 2,400 square metres in the station premises, where 1,600 passengers can wait for their trains and rest. "All adequate arrangements have been made including providing additional ticket counters and other necessary facilities in these passenger shelter centres", he said. The divisional railway manager said the Varanasi division of NER is committed for ensuring seamless travel for passengers during the Maha Kumbh Mela. "Keeping in view the expected influx of passengers, the NER has arranged adequate number of staff to provide 24x7 service, including special holding areas, additional ticket counters, food stalls, tea stalls, toilets, water taps, announcements, CCTV, control rooms, Railway Protection Force (RPF) platoons, passenger assistance booths, medical assistance booths and other necessary facilities", he said.



He said the speed of trains running on the newly doubled rail section of Prayagraj and Varanasi has been increased to 110 km/h in which the newly constructed rail bridge number 111 with double electrified lines on the Ganga is making its important contribution. Prayagraj-Varanasi rail section is ready for the movement of Kumbh Mela special trains. "About 200 trains will be able to pass through this rail section every day with increased efficiency", he said. The divisional railway manager further said three five line indoor/ outdoor video display boards, three single line display boards, three single line display boards, 18 55" LED display boards, one video wall and 30 speakers have been installed in the

passenger shelter centres established at Jhusi station to provide information about trains to the fair passengers. The three further added that for 24 hour surveillance, 120 fixed box CCTV cameras, 20 remote controlled (Pan Tilt Zoom) cameras have been installed which can rotate 360 degrees and move 180 degrees up/down or horizontally by bringing the object closer or farther away and record it. Besides 18 (FRS) cameras have been installed with face recognition system which will be able to identify suspicious persons and people who are frequently on the move and inform the security agencies by sounding an alert alarm, he added. For providing information about trains to the fair passengers at Prayagraj Rambag station, three five line indoor/outdoor video display boards, three at a glance display boards, five single line display boards, 6 55" LED display boards, one video wall and 51 speakers

have been installed. Apart from this, LED coach guidance systems of 22, 24, 25 and 25 coach capacity have been installed on platform Nos 1, 5, 6 and 7 of Prayagraj Rambag respectively, which will be connected to the National Train Enquiry System (NTES), Srivastava said. For proper communication system at Prayagraj Rambag station during Maha Kumbh Mela, 29 Wi-Fi connections courtesy of Rail Tel in station premises and passenger shelters, 20 railway phones of Railways, 6 hotline connections for control room, two BSNL phones with broadband connection, 45 mobile phones of Airtel/Jio for control room, passenger shelter and enquiry centre, four BSNL helpline numbers in control room for emergency, two control phones for giving accurate information of train operations, 35 megawatt phones for crowd management as per requirement, 44 two way communication systems for convenience at UTS, enquiry and PRS coun-

ters and one 25 watt for other management. Provision of VHF set and 130 nos 5 watt VHF walkie-talkie has been made. For 24 hour surveillance, 89 fixed box CCTV cameras, nine remote controlled (Pan Tilt Zoom) cameras have been installed which can rotate 360 degrees and move 180 degrees up/down or horizontally to record the object near and far and 14 cameras have been installed with face recognition system. "These cameras will be able to identify suspicious persons and persons who are frequently on the move and inform the security agencies by sounding an alert alarm", the divisional railway manager said, adding that apart from this, display boards, speakers, platform number boards and signages of various passenger amenities provided at the stations have been installed on the foot over bridges of both the stations which will help the Kumbh Mela passengers in reaching their destination.

Youth hit by dumper, dies

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A youth standing on the roadside died after being hit by a speeding dumper in Navai village on Aigain-Mohan road under Aigain Kotwali police station area of Unnao. He was identified as Ankit Verma (26) of Navai village. His friend Dilip was seriously injured in the incident. Irate kin and villagers staged an agitation and blocked the Aigain-Mohan road. Circle Officer (CO) Santosh Singh along with force rushed to the spot and pacified the issue by assuring them all possible help. The agitation ended after around two hours and the traffic was restored. When the driver was trying to flee from the spot, the villagers chased him, caught him and handed him over to the police, which also impounded the dumper. On the complaint of the kin, further action was being initiated in the matter. Suman, wife of the deceased Ankit, was worried about the future of her four-year old daughter Akanksha.

Procession taken out with great pomp & show



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

For Maha Kumbh the procession of Taponidhi Shri Panchayat Anand Akhara was taken out with great pomp and show on Monday. More than a thousand saints and seers came out riding on elephants, horses, camels and chariots and were welcomed with drums and blowing of conches and flower showers. Artists dressed as Shiv Baratis

9 of family rescued from drowning

PTI ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) personnel stationed at the Maha Kumbh Mela site rescued nine members of a family from drowning in the Ganga river on Monday, officials said. An NDRF official stated that Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Manoj Kumar Sharma was visiting Arail Ghat on Monday when he noticed a boat carrying nine individuals drifting uncontrollably in the strong current. The family

members on the boat were shouting for help. "Upon hearing their cries, DIG Sharma immediately directed the NDRF team to enter the river and rescue the stranded family. The team successfully brought all nine individuals to safety," the official said, adding that those on board were members of the same family. Around 40-45 crore visitors are expected during the Maha Kumbh, which is being held from January 13 to February 26 after a gap of 12 years.

wearing a garland of human skulls performed Tandava which were the centre of attraction. Shrimahant Shankaranand Saraswati said that this procession was taken out from the

Anand Akhara premises located near Baghambari Math. The grand procession entered the Maha Kumbh via Bhardwajpuram, Baghambari, Ramli Park, Labour Square, Bajrang Square etc. In this, Mahamandaleshwars, saints, seers, sanyasis, riding on chariots, horses, etc. from all over the country were moving forward giving their blessings to the devotees. Swami Rajeshwaranand Saraswati said the saints will stay in the camp of the Akhara during the entire Maha Kumbh. Naga sanyasis also joined the procession, who were walking with trident and mace in their hands. Reemahant Shankaranand Maharaj said the presiding deity of this akhara is Lord Surya Narayan.

Fog woes persist, train services affected

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Dense fog on Monday continued to severely disrupt the train services here. Most of the long-distance trains, especially those coming from the northern states, were running hours behind the scheduled time. Even trains like Rajdhani, Vande Bharat etc were running several hours behind schedule. According to a report received from Pt Deen Dayal Upadhyay Junction (DDU), 22811 BBS (Bhubaneswar) Rajdhani Express was running 9.14 hours late while RJPB (in Patna city) by 9.58 hours and 20818 BBS Tejas Rajdhani by 10.52 hours. Several long-distance trains arrived at Varanasi Junction (BSB) and Banaras (BSBS) railway stations several hours



Dense fog on Monday slowed down the speed of trains in Varanasi

behind schedule. Trains like Vande Bharat arrived late as 22436 from New Delhi departed by 5.14 hours, 12562 Swatantrata Senani Express by 5.03 hours and 12875 Neelachal Express 3.21 hours. However,

12333 Vibhuti Express was delayed by about 7.07 hours while 15667 Kamakhya Express by 5.14 hours, 12562 Swatantrata Senani Express by 5.03 hours and 12875 Neelachal Express 3.21 hours. However,

the most popular train from New Delhi, 12560 Shiv Ganga Express arrived at Banaras station 1.42 hours late, showing some improvement in its arrival compared to the last two days. However, 12582 New Delhi-Banaras Superfast Express arrived late here by remained around six hours. The dense foggy and low visibility also affected the flight services badly at Lal Bahadur Shastri International Airport, Babatpur. The affected flights included AI-406 from Delhi; QP-1421 and 6E-438 from Bengaluru; QP-1633 and 6E-450 from Hyderabad; 6E-7035 from Bhubaneswar; AI-2457 from Mumbai; 6E-822 from Kolkata; 6E-5082 from Khajuraho and many others which landed behind their scheduled time.

ACM: Various facilities being arranged for Maha Kumbh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Assistant Commercial Manager (ACM), Kanpur Central station, Santosh Kumar Tripathi, said a temporary accommodation facility with a capacity of 200 people will be established near Kanpur Central station for devotees heading to Prayagraj for Maha Kumbh. Travellers from Kanpur Central station to Prayagraj will be issued green tickets and provided green accommodation upon arrival. While addressing mediapersons here, he said various facilities are being arranged for the Maha Kumbh, including a baby feeding centre starting January 10. Sleeping pods are currently available for passengers. The railways will operate a special

Kumbh Mela Express from Hubli to Lucknow via Kanpur Central. Meanwhile, the UPSRTC has also finalised arrangements for the Maha Kumbh. The Jharkati bus station anticipates approximately two lakh passengers between January 12 and 15 compared to its regular daily traffic of 35,000 passengers on 1,400 buses. To accommodate pilgrims travelling to Prayagraj, 2,800 buses will be available. Assistant Regional Manager Pankaj Tewari said with the first ceremonial bath scheduled for January 13, the station expects two lakh pilgrims from January 12 to 15. The enhanced bus service includes 450 vehicles from Kanpur region, with additional services from Madhya

Pradesh, Rajasthan, Delhi and Uttarakhand via Kanpur. He said 20 vehicles will remain on standby for immediate deployment to Prayagraj if needed. The station will operate five additional ticket windows and three information centres. More than 100 staff members will assist pilgrims with boarding and 25 female staff will be deployed to support travellers. Each route will have five-10 inspectors ensuring punctual operations. Buses must avoid unscheduled stops at roadside establishments, stopping only at designated points, he said. **MECHANIC KILLED:** A motor mechanic was killed under mysterious circumstances in an auto charging centre situated in Ramaipur under Bidhnu police station

area. His profusely-bleeding body was recovered lying on a cot on Monday morning. It appears that he was murdered by being hit on his head with some heavy object. On getting information police along with forensic team and sniffer dog squad rushed to the spot and carried out investigation. Mohd Shadab (38) of Jajmou was a motor mechanic and his family comprised father Farid, mother Shahin and three brothers. He was second among his four brothers. According to kin, Shadab did not have much contact with the family members. Bidhnu Inspector Jitendra Pratap said the body had been sent for autopsy. On the basis of evidence collected from the spot, a probe was on in the matter.

Symbolic strike by auto drivers

Varanasi (PNS): Auto rickshaw and taxi drivers held a two-hour symbolic strike from 10 am to 12 noon on Monday and warned the local Varanasi Junction (Cantt) railway administration. During this time, the stand of autos and taxis remained completely closed in the railway premises. Auto Union president Bhagwan Singh said if the prepaid system is not implemented by the local railway administration by January 14, then they will go on an indefinite strike. During this strike, outside autos and private taxis will not be allowed to enter the railway premises. Among those present were Bhagwan Singh, Devnand Singh, Taj Mohammad, Subhash Singh, Zuber Khan, Bagi, Kailash Gupta, Vinod Srivastava, Akhilesh Yadav, Kaushal Srivastava, Mahakal, Manoj Pehlwan, Guddu Yadav, Dinesh Gupta besides many other drivers.

Sales in divisional khadi exhibition cross ₹2 crore

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Sales of various khadi and handicraft items crossed Rs 2 crore on the 11th day on Monday in the 15-Divisional Khadi Village Industry Exhibition-2024 being organised by Uttar Pradesh Khadi and Village Industries Board in the Urban Hut courtyard located at Chowkaghat here despite foggy conditions and chilly weather. The exhibition will continue till January 10. The main objective of the exhibition is to provide market to the entrepreneurs of rural areas and to help in marketing and encourage them for sales. District Village Industry Officer UP Singh said by the 10th day of the fair, sales reached ₹1.90 crore. Famous singer Garima Mishra of Maa

Mundeshwari Music Group presented bhajans in the fair. Khadi clothes and village industry items are being purchased in large numbers. Consumers are taking advantage of 30 per cent discount on khadi, said Singh, adding that the main objective of the exhibition is to sell as much Khadi Village Industry products as possible, produced by workers from remote places of the state, so that their livelihood can be improved and Mahatma Gandhi's dream can be realised. A total of 113 stalls have been set up in this exhibition, in which 25 stalls are of Khadi industry and 88 stalls are of Village Industry products. The exhibition is showcasing modern khadi clothes, khadi-made Katia, Moonga and cot-

ton clothes, kurta, pyjama, shirt, towel, dhoti, handkerchief, lungi, quilt, mattress, designer sarees, Banarasi sarees, cotton sarees and Kashmiri shawls. Additionally, stalls showcasing woolen jackets and blankets of Uttarakhand and carved sofa, bed, divan swing and modern items made of wood of Saharanpur besides food items made from amla of Prapatgarh and Varanasi like laddu, barfi, candy, vinegar and pickles like mango pickle, lemon pickle, garlic pickle and ginger pickle. Moreover, leather items made from Kanpur like shoes, slippers, belts, purses besides medicines made from Ayurvedic herbs and sandalwood, sandalwood face pack and Rudraksha, ring and pain relieving oil are also available at the exhibition with huge discounts.

15,187 candidates secure employment during Kashi Sansad Rojgar Mela

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

In the two-day Kashi Sansad Rojgar Mela which concluded at the Government Industrial Training Institute (ITI), Karaundi, on Sunday, UP Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Stamp and Court Registration Fees Ravindra Jaiswal gave certificates to the employed candidates. Representatives of a total of 371 companies and 24,722 beneficiaries participated in this employment fair in which a total of 15,187 candidates were employed against the target of providing jobs to 15,000 youths. The companies providing maximum employment in the employment fair were Clinton Geo Engineering Private Limited, which employed 220 candidates and Rastant Lucknow offered jobs to 144 candidates. Apart from this, the companies offering the highest package in the job fair were HDFC Bank and Saundarya Beauty Studio, Varanasi (4,20,000 per annum each). The candidates who got the highest salary in the job fair were Meenal Ojha and Raj Tiwari who were offered jobs of deputy branch manager and sales manager by HDFC Bank



UP minister Ravindra Jaiswal giving job certificate to a candidate at Rojgar Mela in Varanasi

and Saundarya Beauty Studio respectively. The beneficiaries who got job offers said that this initiative of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has given the youth a golden opportunity to become self-reliant. In the fair, along with Chief Development Officer (CDO) Himanshu Nagpal, Shivsharan Pathak (in charge of Parliamentary Public Relations Office), Kashi region media in-

charge of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Navratan Rathi, Jagdish Tripathi, Rahul Singh, Arvind Singh, Sanjay Sonkar, Geeta Shastri, Ashok Yadav, Sandeep Raghuvanshi, Shailendra Mishra, Fauzdar Pal, Chhathi Yadav etc were prominently present. Earlier, on the first day the fair was started with the lighting of lamp by District Magistrate S Rajalingam during which CDO Himanshu Nagpal and other officials were present.

Uttar Pradesh Labour and Employment, Coordination Minister Anil Rajbhar, Zila Panchayat Chairperson Poonam Maurya, Mayor Ashok Tiwari, district president of BJP and MLC Hansraj Vishwakarma, MLC Dharmendra Rai, city BJP president Vidyasagar Rai, MLAs Saurabh Srivastava and Sunil Patel etc were also present. On the first day, 8,381 youths got job offers.

Cash, goods worth lakhs stolen from shop

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Cash and goods worth around ₹30 lakh were stolen from the shop of Goldiee Masale on Express Road in Collectorganj police station area late on Saturday night. Miscreants committed the theft by sneaking into the shop after dismantling the iron grill and breaking open the shutter. The incident came to light when the employees reached the shop on Monday morning. On being informed ACP Collectorganj Shrishti Singh along with force rushed to the spot and called the forensic team and sniffer dog squad to investigate the matter. In the CCTV footage, police saw a thief in the shop. It is believed that his other accomplices may have been waiting outside the shop. Police are now examining the CCTV footages of other adjacent shops for working out the case. Reports said that this old shop of Goldiee Masale is in the name of Lala Ramchandra Gupta & Sons where Ajayendra Gupta of the family sits. Around 2 am on Saturday miscreant broke into the shop and stole Rs.15 lakh cash, goods worth around Rs.12 lakh, two laptops and two mobile phones from there. As Express Road



The Goldiee Masale shop which was burgled in Collectorganj police station area.

market remains closed on Sunday, the incident came to light on Monday morning. Shop owner Som Goenka informed the police which rushed to the spot and carried out probe in the matter. President of Kirana Bazar Awadhesh Kumar Bajpai said a large number of drug addicts gathered in the locality at night. He had apprised the police several times about this but nothing was done so far, he claimed. On the other hand, general secretary of Akhil Bhartiya Udyog Vyapar Mandal (ABUVM) Gyanesh Mishra

raising concern over policing in the area threatened to take to the streets and protest if police failed to adopt effective measures to curb incidents of crime in the locality. **MISHAP:** A youth was fatally knocked down by an unidentified vehicle on Jhansi-Mirzapur highway on the Uttar Pradesh-Madhya Pradesh border in Mahoba district on Sunday night. According to a report received here, Rahul Ahirwar (27), son of Ratanlal of Saura village under Mahobkhanth police area of Mahoba had left his house for Delhi

around 9 pm on Sunday. While crossing the road, he was hit by some unidentified vehicle as a result of which he was killed on the spot. The Harpalpur police rushed to the spot and sent the body of the victim for an autopsy. When contacted Circle Officer (CO) Kulpahar (Mahoba) Harshita Gangwar said on hearing about the incident, the Mahobkhanth police had immediately rushed to the spot. After contacting the Harpalpur police, they rushed to spot and carried out action in the matter, she added further.

Nitish rules out quitting NDA



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

SC orders foreigners to stay in India for criminal proceedings

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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



Om Birla honours women at Panchayat Se Parliament 2.0

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

Yemen court's sentence on nurse pending Presidential ratification



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

CJI Sanjeev Khanna recuses from sports constitution cases

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

SC quashes cheating case against Goa MLA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

PM Modi virtually inaugurates multiple railway projects

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU/NEW DELHI

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

mantra of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas' is helping turn the vision of a developed India into reality while congratulating the people of these states and all citizens of India on the new developments. According to Modi, all these initiatives are generating millions of new employment opportunities in the railway sector. Keeping in mind the special skills related to the railways, the country's first Gati-Shakti University has also been established, he added. Highlighting the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla rail line, he said that Jammu and Kashmir is achieving new milestones in railway infrastructure. The Railway Board appointed E Srinivas as the first Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) of the Jammu Rail Division soon after its inauguration by PM. According to the prime minister, the completion of the Chenab bridge, the world's highest railway arch bridge in J-K, will play a key role in connecting the region with the rest of India, providing convenience to the people of Leh-Ladakh.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

E-student visa initiative

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

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



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

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

PICTALK



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

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



RAJDEEP PATHAK

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

On January 4, 1932, Mahatma Gandhi was arrested after the Congress Party had decided to resume a civil disobedience movement in the wake of emergency measures imposed by the British government. The arrest marked a pivotal juncture in India's struggle for independence and left an indelible impact on global movements for justice and equality. Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence and civil disobedience not only reshaped India's freedom struggle but also served as a blueprint for resistance movements worldwide. The Civil Disobedience Movement, initiated by Mahatma Gandhi in 1930, was a landmark moment in the Indian nationalist struggle. It was launched with the historic Salt March (Dandi Yatra) - where Gandhi defied British rule by marching to the sea to produce salt, a symbol of colonial exploitation - foot-marching from Sabarmati Ashram in Gujarat to the river Dandi, a journey of 241 miles. This movement aimed to undermine British authority through non-violent means such as boycotting British goods, refusing to pay taxes, and disobeying oppressive laws.

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India's moral and political conscience, galvanising people from all walks of life to resist British rule. Women, in particular, stepped into leadership roles during this period. Kasturba Gandhi, Gandhi's wife and Sarojini Naidu led marches and protests, ensuring that the movement did not lose steam. Acts of civil disobedience, such as the refusal to pay land revenue and the boycott of British institutions, intensified across the country. The arrest also amplified the moral and symbolic power of Gandhi's leadership. His willingness to endure imprisonment demonstrated his steadfast commitment to non-violence and truth. The Indian masses responded with unprecedented solidarity, reinforcing the idea that freedom could be achieved through peaceful resistance. Gandhi's arrest in 1932 was widely reported in the global press, drawing attention to the Indian struggle for independence. In Britain, the arrest sparked wide debate. While the colonial government justified the move as a necessary measure to maintain law and order, prominent intellectuals like Bertrand Russell and George Orwell criticized the repression. Orwell in his book 'As I Please: Essays' (1943); Tribune Publishing remarked, "The



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RSS CHIEF ROOTS FOR UNITY

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

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

Vinod Johri | Delhi

A Journey from poverty to prosperity



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

in 2012 to 4.86 per cent in 2024, showcasing the impact of government schemes.

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

R K Jain | Barwani

JUSTICE FOR MUKESH CHANDRAKAR

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

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

HEALTHCARE SYSTEM NEEDS ATTENTION

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

Jakir Hussain | Kanpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Resilience redefined: The art of bending without breaking

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

Resilience is often misunderstood as an unshakable strength, but its true essence lies in flexibility and growth. It is not about avoiding pain or adversity but learning to navigate them with courage and purpose. Resilience is the whisper within us that says, "You can rebuild." Take Priya (name changed), a 36-year-old software engineer whose life unravelled after an unexpected layoff. "I thought I had lost everything—my confidence, my identity," she admitted. Beneath her professional stress lay years of self-worth tied to external validation. Through journaling and cognitive reframing, Priya discovered her worth extended beyond achievements. The layoff became not an ending, but an opportunity to redefine herself.



Resilience is not about bouncing back but about moving forward, transformed by challenges. Its foundation rests on four key elements:

1. Self-Trust: Believing in your ability to navigate life's storms.
2. Emotional Agility: Acknowledging and processing emotions without being consumed by them.
3. Relational Anchors: Relying on meaningful connections for support and safety.
4. Hopeful Realism: Balancing acceptance of hardship with faith in better outcomes. Consider Rohan (name changed), a 50-year-old attorney overwhelmed by work stress. Grounding techniques like mindful breathing helped him regain

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

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

Resilience is often misunderstood as an unshakable strength, but its true essence lies in flexibility and growth. It is not about avoiding pain or adversity but learning to navigate them with courage and purpose. Resilience is the whisper within us that says, "You can rebuild." Take Priya (name changed), a 36-year-old software engineer whose life unravelled after an unexpected layoff. "I thought I had lost everything—my confidence, my identity," she admitted. Beneath her professional stress lay years of self-worth tied to external validation. Through journaling and cognitive reframing, Priya discovered her worth extended beyond achievements. The layoff became not an ending, but an opportunity to redefine herself.

Resilience is not about bouncing back but about moving forward, transformed by challenges. Its foundation rests on four key elements:

(The writer is a psychologist specialising in trauma and inner child healing. She writes and speaks extensively about mental health and resilience; views are personal)



KAVITA KABIR



FIRST COLUMN

THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF YOGA

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



RAVI VALLURI

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

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



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

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

Turning Canada's crisis into India's opportunity



DINESH SOOD

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



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

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

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



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

cement its reputation as a global supplier of talent. Bridging the Skills Gap with Policy Support India has already made strides in skill development through initiatives like Skill India, Digital India, and the National Skill Development Mission. However, these efforts must be scaled and aligned with global standards to capitalise on emerging opportunities, and the private sector truly should be able to design certification programmes that meet international benchmarks. Hands-on training, internships, and industry-specific curricula ensure that Indian workers are both employable and competitive globally. Equitable access to skill development programmes is critical. Government subsidies, partnerships with educational institutions, and digital learning platforms can make high-quality training accessible even in rural areas. Technology can be a game-changer in India's skill development journey. Online learning platforms, virtual reality simulations, and AI-driven personalised training modules can revolutionise how skills are imparted. These tools make training accessible to even the country's remotest corners, enabling millions to participate in the economic mainstream. Skill development should focus on employment and fostering entrepreneurship. For instance, a trained beauty and wellness professional could start a salon, or a logistics expert could launch a delivery service. With mentorship and financial support, such ventures can create jobs and spur regional economic growth. **Key Sectors with Growing Opportunities** **1. Information Technology (IT):** India's IT sector is already a global leader, but the rapid advancements in artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and cyber secu-

rency require a highly skilled workforce. As digital transformation reshapes industries worldwide, there is a pressing need for talent proficient in emerging technologies. Training programmes should focus on data analytics, AI applications, and cyber security protocols to meet global standards.

2. Hospitality and Tourism: With increasing international and domestic travel, the hospitality and tourism sectors demand professionals with strong soft skills, cultural competence, and customer service excellence. Vocational training in these areas, coupled with language enhancement programs, can help Indian youth secure lucrative positions both at home and abroad.

3. Transportation and Logistics: The transportation industry is a vital economic pillar, requiring skilled personnel for logistics management, safety protocols, and infrastructure operations. By offering targeted training in these areas, India can create a workforce ready to address the growing demand in this sector. **4. Beauty and Wellness:** Often overlooked, the beauty and wellness industry has witnessed exponential growth globally. This sector offers immense opportunities, from cosmetology to spa therapies and holistic wellness. By blending traditional Indian practices with modern techniques, India can produce skilled professionals catering to diverse cultural needs worldwide.

5. Retail: The rise of e-commerce and the evolution of traditional retail have created a demand for skilled workers in inventory management, customer relations, and digital marketing. Training programmes focused on these areas can help India's youth tap into this dynamic sector. A Collaborative Effort Capitalising

on these opportunities requires a coordinated effort between the government, private sector, and educational institutions. Policies should focus on creating industry partnerships, providing financial incentives for skill development, and ensuring that training programs are aligned with market demands.

At the same time, private enterprises must invest in upskilling initiatives and collaborate with training institutes to design job-ready curricula. International partnerships can also be vital in providing Indian workers with exposure to global best practices. Seizing the Moment India's youth stand at the cusp of a transformative moment. By equipping them with the right skills, the nation can address unemployment, meet global workforce demands, and drive economic growth. The current challenges faced by countries like Canada remind us of the interconnectedness of global economies and the opportunities that lie within crises. This is an opportunity for India to fill workforce shortages in other nations and elevate its standing as a global talent powerhouse. By focusing on skill development today, India can ensure a brighter, more prosperous tomorrow for its young generation and the nation.

As the world navigates economic uncertainties, it is not the crises that define us but how we respond to them. This is a moment for India to turn challenges into opportunities and empower its youth to shine within the country and on the global stage. (The writer is co-founder and MD of Orane International, a training partner of the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and a network Member of India International Skills Centres, an initiative of GoI. The views expressed are personal)

Cooperative entrepreneurship: A pathway to inclusive growth and social justice

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

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



BINOD ANAND

Cooperatives operate as dual-purpose entities-economic organisations and member-centric institutions-with the aim of maximising member benefits while maintaining operational efficiency. Their governance structures emphasise democratic decision-making and resilience, making them particularly relevant in regions like Eastern India,

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

BJP questions Kejriwal's ₹33 Crore residence renovation

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

After the leak of the Comptroller of Auditor General of India (CAG) report on 6 Flag Staff Road and Addition and Alteration in the camp office and Staff Block, Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva launched a scathing attack on Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener and former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, accusing him of indulging in extravagant and questionable spending on the renovation of his official residence, infamously known as 'Sheesh CMahal'.

quoting the CAG report, Sachdeva alleged that the renovation costs had exceeded Rs 33.66 crore by 2022, with the total expenditure remaining unclear. Various irregularities at all stages of the project have been flagged in the

CAG report, which is still to be tabled in the Delhi assembly and is hence not public yet. Addressing a press conference, Sachdeva alleged that Kejriwal, in collusion with the Public Works Department (PWD), engaged in questionable practices to renovate the bungalow.

"The expenditure of Rs 33.66 crore is just a figure; the actual cost could be much higher when missing inventory and additional expenditures from 2023 and 2024 are included," he claimed. This work was awarded at tendered cost of Rs 8.62 crore which was 13.21 per cent above the estimated cost of Rs 7.61 crore. The work was completed in April 2022 and final payment of Rs 33.66 crore was made to the contractor. This work

awarded at 13.21 per cent above the estimated cost was finally completed at 342.31 per cent above the estimated cost and 290.49 per cent above the tendered amount," the CAG report says.

Sachdeva questioned the urgency and rationale behind the extensive renovations, saying, "What was the emergency that you were so anxious to enter this palace... Later it was said that some portion of this structure is such that it can be removed anytime, it is temporary, sometimes servant quarters are added to it, sometimes they are reduced, that is, the CAG report has a detailed report about the black deeds of Arvind Kejriwal and what his evil mind was thinking at that time," he said.

IMD issues fog alert, cold wave hit Delhi...

From page 1

Dense fog in the capital reduced morning visibility to zero on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, leading to flight cancellations and diversions, and trains being delayed. On Saturday, there was zero visibility for an unprecedented nine hours.

Due to the fog, several trains to and from New Delhi and satellite stations were running behind their schedule, leaving passengers stranded at the railway stations. As per the railway department, at least 17 trains were running late ranging from 30 minutes to 400 minutes. This includes two Duronto class, several superfast and mail, express category trains. Many north Indian states also experienced similar weather on Monday morning with dense layers of fog and cold wave.

Delhi's Air Quality Index meanwhile stood at 320 (very poor).

The Safdarjung observatory, Delhi's primary weather station, recorded a minimum temperature of 9.6 degrees

Celsius, 2.7 notches above the normal for this time of the year, at 8.30 am. The maximum temperature was recorded 16.9 degree Celsius, two notches below the normal. The gap between the maximum, and minimum has been reduced, leading to cold wave conditions.

The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) on Sunday revoked curbs under Stage 3 of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) in Delhi-NCR after the region witnessed a dip in air pollution levels owing to favourable meteorological conditions, especially improved wind speed. However, restrictions under Stage 1 and Stage 2 of GRAP remain in place across Delhi-NCR.

In Kashmir, the night temperatures across the Valley rose by several degrees following overnight snowfall, but the mercury remained below the freezing point. The minimum temperature in Srinagar settled at minus 0.5 degree Celsius, two degrees above the previous night's

minus 2.5 degree, the weather office said.

Gulmarg, a tourist resort town known for skiing activities in north Kashmir, recorded a low of minus 4.5 degree Celsius, unchanged from the previous night, it said.

In Pahalgam, one of the base camps for the annual Amarnath Yatra in south Kashmir, the minimum temperature rose to minus 1.4 degree Celsius from minus 3.2 degree the night before, the weather office said.

Qazigund, the gateway town to the Valley, logged a low of zero degree Celsius, while Konibal in Pampore town registered a minimum temperature of minus 1 degree, it added.

Kupwara in north Kashmir recorded a minimum of minus 0.3 degree Celsius, while Kokernag in south Kashmir saw the mercury settle at minus 0.4 degree Celsius — a sharp rise from previous night's minus 8.1 degree Celsius, the weather office said.

Congress takes on AAP, promises ₹2,500 to women

From page 1

Shivakumar said it aims to financially empower women, promising that it would be implemented at the first Cabinet meeting of the new government.

"Today, I have come here to launch the Pyari Didi Yojana. We are confident that a Congress government will be formed in Delhi, and on the first day of the new Cabinet, we will implement the scheme to provide Rs 2,500 to every woman in the capital," Shivakumar said.

"Whatever and wherever Congress has promised at the nation or state level, we have delivered and we are going to deliver," he said, adding that within three months after coming to power, all the guarantees were implemented in Karnataka.

He added, "Women in the entire state travel free in buses, 10 kg of rice is being given to every household, about Rs 3,000 given to the unemployed youth, 200 units

of electricity, and Rs 2,000 is being given to every woman. Additionally, 1.22 crore women are getting Rs 2,000 every month."

While addressing media, Delhi Congress chief Devender Yadav said that their tag line would be "Hogi har jarurat puri, Congress hai jaruri" (every need will be fulfilled, Congress is needed). Yadav claimed that there is an impostor in Delhi who is continuously working to show people dreams.

Claiming that the condition of Delhi is deteriorating, he said, "I am happy that we have announced the scheme through Shivkumar. In the coming days, we will come up with many such schemes which are very important for Delhi."

Yadav later concluded his address to the media by saying that "Karnatak ne ki hai umedein puri, Delhi ne kaha hai Congress hai jaruri" (Karnataka has fulfilled all the expectations, Delhi said that Congress is needed).

Further, Congress' Kalkaji assembly constituency candidate Alka Lamba also raised questions regarding the lack of implementation of a similar scheme in Punjab.

"While everytime they fail to implement something in Delhi they blame the central government and the LG, AAP supreme Arvind Kejriwal should answer why he has not been able to keep his promise to the women in Punjab when he has a full-fledged government in the state," she asked.

Lamba also thanked the senior leadership of the party on behalf of the women in Delhi for the scheme and asserted that it will be implemented as soon as we hold the first cabinet meeting.

Elections to the 70-member Delhi Assembly are due in February. Yadav, the party's Delhi in-charge Qazi Nizamuddin, and other senior leaders were present during the announcement.

States dismiss HMPV scare, as cases rise

From page 1

Meanwhile, the governments in Karnataka, Maharashtra and Delhi have issued guidelines - similar to those followed during Covid-19 - to ensure preparedness for potential outbreak of the pathogen and other respiratory diseases. DGHS under the Union Health Ministry, Dr Atul Goel said that India is well-equipped to handle any potential increase in respiratory illnesses.

Karnataka's Health Minister, Dinesh Gundu Rao, stated that the strain involved in these cases is old and poses no life-threatening risks. While there is currently no vaccine for HMPV, health officials suggest that regular flu vaccinations and COVID-19 vaccinations may provide some immunity against it.

Health officials have stressed on precautions such as hand hygiene and avoiding crowded places, however no extraordinary measures like lockdowns or mandatory mask-wearing have been

deemed necessary, the official said, adding that one should remain calm and maintain normal health practices without undue fear.

Delhi health minister Saurabh Bharadwaj said that the officials have been asked to maintain careful tracking of any such trends in the country. "They should be in touch with the union health ministry to get timely updates about the preparedness in the capital. It is important that hospitals in Delhi should be well-equipped to handle any potential increase in respiratory illness as per the advice of the union health ministry."

With two cases of Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) detected in Karnataka, the state's Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao on Monday said there is no need to panic as the infections that have been detected are by old virus strains that are existing in the country and they are not life-threatening.

The minister who chaired a meeting of health department

officials said the two infected infants are doing "normal", and advised people to follow general precautionary measures.

One per cent of ILI cases might be infected by HMPV as per union government and ICMR surveillance data, he further said, fatalities because of it alone are very less, unless the infected person has other comorbidities. Maharashtra, West Bengal, and Andhra Pradesh have reported that they currently have no cases of Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) and that they are monitoring the situation closely while encouraging the public to adhere to general health precautions to prevent respiratory infections.

According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the HMPV belongs to the Pneumoviridae family, the same family as the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). It typically causes upper and lower respiratory infections, presenting symptoms similar to a common cold or flu.

Tillu Tajpuriya gang members arrested

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has arrested three active members of the Tillu Tajpuriya-Parvash Maan gang and recovered two pistols, a revolver, and 39 live cartridges from them.

According to the police on Monday, those nabbed have been identified as 36 year old Deepak alias Prince alias Amit, 24 year old Ankit alias Hunny and 24 year old Sagar. A case under sections 25, 54 and 59 of the Arms Act has been registered at Narela Industrial Area (NIA) police station. The active gangsters like Parvash Maan, Kapil @ Kallu, Rajesh Tyagi, etc., are in judicial custody under different provisions of IPC and MCOCA, but their foot soldiers still support either logistically or financially," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer North) Nidhin Valsan said.

Police fight over jurisdiction as...

From page 1

Finally, at 11 PM, four hours after the accident, Madhya Pradesh police returned, removed the body, and sent it for post-mortem. Traffic movement was restored only after the villagers cleared the blockade.

This incident highlights the chaos and lack of coordination between state police forces, particularly in border areas. "What happened here is shameful. A young man's body was left unattended, and his family was made to suffer because two states couldn't decide who should act," said a local resident.

The victim's family has called for the driver responsible for the hit-and-run to be identified and punished. Meanwhile, the incident has sparked outrage on social media, with calls for reforms in handling inter-state jurisdiction disputes.

Sensex slumps over 1,250 pts on earnings growth concerns

From page 1

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

Titan and Sun Pharma were the only gainers.

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

"Additionally, fears related to the new HMPV have added to the bearish sentiment,

triggering fresh rounds of selling after the recent counter-trend pullback rally," Santosh Meena, Head of Research, Swastika Investmart, said.

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

"Indian equities faced intense selling pressure amid concerns regarding the outbreak of HMPV Virus (Human Metapneumovirus) and sharp fall in banking stocks post lacklustre quarterly updates. Diagnostic stocks were in focus as the first two cases of HMPV were detected in Bangalore.

"There was broad-based sell-off in the market with midcap and smallcap indices falling between 2-3 per cent each and all sectoral indices closing in

Delhi, tops English proficiency, India above global average

From page 1

The Pearson Global English Proficiency Report 2024 aggregated and analysed data from approximately 750,000 Versant tests conducted worldwide, offering a detailed snapshot of current skill levels and emerging trends. Versant by Pearson is an English Language assessment tool that accurately and efficiently evaluates candidates' English language proficiency, assisting businesses in hiring the best talent suited for their needs.

"In today's global economy, English proficiency is not just a skill but a strategic asset. The Pearson Global English Proficiency Report 2024 provides business leaders with the data-driven insights they need to make informed decisions about hiring and developing their workforce. By integrating these insights into their talent strategies, organizations can enhance their competitive edge and drive growth," said Giovanni Giovannelli, president of Pearson's English Language Learning division.

Trudeau resigns, amid rise in economic, political chaos

From page 1

Canada's former finance minister, Chrystia Freeland, announced her resignation from Trudeau's Cabinet on Dec 16, criticising some of Trudeau's economic priorities in the face of Trump's threats.

The move, which came shortly after the housing minister quit, stunned the country and raised questions about how much longer the increasingly unpopular Trudeau could stay in his job.

Freeland and Trudeau had disagreed about two recently announced policies: a temporary sales tax holiday on goods ranging from children's clothes to beer, and plans to send every citizen a check for \$250 Canadian (\$174).

Freeland, who was also deputy prime minister, said Canada could not afford "costly political gimmicks" in the face of the tariffs threat.

"Our country is facing a grave

challenge," Freeland wrote in her resignation letter. "That means keeping our fiscal powder dry today, so we have the reserves we may need for a coming tariff war."

Trudeau had been planning to run for a fourth term in next year's election, even in the face of rising discontent among Liberal Party members. The party recently suffered upsets in special elections in two districts in Toronto and Montreal that it has held for years. No Canadian prime minister in more than a century has won four straight terms.

And based on the latest polls, Trudeau's chances for success looked slim. In the latest poll by Nanos, the Liberals trail the Conservatives 47% to 21%.

Over nearly a decade in power, Trudeau embraced an array of causes favoured by his liberal base. He spoke in favour of immigration at a time other countries were

trying to tighten their borders. He championed diversity and gender equality, appointing a Cabinet that was equal parts men and women. He legalised cannabis.

His efforts to strike a balance between economic growth and environmental protection were criticized by both the right and left. He levied a tax on carbon emissions and rescued a stalled pipeline expansion project to get more of Alberta's oil to international markets.

Fewer people died from COVID-19 in Canada than elsewhere and his government provided massive financial support. But animosity grew among those opposed to vaccine mandates. Flags with Trudeau's name and expletives became a common sight in rural parts.

A combination of scandal and unpopular policies damaged his prospects over time. Trudeau's father swept to power in 1968, and led Canada for almost 16 years, becoming a storied name in the country's history, most notably by opening its doors wide to immigrants. Pierre Trudeau was often compared to John F Kennedy and remains one of the few Canadian politicians who are recognised in America.

Tall and trim, with movie-star looks, Justin Trudeau channelled the star power - if not quite the political heft - of his father.

He became the second-youngest prime minister in Canada's history, and rivals said his age was a liability when he first sought office. But he won a sweeping mandate in a come-from-behind victory in 2015.

Trudeau is a former teacher, nightclub bouncer and snowboard instructor who has three children with his now estranged wife, a former model and TV host.

TN Gov sulks, walks out of...

From page 1

Stalin ensured that R S Bharati the party spokesman, issued statements after statements ridiculing the Governor, The Speaker on his part had declared that National Anthem was not part of the session's proceedings.

"Many actions of the DMK Government point out to the truth that the party wants to secede from India. Stalin himself has made it known that he was for creating a Dravida Nadu and the party has put he agenda in the backburner for the time being," said a senior intelligence official.

The DMK is annoyed with the Governor for his support to the findings of an international research team of genetic engineers and scientists that the concept of Dravidian itself was bunkum. This is the fourth time in a row that the Governor left the House without reading out the address to the session.

EC tightens scrutiny, as voter registration spikes in Delhi

From page 1

Both AAP and the BJP have accused each other of tampering with the voters' list ahead of the Delhi Assembly Election 2025. AAP has raised concerns about the alleged removal of their supporters' names from the electoral roll, claiming unauthorised deletions. On the other hand, the BJP has pointed to discrepancies in the voters' list, attributing them to the presence of illegal immigrants and relocated individuals, which they believe has led to inaccurate additions.

AAP had accused the BJP of filing bulk applications to delete the names of voters perceived to support the Kejriwal-led party.

AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh alleged that voter names were being deleted in the New Delhi Assembly constituency, from where AAP convener and former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is contesting. Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva hit back, accusing AAP leaders, including Singh, of threatening election officers.

The Office of Delhi Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) published the Special Summary Revision (SSR), 2025 ahead of the assembly elections.

The Special Summary Revision of electoral rolls with respect to the qualifying date of January 1, 2025, started in all 70 Assembly

constituencies of NCT of Delhi with the commencement of pre-revision activities on August 20, 2024, the statement said. "During the period of receiving claims & objections i.e. from 29.10.2024 to 28.11.2024, 1,35,089 form-6 (registration of new voters), 69,177 form-7 (objection to any existing entry in the electoral roll), and 83,825 Form-8 (correction of entries in existing electoral roll) were received in Delhi. Claims & Objections continue to pour in ever after 28.11.2024. All claims and objections pending as on 29.10.2024 and received during the period 29.10.2024 to 28.11.2024 were disposed by the EROs as per the scheduled date i.e. by 24.12.2024," read the EC statement.

Among the constituencies, Vikaspuri recorded the largest electorate with 4,62,184 voters, while Delhi Cantonment has the smallest at 78,893. Tilak Nagar registered the highest gender ratio at 967 females per 1,000 males, whereas Okhla recorded the lowest at 731. As the electoral list, there are 2,08 302 voters in the age group of 18-19; 2589780 in the age group of 20-29; 4174823 voters in the age group of 30-39; 3644638 in the age group of 40-49; 2462994 in the age of 50-59; 1377909 in the age of 60-69; 789190 in the age of 70-79 and 277221 in the age group of 80 and above. Meanwhile,

the gender ratio has improved to 859 females per 1,000 males, and the elector-population ratio has reached 71.45, up by two points, the statement said.

According to the statement, eight FIRs have been lodged against 24 individuals for submitting fake documents with the Delhi CEO, emphasising the importance of transparency and accuracy in voter registration to prevent any misuse.

The revision of electoral rolls is a continuous annual exercise with addition and deletion of voters going on round the year. For conducting elections, the poll panel uses the last available updated rolls till the notification of election.

Naxals blow up DRG vehicle, eight dead

From page 1

The vehicle was completely destroyed in the explosion while dismembered bodies were seen placed on plastic sheets. A part of the SUV was seen hanging on a nearby tree. This was the biggest strike by Maoists on security forces in Chhattisgarh in the last two years and the first assault in 2025, and comes amid the Centre's push to eradicate the menace of Left-wing Extremism (LWE) by March 2026.

President Droupadi Murmu condoned the loss of lives in the Naxal attack and said that the country is determined to

completely eradicate Naxalism. "The Naxalite attack on security forces in Bijapur, Chhattisgarh is condemnable. I express my deepest condolences to the bereaved families of the brave soldiers who made the supreme sacrifice for the security of the country. Our country is determined to completely eradicate Naxalism," Murmu said in a post on X.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Chhattisgarh Governor Ramen Deka and Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai expressed grief over the death of DRG personnel and the civilian driver in the blast. "I am deeply saddened by the news of the loss of DRG soldiers in the IED blast in Bijapur (Chhattisgarh). I express my deepest condolences to the families of the brave soldiers. It is impossible to express this grief in words, but I assure the sacrifice of our soldiers will not go in vain. We will end Naxalism from India by March 2026," Shah said in a post on X. Governor Deka strongly condemned the Naxal attack and termed it as a heinous crime.

Chief Minister Sai said Naxalites were frustrated with the ongoing counter-insurgency operation in the

Bastar region and therefore, have resorted to such cowardly acts. Martyrdom of jawans will not go in vain, he asserted. "The news of the martyrdom of 8 jawans and a driver in an IED blast carried out by Naxalites in Kutru of Bijapur district is extremely sad. My condolences are with the families of the martyrs. I pray to God to rest the souls of the martyred soldiers in peace and provide strength to the bereaved families," Sai said in a statement.

Chief Minister vowed to continue fight against the LWE. "Naxalites are frustrated with the ongoing anti-Naxal operation in the

Bastar and have committed such cowardly act out of frustration. The martyrdom of the soldiers will not go in vain. Our fight to end the menace will continue strongly," he added. In the past, numerous attacks have taken place on security forces in the Bastar region of Chhattisgarh, comprising seven districts including Dantewada, using IEDs. In the last major assault, ten police personnel and a civilian driver were killed after Naxals blew up their vehicle, part of a convoy carrying security personnel in neighbouring Dantewada district, on April 26, 2023.

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

AP ■ SEOUL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Police vow more forceful efforts to detain Yoon: Police



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

say they plan to make a more aggressive effort to detain Yoon at the official residence, where members of the presidential security staff were seen installing barbed wire near the gate and along the hills leading up to the building. A police official, who spoke on condition of anonymity per department rules, told reporters there were discussions with the anti-corruption agency on whether to arrest members of the presidential security staff if they forcefully obstruct efforts to detain Yoon. When asked about the possibility of deploying police special task forces, the official said "all

available options" were being reviewed. If investigators manage to detain Yoon, they will likely ask a court for permission to make a formal arrest. Otherwise, he will be released after 48 hours. Meanwhile, the agency has urged the country's acting leader, Deputy Prime Minister Choi Sang-mok, to instruct the presidential security service to comply with the execution of the detention warrant. Choi

Oh Dong-woon, and six other anti-corruption and police officers for orchestrating Friday's detention attempt, which they claim was illegal. The lawyers also filed complaints against the country's acting national police chief, the acting defense minister and two Seoul police officials for ignoring the presidential security service's request to provide additional forces to block the detention attempt. The lawyers

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

PTI ■ DHAKA

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

This was the second arrest warrant by the ICT against Hasina, who fled to India after her Awami League regime's toppling following unprecedented anti-government protests in August last year. The tribunal has so far recorded three cases against her. "Justice Md Golam Mortuza Mojudmar, chairman of the tribunal, issued the arrest warrant after hearing a prosecution plea," an ICT official said. The Inspector General of Police was ordered to arrest the twelve people, including Hasina, and produce them before the tribunal on February 12 in the case filed over complaints of enforced disappearances of several hundred people. The deposed premier's then-defence adviser Major General

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

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

The chief prosecutor alleged that those involved in carrying out these disappearances were rewarded. He added that agencies like the elite anti-crime Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), the police's Detective Branch



(DB), the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit, and the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) were most frequently used for the purpose.

Over the past 15 years, a culture of fear was established in Bangladesh through enforced disappearances and crossfires. Thousands of people were abducted by various forces, either in plainclothes or in uniform. Most of them never returned," Islam told journalists.

Last month, Dhaka officially sought Hasina's extradition

from India. While New Delhi acknowledged the receipt of the letter, it refrained from commenting on it.

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

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

A commission formed by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus's interim government last month submitted its provisional report alleging the involvement of Hasina, her officials and neighbouring India in incidents of enforced disappearance.

The commission said it recorded 1,676 complaints of enforced disappearances and so far examined 758, of which 27 per cent of the victims never returned.

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

AP ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Monday condemned "lies and misinformation" that he said are undermining UK democracy, in response to a barrage of attacks on his government from Elon Musk. The billionaire Tesla CEO has taken an intense and erratic interest in British politics since the centre-left Labour Party was elected in July. Musk has used his social network, X, to call for a new election and demand Starmer be imprisoned. On Monday he posted an online poll for his 210 million followers on the proposition: "America should liberate the people of Britain from their tyrannical government."

Asked about Musk's comments during a question session at a hospital near London, Starmer criticised "those that are spreading lies and misinformation as

far and as wide as possible," particularly opposition Conservative politicians in Britain who have echoed some of Musk's claims.

Musk often posts on X about the UK, retweeting criticism of Starmer and the hashtag TwoTierKeir -- shorthand for an unsubstantiated claim that Britain has "two-tier policing" with far-right protesters treated more harshly than pro-Palestinian or Black Lives Matter demonstrators.

Recently Musk has focused on child sexual abuse, particularly a series of cases that rocked northern England towns in which groups of men, largely from Pakistani backgrounds, were tried for grooming and abusing dozens of girls. The cases have been used by far-right activists to link child abuse to immigration, and to accuse politicians of covering up the "grooming gangs" out of a fear

of appearing racist.

Musk has posted a demand for a public inquiry into the cases. An inquiry was held under the previous Conservative government, though many of the recommendations it made in 2022 have yet to be implemented.

Musk also has accused Starmer of failing to bring perpetrators to justice when he was England's director of public prosecutions between 2008 and 2013. Answering questions after a speech near London, Starmer defended his record as chief prosecutor, saying he had reopened closed cases and "changed the whole prosecution approach" to child sexual exploitation. He also condemned language used by Musk about Jess Phillips, a government minister responsible for combating violence against women and girls. Musk called Phillips a "rape genocide apologist" and said she deserved to be in

prison. "When the poison of the far-right leads to serious threats to Jess Phillips and others, then in my book, a line has been crossed," Starmer said. "I enjoy the cut and thrust of politics, the robust debate that we must have, but that's got to be based on facts and truth, not on lies." Musk has also called for the release of Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, a far-right activist who goes by the name Tommy Robinson and is serving a prison sentence for contempt of court. Starmer said people "cheerleading Tommy Robinson... are trying to get some vicarious thrill from street violence that people like Tommy Robinson promote." Starmer largely avoided mentioning Musk by name in his responses, likely wary of giving him more of a spotlight -- or of angering Musk ally Donald Trump, who is due to be inaugurated as US president on Jan 20.

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

AP ■ SEOUL

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

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

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

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



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

damage to vessels or aircraft.

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

Blinken's visit comes amid political turmoil in South Korea following President Yoon Suk Yeol's short-lived martial law decree and subsequent impeachment by parliament last month, which experts say puts the country at a disadvantage

in getting a steady footing with Trump ahead of his return to the White House.

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

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

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

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

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

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

AP ■ WASHINGTON

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

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

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

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

"As the climate crisis continues to threaten communities across the country and we are transitioning to a clean energy economy, now is the time to protect these coasts for our children and grandchildren," he said. Biden's orders would not affect large swaths of the Gulf of Mexico, where most US offshore drilling occurs, but it would protect coastlines along California, Florida and other states from future drilling.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pope Francis names first woman to head major Vatican office

AP ■ ROME

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

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

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

the first woman prefect in the Vatican".

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

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

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

Francis made Brambilla's appointment possible with his 2022 reform of the Holy See's founding constitution, which allowed laypeople, including women, to head a dicastery and become prefects. Brambilla, a nurse, worked as a missionary in Mozambique and led her Consolata order as superior from 2011-2023, when Francis made her secretary of the religious orders department.

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



Sister Simona Brambilla

out allowing them to be ordained as priests.

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

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

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

alone, the percentage of women is 26%.

Among the women holding leadership positions are Sister Raffaella Petri, the first-ever female secretary general of the Vatican City State, responsible for the territory's health care system, police force and main source of revenue, the Vatican Museums, which are led by a laywoman, Barbara Jatta. Another nun, Sister Alessandra Smerilli, is the No. 2 in the Vatican development office while several women have been appointed to under-secretary positions, including the French nun, Sister Nathalie Beccquart, in the synod of bishops' office. **Pope wraps up busy Christmas season by calling for culture of welcome in Christian communities:** Pope Francis wrapped up a busy Christmas season on Monday by calling for the faithful to promote a culture of welcome

and integration in their communities and reject discrimination.

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

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

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

and discards people. He called instead for promoting "a strong culture of welcome, in which the narrow places of fear and denunciation are replaced by open spaces of encounter, integration and sharing of life; safe spaces where everyone can find warmth and shelter." Francis has long preached the Gospel-mandated need to welcome the stranger, applying it to migrants in particular.

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

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

Market crash makes investors poorer by Rs 10.98 lakh cr

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

Titan, HCL Tech and Sun Pharma were the gainers.

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



earnings season.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

"Assessing the final act of 2024, central banks around the world continued to play a leading role in the demand for gold. November represented another solid month of gold buying as central banks collectively added a net 53 tonnes to global official holdings," WGC said in a report - Central bank gold statistics November 2024.

The gold price dip in November, following the US election, may have provided some central banks with added impetus to accumulate, WGC said.

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



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

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

The Central Bank of Uzbekistan's gold reserves rose

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

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

The People's Bank of China (PBOC) had resumed gold purchases

after a six-month hiatus, adding 5 tonnes of gold to its reserves, increasing its year-to-date net purchases to 34 tonnes and its total reported gold holdings to 2,264 tonnes (5 per cent of total reserves), the report said.

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

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

Gold reserves held by the Czech National Bank rose by almost 2 tonnes in November - the 21st consecutive month of buying, it said, adding the Czech National Bank's year-to-date net purchases now total almost 20 tonnes, lifting gold holdings to just above 50 tonnes.

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

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

ICICI Securities pays Rs 40.2 lakh to settle case with SEBI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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



ous close. On Friday, the rupee depreci-

ated 4 paise to close at 85.79 against the dollar.

Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Government mulls mandatory hallmarking for silver jewellery

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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



holder discussions were underway.

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

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

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

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

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

BIS, established under the BIS Act in 1986, is an autonomous national body responsible for setting quality standards for products and services. Listing out upcoming focus areas, the minister said the BIS is also developing standards for Artificial Intelligence (AI) and is at the forefront of shaping the future of innovation and technology.

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

AP ■ PARIS

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

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



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

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

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

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR

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



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

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

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

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

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

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



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

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

Kiran Jadhav wins air rifle gold in Lakshya Cup

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

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



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

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

Indonesia fires head coach Shin Tae-yong

AP ■ JAKARTA

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



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

Mandhana to lead India women in home ODIs against Ireland

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

AP ■ LIVERPOOL

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former India spinner Harbhajan Singh has urged the BCCI to end the "superstar culture" in the team and pick players for future assignments solely on the basis of performance and not on reputation. Harbhajan's stinging remarks came after India's 1-3 Test series defeat to Australia for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy for the first time in a decade. "There is a superstar culture which has developed. We don't need superstars, we need performers. If the team has them (performers), it will move forward. Whoever wants to become a superstar should stay at home and play cricket there," the spin great said on his YouTube channel. "There is a tour of England coming up. Now everyone has started talking about what will happen in England, who will go, who will not go. For me, it is a simple matter. Only players who are performing should go. You

can't keep picking players on their reputation. "If you do that, then you should take Kapil Dev sir and Anil bhai also. Here, the BCCI and the selectors will have to be firm and act tough. I don't think that the superstar attitude is taking the team forward." Captain Rohit Sharma and star batter Virat Kohli were woefully out of form during the just-concluded Test series against Australia. The series defeat resulted in the team losing out on qualifying for the World Test Championship final. Kohli could manage only 190 runs in his nine innings in the series Down Under, repeatedly offering edges to the slip cordon or keeper. Harbhajan said the struggling players should play some form of cricket and prove themselves if they wish to be picked for the England Test tour. "It should be based on performance only, whether it is Virat, Rohit or anyone. No player is bigger than the game, even if he



thinks in his mind that he is a big superstar. If we have to take Indian cricket forward, we have to ask tough questions. "I am not saying that you should drop them but if you take them on tour, they (struggling players) should play some form of cricket whether county cricket or something before England tour. "This will be a challenge for the selectors, but it's time for selectors to wake up and take some action. "I don't say that any player be dropped, and unnecessarily start chopping and dropping but at least there should be a procedure as to who will get how many chances and for how long, because in India there is a long queue of talents." He also spoke about Kohli's struggles in the past few years. "Virat has played 11 Tests in 2024 and scored 440 runs. The average is 23.15, with one hundred and one fifty. Such an average may be unheard of because he is a very big name. This stat is obviously very low. When I saw it, it was a shocking stat for me too.

"If you give a youngster an opportunity, I feel he will also be able to do this much (match the stats of Kohli)." Harbhajan said India would have lost the series 0-5 or 0-4 if Jasprit Bumrah was not part of the team. "He was used like you squeezed juice from sugarcane. It was like 'Travis Head has come, give the ball to Bumrah, Marnus has come, give the ball to Bumrah, Steve Smith has come, give the ball to Bumrah.' "How many overs will Bumrah bowl? He has been reduced to such a condition that he was not available at the end. If he was there, Australia may have won the fifth Test but they would have lost eight wickets, it would have been tough for them. "You broke his back and the management should have decided on how many overs he should be given." Harbhajan also criticised the team selection for the fifth Test in Sydney which India lost by six wickets.



Toughest SCG pitch, I got chainsawed: Smith on missing 10,000 Test runs milestone

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Veteran Australian batter Steve Smith has said he had never encountered a wicket like the one at the SCG, after falling one run short of reaching 10,000 career runs in the five-match Test series against India for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. In Australia's first innings of the fifth Test here, Smith edged a delivery to slip just five runs shy of the landmark. In the second innings, Prasidh Krishna's delivery rose sharply from short of a length and Smith advanced down the pitch, only to fend it into the gully to be dismissed on 9999 Test runs. "I got chainsawed didn't I! Pretty nasty delivery actually; back of a length, I thought 'oh, there's one to punch through point' and it just took off," the former Australian captain told 'Triple M' after their six-wicket win on Sunday that gave them the trophy after a decade. "It wasn't to be (reaching 10k Test runs), but that's alright we got the result we were after. "Absolutely (toughest SCG pitch I've played on). By a mile. It was two-paced, up and down, seaming all over the place, swinging. I've never played on a wicket like that at the SCG before. It was incredibly difficult to bat. Smith made 33 in the first innings and 4 in the second edged, failing to sign off on a high after notching two

hundreds in the series. "I love the game, it's been a fun series, India are an unbelievable team. There's been some great challenges, Bumrah in particular. It's been great fun and fortunate to get the result in the end," the 35-year-old added. Left-arm quick Mitchell Starc highlighted that everyone had "worked our backsides off" to get to the Border-Gavaskar Trophy series, emphasising the collective effort of the squad, support staff, and families for the successful result. "Five Test matches against India, they're always gruelling, particularly four and five always close together," Starc told Fox Cricket. "We've all worked our backsides off to get to this series, we knew it was a big one on the calendar and I think that's just reward for all the hard work from the support staff, the families to the extended squad and everyone that's taken part. It's a fantastic result, today caps it off. "I like staying out of the scanner but sometimes I'm made to get in there. It's always 'if I can make it worse, what's worse look like?' and if not, then kick on. I always want to be a part of it, if I can contribute - I don't want to leave the guys a man short so that's always a question - but as soon as I knew I wouldn't leave them short I was ready to go."

ICC, BCCI, CA, ECB explore possibility of two-tier Test system

PTI ■ SYDNEY/NEW DELHI

The ICC in collaboration with cricket boards of India, Australia and England is exploring the possibility of a two-tier Test system to facilitate more series between big three nations. The Age reported that Jay Shah, the new ICC chairman, is set to meet Cricket Australia chair Mike Baird and his England counterpart Richard Thompson later this month to discuss the finer points. "Any plan for a move to two divisions in Test cricket would kick in after the end of the current Future Tours Program in 2027," the Age reported quoting its sources. The BCCI is currently gearing up for its Special General Meeting on January 12 in Mumbai where interim secretary Devajit Saikia is expected to get a full-time role. Saikia was appointed in



the interim role after Shah vacated his post last month to take over as ICC chairman. A BCCI official indicated that the discussion floated around the ICC corridors in 2016, the first-time when a two-tier Test system was seriously considered. "We don't have any news of any such move as yet. Currently, preparations are being made for SGM and the recent tour to Australia too needs to be discussed. "There was such a move sometime back, but we haven't heard anything since," a BCCI source told PTI. The BCCI and cricket bodies of Zimbabwe and Bangladesh opposed the move, citing the possibility of decreasing revenue.

They had also argued that smaller nations would miss out on the opportunity of playing against top teams if such a system comes into existence. However, nine years down the road the modalities have changed and even some of the reputed experts such as former Indian skipper Ravi Shastri are supporting the division. "I've been a firm believer in that if you want Test cricket to survive and be alive and thriving, I think that's the way to go. "The top teams play against each other more often, so there is a contest; you want contests," Shastri told SEN during the recent fifth Test between India and Australia. Even some of the top players such as England Test skipper Ben Stokes had criticised the current model of World Test Championship.



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

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Australian all-rounder Beau Webster is feeling "speechless" after his impressive debut against India during the fifth Test here, which the hosts won by six wickets to reclaim the Border-Gavaskar Trophy after a decade. Webster made 57 and unbeaten 37 in the two innings of the Sydney Test, important contributions in the match's context, besides taking the wicket of Shubman Gill in India's second innings. "I'm a bit speechless, honestly. If you told me a week ago that all this would happen in the last few days, I wouldn't have believed you," Webster told cricket.com.au. "It's been a dream debut and to get the win there inside three days is a hell of a feeling. I'm sure the boys will celebrate accordingly," he added. The Tasmanian had a nice ending to his debut Test when he smashed spinner Washington Sundar for a boundary down the ground to collect the winning runs. The 31-year-old said he would cherish that moment forever. "When I hit that cut-shot boundary, I saw we only needed four (to win) and I thought, 'It's got to be one of these two balls - how many chances are you going to get to hit a boundary for the winning runs for your country?' "I was going to go no matter

where that ball was, that last one, and managed to make connection. I looked straight at 'Heady' (batting partner Travis Head) and he was up and about," he noted. "It was a great moment, probably one I'll never forget. That's something that might never happen again - especially a boundary on the fifth Test of a decider. It doesn't get much better than that," he added. Webster replaced an out of form Mitchell Marsh in the Australia eleven for the New Year Test, and the all-rounder admitted that initially he felt a bit "awkward." "It was a bit of an awkward moment. I sort of came to training at the last minute, and I didn't think that they'd change the team. I hadn't heard anything right up until the training (the day) before the game, and I just expected it to be the same XI. "Then we got to the ground and asked Mitch what he was doing, and he said, 'I'm waiting to see if I'm playing.' That hit me by surprise a little bit and then in the next hour or so, we were fumbling around until I went back in the change rooms. "He (Marsh) had a big grin on his face and just said, 'You're in mate'. And he couldn't have been happier. He's been unbelievable this week," Webster said, explaining the situation surrounding his entry into the Australian team.

Australia's tactics to break down Rohit were successful, says Kerry O'Keeffe

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Indian skipper Rohit Sharma wilted under the traditional Australian tactic of mentally breaking down the opposition captains during the just-concluded Border-Gavaskar Trophy, said former spinner Kerry O'Keeffe. India lost the five-match series 1-3 and Rohit made just 31 runs from three Tests at an average of 6.20. "They couldn't bring down (Jasprit) Bumrah. He was too good. But then the baton was passed to Rohit Sharma and they brought him down straight away, to the extent that he withdrew from the final Test," O'Keeffe told Fox Sports. "So that's a tactic they seem to want to do if they can, if they can break the skipper and make him anonymous, it empowers them," he added. It may be recalled that former



Australian pacer Glenn McGrath used to make pre-series predictions as how many times he will dismiss the opposition captain and it often worked against the likes of ex-England skipper Michael Atherton. Bumrah led India in the first Test at Perth in the absence of Rohit, who stayed back in India for the birth of his second child. India won the match by 295

runs. The 37-year-old Rohit took over from Bumrah in the second Test in Adelaide, but his personal form and the team's fortunes went south from that point. Eventually, Rohit "opted out" of the fifth and final Test Sydney with Bumrah returning to guide the side. The 75-year-old further validated his point saying the Aussies could not dominate

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

PTI ■ SYDNEY

The nightmarish batting performance is deservedly under the scanner after India's meek surrender in the Border-Gavaskar series but a closer look at the team's bench strength would reveal that bowling resources are a bigger concern for the side as it navigates a difficult transition. Skipper Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli's Test future hangs in balance after their poor returns with the bat but the national selection committee has the reserves to ensure that the order remains a solid one even if the two giants were to be phased out. However, bowling, especially pace, is a different story. The cupboard in the fast

bowling department is bare and it will take some time to prepare another crack line-up that can match up to the aura of Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shami and Ishant Sharma. The available names are doing their best but is that enough for the team or for Bumrah, whose workload became a massive concern during the just-concluded series? The spearhead was forced to watch from the dressing room during the last innings of the decisive fifth and final Test that India lost by six wickets as back spasms prevented him from bowling. Mohammed Siraj, after 36 Tests, hasn't developed into a game-changer yet and Prasidh Krishna bowls too many loose balls.

There is the duo of Akash Deep and Mukesh Kumar, who are skilful, but they are not really tested at the highest level. In the Ranji circuit, there aren't too many exciting fast bowling options that the selectors can explore as of now. The main problem seems to be a dearth of left-arm seamers as Arshdeep Singh hasn't actually set the stage on fire and Yash Dayal doesn't look a finished product. But when it comes to batting there is some real talent available although the Ajit Agarkar-led selection committee will not decide anything till the end of the Ranji Trophy season. If the panel decides to move away from Rohit and Kohli or



the two announce retirements, there are at least half a dozen name ready to stake a claim for the two slots that will open up. One of the prime contenders could be B Sai Sudharsan of Tamil Nadu. The elegant left-hander impressed in his appearance for India A against Australia in Mackay but then he had

a sports hernia operation and is undergoing rehabilitation. As and when Sudharsan is ready and if there are at least a couple of slots, he should be in contention provided he is in form and has the requisite fitness levels. In the current set-up, there is Devdutt Padikkal, another stylish and sinewy left-hander, who has played a couple of Tests. Abhimanyu Easwaran has been around the side for three years now but there is a belief in the Indian cricketing circle that he is not cut out for bigger challenges in SENA (South Africa, England, New Zealand and Australia). A proof of it the recent series, where he travelled with the squad but wasn't even remotely in contention for a

playing XI slot in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. For Sarfaraz Khan, his technique against real quick bowling was always doubtful but the manner in which he got out in Pune and Mumbai in the home Tests against New Zealand has made the current team management wary. In most of the venues, Sarfaraz didn't even come out to bat during the customary net sessions, an indication that he is quite low in the pecking order. There is every chance that he might not make it to squad for the upcoming limited-overs series against England. There are also three seasoned players who might get a second wind if the second half of Ranji Trophy goes well for them.

They are Chennai Super Kings skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad, who is yet to make his debut, three-Test-old Rajat Patidar and Mumbai's very own Shreyas Iyer. Iyer's problem has been the short ball, while Patidar flattered to deceive against England at home last year. Gaikwad failed in two India A games Down Under but his pedigree is unquestionable. It is understood that the selection committee won't be looking at just the volume of runs or wickets but would also focus on impactful performances. A century on a Lahli green top or a five-wicket haul on a Rajkot belter would carry more weight than performances in favourable conditions.

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