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INSIDE

WORLD 9
HAMAS CLOSE TO
ACCEPTING GAZA CEASEFIRE,
HOSTAGES RELEASE

Parliament Committee to question Meta CEO



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

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA
NEW DELHI

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

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

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

Continued on page 8

Police find NGO, political ties in Delhi bomb threats

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

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

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



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

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

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

Continued on page 8

Release Indians hired to army: MEA to Russia



Mohammad Asfan was killed on the Russia-Ukraine frontlines last year. He travelled to Russia for a security guard's job but was sent to the war zone

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

India on Tuesday pressed Russia to release all the Indians recruited by the Russian military, following the death of another Indian national in the Russia-Ukraine conflict zone, taking the death toll to 10. Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said an Indian national from Kerala has died and another has sustained injuries and is undergoing treatment at a hospital in Moscow. Jaiswal said the matter has been strongly taken up with Russian authorities in Moscow as well as with the Russian embassy in New Delhi. "We have also reiterated our demand for an early discharge of the remaining Indian nationals," he said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had strongly raised the issue of early discharge of the Indian nationals working in

the Russian Army during his talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow in July last year. The death of Binil TB, who hailed from Thrissur, was made public on Monday by one of his relatives. Though the MEA did not provide the circumstances of his death, he reportedly died on the frontlines of the conflict in Ukraine. According to official data, nine Indians died while serving in the Russian Army in the last few months. Binil's death has taken the toll to 10. "We have learnt of the unfortunate death of an Indian national from Kerala, who had apparently been recruited to serve in the Russian Army," Jaiswal said. "Another Indian national from Kerala, who was similarly recruited, has been injured and is receiving treatment in a hospital in Moscow," he said. The MEA offered condolences to the family of the deceased.

Continued on page 8



Kite string slits claims four lives in Gujarat

PNS ■ AHMEDABAD

Four persons including a four-year-old boy died after their throats were slit by 'manja' or kite string during Uttarayan celebrations in Gujarat on Tuesday. A death case was reported in Rajkot, Panchmahal, Mehsana and Surendranagar districts while numerous cases of injury were reported across the state, officials said. Manja made from nylon or coated with crushed glass is sharp enough to cause fatal injuries. Despite being banned, it is used by kite enthusiasts who find them effective for cutting an opponents' kite. Kunal Parmar (4) bled to death in Halol town of Panchmahal district after his neck was slit by kite string, said an official of the local police station. He was riding with his father on motorcycle to buy kites and balloons from the market when a piece of string wrapped around his neck and caused a deep gash. Mansaji Thakor (35), a farmer, died in Vadnagar taluka of Mehsana district.

Continued on page 8

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

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

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

transportation and logistics; Rs 5,000 crore by handicrafts and souvenirs; Rs 3,000 crore by healthcare services; Rs 1,000 crore by IT and digital services; Rs 10,000 crore by entertainment and media; and more. According to estimates, the event may generate Rs 2 lakh crore if each of 40 crore visitors spends an average of Rs 5,000. Some experts estimated the average cost of accommodation and food for each visitor in Prayagraj would be Rs 10,000, which would

SANGAM BANK BECOMES SELFIE HOTSPOT

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

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



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

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

Retail inflation drops, Sensex, Nifty bounce

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

Continued on page 8

Australia loss prompts BCCI to limit wives, girlfriends on tours

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

India's 1-3 loss to Australia in the recent five test match series there has prompted Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to consider disciplinary measures like limiting the presence of wives on tours. The BCCI also proposes to make it mandatory for players to travel together in the team bus. They may also be asked to pay for extra luggage. These proposed measures also come in the backdrop of

Indian cricket team losing all the three test matches against New Zealand at home before the Border-Gavaskar test match series in Australia. The steps were reportedly discussed in the review meeting between the BCCI and Rohit Sharma and Gautam Gambhir after the loss Down Under. The proposed steps include not allowing spouses to travel with players beyond two weeks on a tour that more than 45 days, it was learnt. If the tour is shorter, the duration may be reduced to seven days. India's

next Test assignment away from home is a five-match tour of England starting in June. Moreover, it will be made mandatory for the players to travel together in team buses. They have also been asked to pay for extra luggage. If players' luggage exceeds 150 kg, BCCI will not cover the extra charges, and players will have to pay them. Two top players of the Indian team reportedly travelled with their families between cities during Australian tour while the rest of the players travelled



together. A report even claimed that the Indian team did not celebrate their historic win in Perth together. The BCCI decided to avoid any knee-jerk reactions in terms of the combination of the team. It is understood that with an important ODI tournament like the Champions Trophy scheduled in another six weeks' time, any immediate reaction would hurt the team as well as the support staff. Moreover, the issue of managers of players and coaches was highlighted when

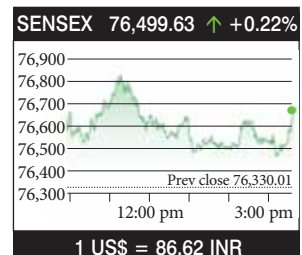
the personal manager of a senior coaching staff member was allowed on the team bus on the recent tour in Australia. The issue of managers of players and coaches was highlighted when the personal manager of a senior coaching staff member was allowed on the team bus on the recent tour that ended with India losing 1-3. Personal managers travelling on the team bus also raises a red flag with the anti-corruption unit. It should be avoided going forward. As far as the presence of wives on

tours is concerned, it is being discussed in the board and a call would be taken on it soon, sources said. Also players and coaches should only travel by team bus. It was always supposed to be the case but of late, players use other modes of transportation. That should be avoided, they said. India's 1-3 defeat, their first loss to Australia in 10 years also meant that the Indians failed to make the cut for the World Test Championship final to be held in London in June.

WEATHER

AQI	180
MAX	20.6°C
MIN	8.5°C

MARKETS



1 US\$ = 86.62 INR

Doc accused of torturing, conspiring to kill his wife

Lucknow (PNS): A doctor has been accused of torturing his wife and conspiring to kill her by



NOTICE

I, Army No- JC-635759K Rank - Sub, Bharat Khawas S/o Shri Chandra Bahadur Khawas Unit-6/11 GR, hereby declare that in my service records my son's name inadvertently mentioned as BEDANT KHAWAS while his correct name is BEDANT KHAWAS may be recorded in my Service Records.

NOTICE

I Have Changed My Name From Laik Khan to Mohd Laeeq. In Future I shall be Known as Mohd Laeeq, Mohd Laeeq s/o Naushad Khan, plot No. 4, 150 feet road, araji no. 266/267, Gajju purwa, Jajmau, shiwans Tannery, Kanpur

NOTICE

I have changed my daughter's name from Rashi Chugh to Rashi Kaur Chugh for all future purposes, Dimpy Chugh R/o 111A/376A, Ashok Nagar R.K.Nagar Kanpur Nagar 208012

NOTICE

"I, Darakhshan, W/o Mohd. Qasim, R/o 1/22, Fahimabad, KDA Colony, Kanpur, hereby declare that 'Darkshan' and 'Darakhshan Hafeez' both names belong to me. In future, I should be recognized by the name 'Darkshan'/ दरखशी.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Mohammad Arif to Mohd Arif for all future purpose, Mohd Arif S/o Mohammad Qamar R/o 99/45, Becanganj Kanpur Nagar

सूचना

मैं समयार फातिमा पत्नी इरशाद अहमद, पुत्री श्री राम कश्यप, निवासिनी ई एम-1 बी/467, सेक्टर ए, सीतापुर रोड योजना, लखनऊ बयान करती हूँ कि मेरा विवाह से पूर्व नाम पुष्पा कश्यप था तथा विवाह के पश्चात् मेरा नाम समयार फातिमा हो गया है। भविष्य में मुझे समयार फातिमा नाम से ही जाना व पहचाना जाये।

NOTICE

This is to inform to all that my father's name has been erroneously written as Jamal Abbas Rizvi. in my High School Certificate whereas my father's correct name is Syed Jamal Abbas. The correct name of my father is mentioned in my Aadhar Card (No. 2461 4225 3141) and PAN Card (No. BBYPR6340G), Syed Shuja Abbas Rizvi, S/o Syed Jamal Abbas, R/o 336/120, Nazir Manzil Hata Burhan Saheb, Kazmain P.S. Sahadatganj, Post Chowk, Lucknow

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Serves Singh TO Sarvesh Singh Bhadouria S/o Vireshwar Singh Bhadouria R/o 128/11 A, Patel Nagar, G T Road Kanpur for future purpose

NOTICE

Ihitherto known as Bishal Pal S/O Akshay Kumar, residing at Gram-Katra Lakhapur Post-Abhinaypur, Etawah U.P-206001, have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Vishal Pal. It is certified that I have complied with other legal requirements in this connection.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from RASHIDA OVAIS to RASHIDA SHAHID W/o SHAHID MAHMOOD for all future purpose R/o FLAT NO - 402 88/592 Prem Nagar, Chaman ganj, Kanpur Nagar-208001

NOTICE

In the high school marksheet of my daughter Udisha Bajpai, the mother's name is mentioned as Priti Bajpai whereas in the intermediate marksheet it is mentioned as Preeti Bajpai, both the names belong to the same person. Preeti Bajpai W/o Naveen Kumar Bajpai R/o- 373/7 Shastri Nagar, Kanpur

Illegal factory manufacturing adulterated tea leaves busted

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A team from the Uttar Pradesh Special Task Force (STF) uncovered an illegal factory manufacturing adulterated tea leaves and recovered more than 11 quintals of fake tea leaves mixed with harmful chemicals and arrested a gang member in a raid at a residential colony in Madaion on Tuesday, officials said here. The arrested accused was identified as Mohammed Arif from Sitapur (currently residing at Krishnalok Colony, Faizullahganj, Madaion police station area) in Lucknow. The team recovered 11,209 kg of adulterated tea leaves (worth about Rs 30 lakh), 30 kg of colouring agent used for tea, six packets of ochre (hard stone powder), four electronic weighing scales, four packing machines, a gas stove, and a gas cylinder. The team also recovered 100.5 kg of tea packing foil and other materials, an Aadhaar card, Rs 12,500 in cash, and a mobile phone from the accused. A spokesman stated that, for the past few days, information had been received about the sale of illegal, adulterated, and fake tea in Lucknow and surrounding districts. "In this regard, various units of the STF were instructed to gather information and take action. During the intelligence gathering, the STF team received information from informers and reliable sources that a factory making fake and adulterated tea leaves was being run illegally in Krishnalok Colony, Faizullahganj, Madaion. The location was then raided," he

Robbery case accused arrested in encounter

Lucknow (PNS): A joint team of Wazirganj police and crime branch arrested Karan Yadav, an accused in a robbery case, following a late-night encounter on Monday, officials said here. Yadav, implicated in over two dozen previous robbery incidents, was captured after a joint operation tracked him down based on CCTV footage of the crime that occurred on December 21. The robbery, which had shocked the local community, involved two armed men on a motorcycle who targeted Munim Manish Tiwari, a local businessman. Tiwari was returning after collecting money from a collection route when the robbers snatched the cash from him. The incident was swiftly reported to the authorities, and CCTV footage from the scene provided crucial evidence in identifying the suspects. The breakthrough in the case came when the police successfully identified Karan Yadav aka Kallu, a resident of New Tola, Zorabganj in

Katihar, Bihar. Yadav, wanted in multiple criminal cases, had been evading arrest and was listed with a cash reward of Rs 10,000 for information leading to his capture. DCP (West) Vishwajeet Srivastava confirmed that Yadav was a well-known criminal with a history of over 24 registered cases in various districts, ranging from theft to assault. "Yadav had been on the run for some time, and his arrest brings us a step closer to solving several other robbery cases," said Srivastava. The encounter occurred in Maal Godam trisection in Wazirganj when Yadav attempted to flee under the cover of darkness. The police, however, cornered him, leading to a brief exchange of gunfire. Yadav sustained a gunshot wound to his leg during the confrontation and was promptly taken to a local hospital. In addition to the arrest, the police recovered Rs 25,000

from the loot, part of the money stolen from the victim, and seized the motorcycle used in the robbery. They also found an illegal firearm with cartridges in Yadav's possession. Karan Yadav has a long criminal history that includes multiple charges across various districts. The police had been tracking his movements closely after the robbery, and his arrest marked a significant milestone in the ongoing investigation. "The police have recovered valuable evidence, and we are continuing our efforts to apprehend the remaining suspects involved in the robbery," the DCP said. Authorities have assured the public that further investigations are underway, and they are hopeful that more arrests will follow. The police have urged the community to remain vigilant and report any suspicious activities. "Public cooperation is key to ensuring the safety and security of the area," added Srivastava.

said. Upon interrogation, Mohammad Arif told the police that they were part of an organised gang that illegally produced adulterated and downgraded tea leaves, which were supplied in Lucknow and nearby districts. According to his confession, this gang sourced cheap, raw tea leaves from Assam via carriers and

mixed various chemicals to create strong, coloured tea leaves. These were then packed in packets branded with different company names and distributed across Lucknow and nearby districts such as Barabanki, Sitapur, Shahjahanpur, and Bahraich. This operation proved highly profitable for the gang.

The fake and adulterated tea leaves, containing harmful chemicals, have severe adverse effects on human health and are potentially fatal and unsafe for consumption. A case under relevant sections of the BNS has been registered against the accused, and further investigations are underway.

Munshipulia-Ayodhya road flyover to open for public next month

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Munshipulia-Ayodhya road flyover will be inaugurated shortly, along with the Khurrannagar flyover. Diwakar Tripathi, the representative of Defence Minister and Lucknow MP Rajnath Singh, said that the two flyovers will be inaugurated in the first week of February this year. He stated that the inauguration will be carried out by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Minister of Road Transport Nitin Gadkari, and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. Incidentally, vehicles have already started plying over this flyover since its completion, even before the formal inauguration. The 1.8-km-long, four-lane flyover starts from the Polytechnic and connects to the Polytechnic flyover. It crosses Munshipulia and then descends before Sector 25, Indiranagar. Tripathi said that the cost of constructing the flyover was Rs 170 crore. He added that it will relieve the general public from traffic snarls to a large extent. "The vehicles moving from Sitapur Road towards Engineering College, Tedhipulia crossing, Khurrannagar crossing will be connected with Ayodhya Road, which will help all those going to the High Court and Shaheed Path," he said. Tripathi mentioned that this will ease traffic in the entire Indiranagar, Aliganj, Vikas

Nagar, Jankipuram Extension, and Madaion areas. "This traffic will move on the flyover without stopping anywhere, so all the lanes beneath the flyover will remain unaffected. With external traffic moving completely outside and leaving local life undisturbed, several crossings will be free from traffic snarls," he added. He explained that on Ayodhya Road, commuters will first travel over the Munshipulia flyover, followed by the Khurrannagar flyover, then the Tedhipulia flyover, the Engineering College flyover, and finally the IIM flyover. "All these five flyovers are within a distance of 8-9 kms, and hence the total traffic will be bypassed, allowing vehicles to move faster. This will improve the performance of the general public and contribute to the development of the urban area," he added. Officials also mentioned that those travelling to Ayodhya will benefit, including both those coming from within the city and those coming from outside the city. "These commuters can travel from outside the city and reach their destination without disturbing the traffic inside the city. Areas like the Munshipulia crossing, which used to face severe snarls with commuters losing valuable time and petrol, will find relief," said an official. Officials pointed out that the Polytechnic crossing and all areas of Indiranagar will be free from traffic jams because of the flyover.

KGMU student attempts suicide

Lucknow (PNS): A female student from the general medicine department at King George's Medical University (KGMU) allegedly attempted suicide by jumping from the roof of her hostel room under Chowk police station on Tuesday morning, police said here. She is currently receiving treatment at the trauma centre. According to a police spokesman, the reason for the suicide attempt is believed to be her dissatisfaction with her course of study. The incident occurred around 9:30 am, when police were informed that the student, a resident of Kanpur City, had attempted to take her life by jumping from the roof of room number 206 in the residence hostel. The student had been pursuing her studies in the general medicine department at Gandhi Ward. Upon receiving the information, senior police officials and a local police team arrived at the scene and rushed the student to KGMU for medical attention. "Necessary legal actions are being taken, and a field unit has been called to investigate the scene. Initial information suggests that the suicide attempt was due to dissatisfaction with her academic occupation," the spokesman stated. He also addressed rumours of ragging being a factor in the incident, stating that no evidence supporting such claims had been found in probe so far.

Varsity delegation meets alumni in Tajikistan

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A delegation from the University of Lucknow, led by Vice-Chancellor Prof Alok Kumar Rai, met LU alumni in Tajikistan on Tuesday. The vice-chancellor announced the establishment of the Tajikistan Chapter of the Lucknow University Alumni Association. The alumni warmly welcomed the delegation. Addressing the gathering, Prof Alok Kumar Rai said, "The Tajikistan Chapter of the Lucknow University Alumni Association will provide an important platform for our former students, where they can share their experiences and connect with one another." On the occasion, the appointment of Khodjaev Iskander as the president of the Tajikistan Chapter was announced. The prominent LU alumni who participated were Latifov Alikhon, who graduated from the Department of Languages in 2009; Nazarov Khayom, who graduated from the Department of Political Science in 2021; Hakimov Bakhtiyor, who graduated from the Department of English in 2021; Davlatshoeva Nordona, who graduated from the Department of Journalism in 2021; Khodjaev Iskander, who graduated from the

Department of Political Science in 2022; and Omina Sidykova, who completed her Masters in the Department of Politics in 2010. Professor Alok Kumar Rai said, "It was a pleasure to meet the alumni of Lucknow University. We are proud of the achievements of our alumni and are committed to strengthening our ties with them."

MOU SIGNED
Meanwhile, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between the University of Lucknow and Tajik National University in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan. On behalf of LU, Rai signed the contract. From the Tajik side, the first Vice Rector of

Tajikistan National University, Rajabzoda Faridun; Gafforzoda Ilyos, the Vice Rector for International Affairs, Tajik National University; and Saifurrahman Safar Ahmad, the Vice Rector for Science, Tajik National University, signed the MoU. Both parties discussed the prospects of joint and dual degree programmes. Other areas of discussion included artificial intelligence, machine learning, pharmaceutical safety, pharmacy and technology, and lexicography. The Tajik partners appreciated the global presence of the University of Lucknow and noted that open-door international relations are crucial in the present times.



No helmet, no petrol in city from Jan 26

Lucknow (PNS): In order to create awareness about road safety in Lucknow district and to reduce deaths in road accidents due to not wearing helmets, the district magistrate on Monday issued directions for the implementation of the 'No Helmet, No Petrol' policy, effective from January 26. In a copy of the order sent to the transport commissioner, commissioner of police, additional district magistrate (administration), all sub-district magistrates, assistant commissioners of police, city magistrate, and petrol pump dealers of Lucknow district, he instructed them to ensure compliance with the directive. The district supply officer has been instructed to convene a meeting of all petrol pump operators/owners in Lucknow district in this regard. According to Section 129 of the Central Motor Vehicles Act 1988 and Rule 201 of the Uttar Pradesh Motor Vehicles Rules 1998, it is mandatory for all motorcyclists and riders to wear protective headgear (helmet) as per the standards set by the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS). All petrol pump operators and owners in Lucknow have been directed to put up large hoardings within the next seven days to inform the public that, from January 26, petrol will not be sold to any two-wheeler rider or co-passenger who are not wearing helmets.

Mission Parivar Vikas to promote family planning awareness

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government is set to run Mission Parivar Vikas from January 18 to 31 to promote family planning awareness and services across communities. Mission Director of National Health Mission, Dr Pinky Jewell, has instructed all chief medical officers to ensure the effective implementation of the campaign. The initiative will feature various activities to make family planning services more accessible to the public. According to the mission director, the campaign's primary goal is to extensively disseminate key messages about family planning, particularly in remote districts, during the fortnight. She added, "The aim is to enhance awareness, foster interest, and ensure that more individuals and families benefit from these services. The campaign aspires to bring the advantages of family planning to every segment of society." General Manager of Family Planning at NHM, Suryanshu Ojha, shared, "A detailed action plan has been prepared to ensure the campaign's success. At the district level, banners, wall writings, and other promotional materials on family planning will be prominently displayed at designated service delivery points. Additionally, Sarathi

vehicles will be deployed in rural and urban areas to raise awareness about family planning services." Community-centric initiatives will play a pivotal role. Activities such as Mother-in-Law-Daughter-in-Law Conferences will be organised to educate and motivate families about the importance of family planning through interactive discussions. Furthermore, special events like the Mr Smart Conference will encourage male participation, particularly those opting for vasectomy. Newly married couples will receive a 'Shagun Kit', including essential information about contraceptive methods and family planning resources.

GURU NANAK DEV UNIVERSITY, AMRITSAR
Tender Notice Reference No. GNDU/Gen/01/2025
The Department of G.N.D.U. Amritsar invites online bids for the following:
Sr. No. 1
Item: Stationery, Crockery etc.
Quantity: 69 Items
Closing date & time: 04-02-2025 at 5:00 p.m.
For details log onto www.eproc.punjab.gov.in
Note: Any corrigendum(s) to the tender notice shall be published on the above website only.
NA/12/27487/2023/40770
Dated CHD :- 1/14/2025

CITYBRIEFS

PANDEY TAKES CHARGE AS VC OF KMCLU
Professor JP Pandey assumed charge as Vice-Chancellor of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti Language University on Tuesday. He has been appointed by Governor Anandiben Patel for the next six months or until further orders, whichever is earlier. The process of his assuming charge was completed by Registrar Dr Mahesh Kumar. Prof Pandey is currently serving as Vice-Chancellor of Dr APJ Abdul Kalam University of Technology (AKTU) in Lucknow. Prof Pandey said, "It is a matter of responsibility and honour for me that I have been appointed as the Vice-Chancellor of Language University. I will work with full dedication to ensure the overall development and excellence of the university."

LU ALUMNA'S BOOK PUBLISHED IN LONDON
Lucknow University alumna Dr Supriya Singh's post-doctoral work has been published as a book in London. The book, entitled 'Emerging Patterns and Nature of Social Inequalities in

Rural India' is based on her post-doctoral research work, which was funded by the Indian Council of Social Science Research. Her research has been published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing, United Kingdom (London). The book provides a detailed appraisal of the ever-growing multidimensional inequalities in contemporary rural India, aiming to explain the nature and dynamics of social inequalities. It explores the existing nature, forms, and dimensions of economic, political, and social inequalities at a micro-rural level and compares them with the Indian macrocosm of increasing inequality, with the goal of revealing the uneven facets of rural India.

ARMED FORCES VETERANS DAY
The 9th Armed Forces Veterans Day was celebrated in Lucknow under the aegis of Surya Command, with around 800 veterans attending. Lt Gen Anindya Sengupta, GOC-in-C, Central Command, and several serving officers participated in the event which began with

a solemn wreath-laying ceremony at Smritika war memorial, paying homage to fallen heroes. At Surya Auditorium, updates on veterans' welfare initiatives were shared. Ten distinguished veterans were honoured with the 'Outstanding Achievement Award' for their remarkable contributions to the nation and society. Lt Gen Sengupta interacted with veterans, addressing grievances and reaffirming the Armed Forces' commitment to their welfare.

CARDIAC CATH LAB INAUGURATED
Governor Anandiben Patel inaugurated the Cardiac Cath Lab and Blood Bank at Health City Vistar Hospital on Tuesday. She emphasised that the hospital's primary objective should be providing state-of-the-art medical facilities at affordable rates. The governor highlighted the role of medical tourism in enhancing health services in rural areas. Addressing the rising number of heart patients, she attributed it to poor lifestyle choices and stress, urging people to adopt

healthier habits, including regular exercise and yoga. She also stressed the importance of blood donation as a humanitarian act. Patel called for better health and education for all citizens, particularly focusing on the health of young women, advocating for awareness on diet and health. She also urged people to prioritise preventative care and yoga.

RECRUITMENT RALLY
Candidates from Rasulabad, Derapur, Akbarpur, Sikandra, Maitha & Bhognipur Tehsils under Kanpur Dehat district and Kulpahar, Charkhari & Mahoba tehsils under Mahoba district participated in recruitment for category of Agniveer General Duty (GD) on Tuesday. A total of 1106 candidates were called up, of which 848 (76.67%) participated in the rally. On Wednesday, candidates from Bidhuna, Auraiya, Ajitmal tehsils under Auraiya district and for Banda, Baberu, Attarra, Naraini & Pailani tehsils under Banda district will participate in the recruitment for category of Agniveer General Duty (GD).

IDFC FIRST Bank Limited
(erstwhile Capital First Limited and amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited)
CIN : L65110TN2014PLC09792
Registered Office: - KRM Towers, 8th Floor, Harrington Road, Chetpet, Chennai- 600031.
Tel : +91 44 4564 4000 | Fax: +91 44 4564 4022

APPENDIX IV [Rule 8(1)] POSSESSION NOTICE (For immovable property)

Whereas the undersigned being the Authorised Officer of the IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited and amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited) under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a demand notice dated 11.10.2024 calling upon the borrower, co-borrowers and guarantors 1. DILIP KUMAR NOTANI, 2. HIMANSHU NOTANI, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being Rs. 18,04,829.16/- (Rupees Eighteen Lakh Four Thousand Eight Hundred Twenty Nine and Sixteen Paise Only) as on 10.04.2024 within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said Demand notice.

The borrowers having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken Symbolic Possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under sub-section (4) of section 13 of Act read with rule 8 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 on this 09th day of JAN 2025.

The borrowers in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of THE IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited and amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited) for an amount of Rs. 18,04,829.16/- (Rupees Eighteen Lakh Four Thousand Eight Hundred Twenty Nine and Sixteen Paise Only) and interest thereon.

The borrower's attention is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of Section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES.

ALL THAT PIECE AND PARCEL OF FLAT NO. FTF-4, 4TH FLOOR, ADMEASURING 66.70 SQ. MTR., PLOT NO. 1140, ADMEASURING 385.45 SQ. MTR., BLOCK RN SCHEME NO. 2, RATAN LAL NAGAR, KANPUR, UTTAR PRADESH - 208022, AND BOUNDED AS: EAST: FLAT NO. FTF-6, WEST: LIFT, NORTH: COMMON PASSAGE, FLAT NO. FTF-3 SOUTH: PLOT NO. 1133, 1134 & 1135.

Date: 09-01-2025
Place: UTTAR PRADESH
Loan Account No: 16668838

Authorised Officer
IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited and amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited)

Crores take holy dip at Sangam on Makar Sankranti

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The spiritually significant Prayagraj Maha Kumbh 2025 continues to witness an overwhelming turnout of devotees, with the Paush Purnima and Makar Sankranti bathing festivals concluding smoothly under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.

On Monday, the Paush Purnima bath concluded peacefully, while on Tuesday, during the Amrit Snan of Makar Sankranti, more than 3.5 crore saint and devotees took a holy dip in the sacred waters of the Sangam.

On Tuesday, during the first Amrit Snan of Maha Kumbh 2025 on Makar Sankranti, the Yogi government organised a grand flower shower from helicopters, draping crores of devotees at the Sangam bank in rose petals. Flowers were showered on all the ghats and akharas, adding to the sanctity of the occasion. The sight of rose petals raining down overwhelmed the devotees, who responded with chants of 'Jai Shri Ram' and 'Har Har Mahadev'.

The Horticulture Department had been meticulously preparing for the flower showers at the Maha Kumbh Mela for weeks. Special arrangements were made to procure and store rose petals to ensure an uninterrupted shower during the bathing festivals. On Monday also, during the first bathing festival, Paush Purnima snan, rose petals were showered on the devotees.

Chief Minister Yogi closely monitored the event from Gorakhpur, ensuring every aspect of the arrangements was meticulously managed. On his instructions, Principal Secretary (Home) Sanjay Prasad and Director General of Police Prashant Kumar, along with other senior officials, are maintaining a constant vigil over the arrangements at the fair. The authorities have been actively engaging with devotees, saints and Kalpvasis, ensuring smooth operations



In this image posted by @myogiadityanath via X on Tuesday, a view of devotees at the Sangam area during the first 'Amrit Snan' of Maha Kumbh on Makar Sankranti

and addressing concerns with efficiency. Devotees have widely praised the administration and police for their promptness, effective crowd management, and the well-coordinated arrangements during the Maha Kumbh. The world's largest spiritual congregation began under the direction of Prime Minister Modi and the leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. On January 13 alone, over 1.62 crore devotees participated in the Paush Purnima snan at the Sangam. The first Amrit Snan on Makar Sankranti saw nearly two crore devotees, including saints, kalpvasis and pilgrims from across India and abroad, take the holy dip in the sacred confluence of Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati.

To manage the massive gathering, a 24-hour control room has been set up to ensure con-

stant surveillance and timely responses and Chief Minister Yogi has been personally receiving real-time updates. Spanning across a vast 1,000 acres, the Maha Kumbh city has been divided into 25 sectors, each equipped with comprehensive facilities such as accommodation, food, electricity, water, sanitation and security for saints, kalpvasis and devotees. Special teams have been deployed for disaster management to ensure a smooth experience for all. The entire fairground has been digitally mapped with surveillance cameras, Google location support and cashless transaction options via UPI integration. More than 60,000 police personnel have been deployed. Advanced monitoring systems, including thermal imaging at night and real-time visuals from drones and CCTV cameras during the day, have

ensured proper crowd control and safety. DGP Prashant Kumar confirmed that special arrangements have also been made for devotees traveling from Prayagraj to other spiritual destinations such as Chitrakoot, Vindhyavasini Dham, Varanasi and Ayodhya. Coordination between administrative and police teams in these cities has been reinforced to ensure a seamless pilgrimage experience.

SANGAM NOSE FAVOURITE SPOT

The primary focus of the devotees was the Sangam Nose, where saints and spiritual leaders from various akharas also performed their ritual baths. Thanks to the tireless efforts of the mechanical branch of Irrigation Department, this seamless coexistence of saints and devotees at the Sangam

Nose became a reality. In just 85 days, the team worked round-the-clock in three shifts to expand 26 hectares of land between the Shastri Bridge and Sangam Nose, with two hectares exclusively added at the Sangam Nose. This meticulous planning and execution allowed saints and devotees to share the sacred experience of the Amrit Snan harmoniously, highlighting the exceptional arrangements made for this grand spiritual event. On January 13, the first bathing festival of Poush Purnima, and January 14, the first Amrit Snan of Maha Kumbh 2025, more than three crore devotees took a holy dip. Most devotees prioritised bathing at the Sangam Nose, with crowds gathering from late at night. It is estimated that over three lakh people bathed at the Sangam Nose every hour during the peak time.

Celebrating Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam

Mahakumbh Nagar (PNS): On the auspicious occasion of Makar Sankranti, the Maha Kumbh saw a remarkable confluence of faith and unity at the Sangam, where people from across the country and world gathered to take the holy dip. Chanting 'Jai Shri Ram', 'Har Har Gange' and 'Bam Bam Bhole', devotees from around the world united for the first Amrit Snan, showcasing a remarkable display of cultural unity beyond borders.

The first Amrit Snan witnessed an overwhelming spirit of unity, as people from diverse backgrounds — Indian and foreign alike — participated in this sacred ritual. Foreign visitors, moved by the eternal culture of India, arrived with their families to bathe in the holy Ganga, their hearts brimming with reverence.

On this historic day, the banks of the Sangam were packed to capacity, swarming with devotees. People from across India, including Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, West Bengal, Assam, Bihar, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and foreign citizens, all immersed in the holy waters of the Ganga. The air was charged with energy as chants of 'Jai Shri Ram' and 'Har Har Gange' echoed, creating a divine atmosphere.

The first two days of this year's Maha Kumbh fair saw active participation from citizens from many countries, who were deeply moved by India's ancient traditions. Foreign devotees also took holy dips in the Ganga, immersing themselves in the rich culture and spiritual atmosphere of India, while chanting along with the Indian devotees.

Foreign visitors to the Maha Kumbh shared their awe and admiration for the event. Jeff, an American citizen currently residing in Lisbon, Portugal, said, "I am traveling through South India and came here via Varanasi. The energy here is very calm and peaceful. Everyone is friendly, and I feel

like I'm in a big temple. I'm impressed by the orderliness and cleanliness — there are dustbins every 15 metres." An Iranian woman, who was part of a group of nine people visiting from different parts of the world, expressed her gratitude, saying, "We're staying in a great tent colony. It's our first time here, and we're excited to take a holy dip at 10 am. The Kumbh is well organised, and the experience is truly impressive." Another American citizen, Paula, said in broken Hindi, "Today is a very good day. We're fortunate to take a bath with the sadhus. It's an incredible experience, and we are grateful to have the opportunity to be here."

broadening the social and cultural scope of the Maha Kumbh. Saints, devotees and seekers from the region participated in this historic celebration.

AMRIT SNAN BY KINNAR AKHARA

The Kinnar Akhara, led by Acharya Mahamandaleshwar Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, became a major highlight. In the afternoon, the akhara members took the holy dip at Sangam Nose, praying for the welfare and progress of society while celebrating Makar Sankranti.

Members of the Kinnar Akhara made their way to the Sangam, chanting 'Har Har Mahadev' with fervor. Acharya Mahamandaleshwar walked at the centre, sheltered under an umbrella, accompanied by other mahamandaleshwars of the akhara. During this procession, the sadhus of the Kinnar Akhara showcased their traditional weapons. Brandishing swords and chanting slogans, they marked the beginning of the Amrit Snan with great enthusiasm.

Rama Narayan Giri, a member of the Kinnar Akhara, shared that on the occasion of the Amrit Snan, every member prayed for the happiness, prosperity and welfare of the nation. He emphasised that the Maha Kumbh is not just a religious gathering but also a platform to convey positive messages to society.

The members of Kinnar Akhara captivated everyone with an impressive display of their traditional rituals and martial skills. They flaunted swords and other weapons, highlighting their strength and rich traditions, filling the atmosphere with energy and devotion. The Kinnar Akhara's event at Maha Kumbh 2025 stood out as a unique and powerful highlight, emphasising that the uplift and welfare of all societal segments are central to Indian culture.

BHOGALI BIHU DEBUTS AT MAHA KUMBH

For the first time, the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj witnessed the vibrant traditions of northeastern states, with the celebration of Bhogali Bihu taking centre stage. On Makar Sankranti, a special event was held at the Prag Jyotishpur camp of northeastern saints, where women devotees from various states performed the traditional Bihu dance, infusing the mela with the rich culture of Assam.

The celebration began with the distribution of rice dishes, followed by Naam Kirtan at Namghar. Women devotees lit up the fairgrounds with their Bihu dance, showcasing the colorful heritage of the Northeast. Traditional structures like the Bhelaghar, made of paddy straw, and the Meji, crafted from bamboo, were ceremonially burned on Tuesday morning, marking the essence of Bhogali Bihu.

Mahamandaleshwar Swami Keshav Das Ji Maharaj of Yogashram Bihalingini, Assam, expressed pride in bringing Bhogali Bihu to the Maha Kumbh for the first time. He emphasised that this initiative aims to highlight Assamese and northeastern culture while

Global celebration of faith, spirituality

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Maha Kumbh 2025 has transformed the grand event's identity from a traditional Indian event into a global celebration of faith and spirituality. The grand inauguration in 'Teerthraj' Prayagraj attracted devotees from India and countries like Brazil, Germany, Japan, England, the US, and Spain, with growing interest from Islamic nations, including Pakistan and Arab countries.

According to Google Trends, the Maha Kumbh 2025 has sparked curiosity and widespread searches in Islamic nations and the Arab world, indicating the global reach of this ancient spiritual gathering, officials said here.

This year's event has become a testament to the growing international influence of Sanatan culture, they added. Among the Islamic countries, Pakistan tops the list with largest number of people searching for the event on Google.

People across Pakistan have shown keen interest in the festival, particularly in its massive scale and the large gathering of devotees. Following

Pakistan, nations like Qatar, the UAE, and Bahrain have also shown considerable interest, frequently searching for updates and details about the event, officials said.

Additionally, countries such as Nepal, Singapore, Australia, Canada, Ireland, Britain, Thailand, and the United States have seen a surge in online searches related to Mahakumbh, reflecting its growing global recognition, they noted.

The presence of international pilgrims and the significant online interest in Maha Kumbh reflects the increasing global influence of Sanatan culture, officials said. Millions of devotees from around the world are participating in the spiritual experience, emphasising the universal appeal of Indian traditions and spirituality, they added.

The Maha Kumbh 2025 has not only drawn international attention but has also reaffirmed the profound impact of Indian culture and Sanatan Dharma on the global stage, officials said, adding, with its grand scale and spiritual essence, the event continues to inspire millions, showcasing India's rich heritage to the world.

Maha Kumbh: Naga sadhus enchant devotees

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The first Amrit Snan of Maha Kumbh 2025 showcased the Naga sadhus' captivating display of spiritual fervor and martial artistry, mesmerising pilgrims at Triveni bank.

Leading most of the akharas during the Amrit Snan, the Naga sadhus mesmerised onlookers with their discipline and mastery of traditional weapons. From skillfully wielding spears and swords to energetically playing the Damru, their demonstrations were a vibrant celebration of age-old traditions. Stunts with sticks and other martial feats added to their spirited display, leaving the devotees enthralled.

In the grand 'shobha yatra' of the akharas leading up to the Amrit Snan, some Naga sadhus rode majestically on horses while others walked on foot, adorned in their distinctive attire and ornaments.

With flowers in their matted hair, garlands around their necks, and 'Trishul' (trident) held high, they added to the spiritual grandeur of the Maha Kumbh. Known for their self-discipline and unwavering spirit, the sadhus moved forward in perfect order, following the directives of their akhara leaders. Amid the rhythmic beats of drums, their energy and enthusiasm turned the occasion into

a vibrant celebration. Their displays with 'Trishuls' and 'Damrus' emphasised that Maha Kumbh is not merely a religious event but a festival of unity between humanity and nature.

During the 'shobha yatra', both the media and common devotees eagerly raised their cameras to capture the mesmerising presence of the Naga sadhus. The sadhus, in turn, engaged with the crowds, inviting them to share their joy. Some even wore black sunglasses, further captivating the audience with their charismatic expressions.

Dancing to the beats of drums and showcasing their traditional rituals live, the Naga sadhus filled the atmosphere with vibrant energy. Their enthusiasm was contagious, as devotees watched in awe, captivated by every movement and expression, making the occasion unforgettable. Even during the holy bath, the Naga sadhus' unique style stood out. They entered the icy waters of the Triveni Sangam with unbounded zeal. Their playful interactions were a sight to behold as they splashed water on each other with joyous abandon. They even engaged with the media, sprinkling water on the cameramen, adding a touch of light-heartedness to the spiritual proceedings.



In addition to the male Naga sadhus, female Naga ascetics were also present in significant numbers. Like their male counterparts, they devote themselves to intense meditation and yoga. The primary distinction lies in their attire — female ascetics wear saffron, typically

unstitched garments. Their journey to becoming Naga ascetics involves renouncing familial ties and performing 'pind daan' for their family members and themselves. Once initiated, their mission is to uphold and protect the Sanatan Dharma. This Maha

Kumbh sparked widespread curiosity about these remarkable women and their steadfast dedication to spirituality. Through their demeanour and traditions, the Naga sadhus conveyed that the Maha Kumbh is more than a religious event — it is a celebration of the

spiritual and natural harmony of humanity. Their every action reflected the purity and joy that embody this sacred gathering. The 2025 Maha Kumbh will be cherished for years to come, thanks to the unique traditions and vibrant activities of the Naga sadhus.

Yogi offers khichdi to Baba Gorakhnath, prays for people's welfare

PNS ■ GORAKHPUR

On the auspicious occasion of Makar Sankranti, Gorakshpeethadhiswar and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, adhering to the sacred traditions of the Nath Panth, offered the holy khichdi of faith to Shivavtar Mahayogi Gorakhnath at the Gorakhnath temple during the Brahma muhurta at 4 am on Tuesday. On this auspicious occasion, he prayed to Baba Gorakhnath for the welfare of the people, a harmonious and prosperous life for all citizens and the nation's well-being.

After the ritual offering, Chief Minister Yogi extended heartfelt greetings and best wishes for Makar Sankranti to all citizens, saints and devotees. Addressing the media, he described Makar Sankranti as

a festival dedicated to expressing gratitude to the Sun God, the creator and sustainer of life. He said, "This festival, deeply rooted in India's Sanatan Dharma, is celebrated with immense devotion under various names nationwide."

The chief minister highlighted the cultural diversity in the celebration of Makar Sankranti, saying that people in the North, South, East or West mark this day with unique traditions and rituals. He added, "It is celebrated as Bihu in Assam, Lohri in Punjab, Pongal in the far South, Tilwa Sankranti in Bengal and Maharashtra, and Khichdi Sankranti in North India."

He emphasised that Makar Sankranti is a profound expression of joy, unity and solidarity, embodying the spirit of



togetherness and happiness within Indian society. He also shared that in Uttar Pradesh, the day is marked by holy dips in sacred rivers and lakes, acts of charity and other virtuous deeds.

Reflecting on his role, he said, "It is my great fortune to have the opportunity to offer khichdi at the feet of Baba Gorakhnath at this revered place of worship."

The chief minister also took the opportunity to congratulate saints and devotees on the first Amrit Snan of the Prayagraj Maha Kumbh. He remarked that while faith-filled khichdi is being offered at the sacred site of Lord Gorakhnath's penance, the grand Maha Kumbh of the century has commenced at the confluence of the holy rivers Ganga, Yamuna and

Saraswati in Prayagraj. Chief Minister Yogi emphasised that festivals like Makar Sankranti convey the message of unity and inspire people to uphold social harmony and preserve our traditions.

Meanwhile, on the auspicious occasion of Makar Sankranti, the world-famous Khichdi Mela at Gorakhnath temple witnessed an extraordinary gesture by the Yogi government as flowers were showered on devotees from helicopters, creating a mesmerising spectacle. As petals rained from the skies, the devotees' chants grew louder, filling the atmosphere with devotion and reverence. On the auspicious occasion of Makar Sankranti, over 15 lakh devotees offered khichdi to Baba Gorakhnath, seeking blessings for themselves and their loved ones.

BJP fields Chandrabhan Paswan from Milkipur

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Bharatiya Janata Party has decided to field Chandrabhan Paswan as its candidate for Milkipur assembly bypoll. This assembly seat is one of the assembly segments of Faizabad Lok Sabha constituency in Ayodhya district. The bypoll was necessitated after Awadhesh Prasad, a senior leader of Samajwadi Party, resigned the Milkipur seat after being elected to Lok Sabha from Faizabad in the June 2024 general elections. The SP has decided to field Awadhesh's son Ajeet from this seat in the bypoll. The Milkipur bypoll has become a battle of prestige for the BJP with Chief minister

Yogi Adityanath taking charge of the February 5 by-election. The saffron party plans to go all out to wrest this assembly seat from its arch rival SP. The Milkipur bypoll was to be held earlier along with by-elections for nine other assembly seats in November 2024. But due to a pending court case, the Election Commission deferred the Milkipur bypoll. Awadhesh Prasad had won the seat with 47.99 per cent votes in the 2022 UP assembly election, followed by BJP's Baba Gorakhnath who secured 41.83 per cent votes. Congress candidate Brijesh Kumar had polled 1.46 per cent votes. Awadhesh Prasad had also won this assembly seat in the 2012 assembly election.

Makar Sankranti in Varanasi showcases unity in diversity

LAKHS TAKE HOLY DIP IN GANGA



Namami Gange activists performing aarti at Dashashwamedh Ghat during Makar Sankranti in Varanasi on Tuesday.

Vishwanath Temple (KVT) which also saw long queues of devotees throughout the day. The personnel of National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and Water Police were deployed at ghats to keep a close watch on the activities and avoid any untoward incident. After taking a bath, the devotees also donated rice, jagery and products made with sesame seeds, coins etc to the Brahmins and beggars as per tradition of importance of donation in this festival, which is popularly known as Khichdi in this region of Purvanchal (eastern UP). Throughout the day, the 'khichdi' was also distributed among devotees at Khichadi Baba Temple in Dashashwamedh area. Like Gujarat, the city is also famous for kite flying. A large number of people, including Gujaratis, went across the river to enjoy kite flying. Markets selling jagery-sesame, groundnut items, chuda (made from flattened rice), lai (parched rice) etc saw heavy crowds of customers during the day. The rush of people, especially children and youth, was seen at stalls selling kites and related

items. Meanwhile, at Rajghat, Namami Gange Ganga Vichar Manch's district coordinator Shivam Agrahari along with associate Jai Vishwakarma were seen continuously making people aware about cleanliness since morning. Through loudspeakers, bathers were urged to maintain cleanliness and safety on the banks of the Ganga. They were being told to bathe behind barricades and maintain a clean and pure Ganga. Then they offered 'shramdaan' to collect puja items and polythene thrown there. Besides, the activists of Namami Gange performed 'aarti' of Sun God and Maa Gangas at Dashashwamedh Ghat. They also made thousands aware to keep the river clean and pollution free. Under the leadership of Kashi region coordinator and Municipal Corporation's Swachhata brand ambassador Rajesh Shukla, the message of conservation of culture and nature was given through the national flag and placards with cleanliness slogans. Among those present were Supriya Pandey, Archana Jaiswal, Vinay Kashyap, Supriya Patel and Sheela.



Devotees on Tuesday taking part in a procession at Sangam on the occasion of Makar Sankranti during the Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 in Prayagraj

PTI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Braving the cold wave, lakhs of devotees thronged internationally famous Ganga ghats and took a holy dip in the sacred water of Ganga river on the auspicious occasion of Makar Sankranti here on Tuesday. Since this festival is celebrated across the country under different names and this ancient city has a PAN-India character as it had separate localities for South Indians, Gujaratis, Marathis, Bengalis, Nepalis, Punjabis, Sindhis, Biharis etc for more than a cen-

ture, it showcased different colours of unity in diversity. The devotees started thronging famous Ganga ghats like Dashashwamedh, Sheela, Assi, Panchganga, Kedar, Bainsaur and many others right from the wee hours and it kept increasing as the day progressed as there was a bright sunshine and less fog than the previous days. Elaborate security arrangements were made apart from several traffic restrictions and diversions. Thousands of people also came here from Maha Kumbh at Sangam in Prayagraj to offer prayers at Kashi

NCR makes many arrangements for devotees

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

For the convenience of the devotees in Maha Kumbh-2025, the North Central Railway (NCR) administration has made arrangements for security, shelter, easy ticket distribution and a large number of trains. Keeping in mind the convenience of the devotees coming to Maha Kumbh, the Railway administration operated more than 50 Mela Special trains till 6 pm on Tuesday on the occasion of Makar

Sankranti festival. The Prayagraj division has operated 34 Mela Special Trains (21 outward and 13 inward trains). Seven special trains from Prayagraj Junction; (one train from Prayagraj Junction for Kanpur, three trains for Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay Junction, one train for Katni, one train for Veerangana Laxmibai station, Jhansi and one train for Ayodhya Cantt in view of the need of the devotees.) One special train from Prayagraj Chheeki station was

run for Banda and another special train from Naini station for Chitrakoot. Special trains were also being operated by the railway administration as per the requirement of the devotees who have come to Maha Kumbh, Public Relations Officer (PRO), Prayagraj division of NCR, Amit Singh, said. **YOUTH CAUGHT:** A 25-year-old suspect was caught on Tuesday morning in the Akhara of Mahamandaleswar and Dasna temple chief Yeti Narsinghanand in the Kumbh

Mela area. The police is interrogating him after taking him into custody. Initial investigation has revealed that the youth had reached the Akhara posing as Ayush Singh. After this, he started insisting on meeting Mahant Yeti Narsinghanand. When contacted SSP Maha Kumbh Rajesh Dwivedi said a youth identified as Ayub Khan was detained and is being questioned as to why he hid his identity and what his purpose of meeting Yati Narsinghanand.

Lohri a symbol of cultural heritage: BLW GM

Varanasi (PNS): In the series of 100-day 'TB Mukta Bharat Jan Sahyog Abhiyan', Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW) celebrated Lohri festival with great enthusiasm and gaiety. With the aim of promoting healthy society this programme organised at BLW Central Sports Ground gave the message of raising awareness towards TB elimination and promoting healthy lifestyle. GM Naresh Pal Singh started the programme by lighting Lohri as per traditional customs. After this dancing and singing to the tune of folk songs of Lohri made the whole atmosphere festive. In



his address, the GM said, "Lohri is not just a festival, but a symbol of our cultural heritage and community unity. This festival inspires us to express gratitude to nature during the harvest season and understand our responsibilities towards society." Highlighting the importance of "TB Free India" campaign, he said, "It is our com-

mon goal to make India TB free by 2025. Collective efforts and awareness are extremely important for this. The slogan 'TB will lose, India will win' is a symbol of commitment of every citizen." During the programme, poetry recitation by Sunita and Naval Kishore Gupta and traditional songs of Lohri and folk dances like Bhangra-Giddha, Hindi song by Munna Rajak captivated everyone. Cultural presentations not only added to the charm of the festival but also strengthened the community spirit. A large number of prominent officers and employees of BLW

were present. Prominent among those present were PCEE SK Srivastava, PCE Vinod Shukla, PCMO Dr. Devesh Kumar, PCPO Janardan Singh, CDE (Electrical) MK Gupta, CDE (Project) Anurag Gupta, CMSE Neeraj Jain, CME (Production & Marketing) Sunil Kumar, Finance Adviser and Chief Accounts Officer (Headquarters) Ajay Srivastava, DyGM Anuj Katiyar, DyCDE SK Singh, Senior Sports Officer Bahadur Prasad, joint secretary of Employees' Council Shrikant Yadav and Council members Sanjay Kumar, Naveen Sinha, Santosh Yadav, Amit Kumar and others.

NER runs 66 Maha Kumbh specials during 2 days

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The North Eastern Railway (NER), ran 66 Maha Kumbh Mela special trains for Prayagraj during the first two days of the Mela mostly by its Varanasi division. It included the operation of 34 special trains on occasion of Makar Sankranti on Tuesday while 32 special trains were run on Posh Purnima, the first day of Maha Kumbh.

On the occasion of Makar Sankranti, 34 Mela special trains were operated from various stations of Varanasi division, including 05105 Banaras-Prayagraj Rambagh; 05107 Banaras-Prayagraj Rambagh; 05106 Prayagraj Rambagh-Banaras; 05108 Prayagraj Rambagh-Banaras; 05109 Banaras-Jhusi; 05113 Banaras-Jhusi; 05115 Banaras-Jhusi; 05111 Banaras-Jhusi; 05110 Jhusi-Banaras;

05112 Jhusi-Banaras; 05114 Jhusi-Banaras; 04114 Banaras-Prayagraj; 04111 Prayagraj-Banaras; 05177 Gorakhpur-Jhusi; 05179 Gorakhpur-Jhusi; 05178 Jhusi-Gorakhpur; 05180 Jhusi-Gorakhpur; 05185 Gorakhpur-Prayagraj Rambagh; 05186 Prayagraj Rambagh-Gorakhpur; 05165 Ballia-Jhusi; 05166 Jhusi-Thawe; 05157 Chhapra-Jhusi;

05127 Chhapra-Jhusi; 05130 Jhusi-Chhapra; 05125 Chhapra-Prayagraj Rambagh; 05126 Prayagraj Rambagh-Chhapra; 05121 Dohrighat-Prayagraj Rambagh; 05122 Prayagraj Rambagh-Dohrighat; 05159 Bhatni-Jhusi; 05160 Jhusi-Bhatni; 05102 Jhusi-Azamgarh and 05164 Jhusi-Thawe, said Public Relations Officer (PRO), Varanasi division, Ashok Kumar.

Minister inspects construction work



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Uttar Pradesh Minister of State for Stamp and Court Registration Fees Ravindra Jaiswal, along with senior officials, including Commissioner of Police (CP) Mohit Agarwal, District Magistrate (DM) S Rajalingam, Vice-Chairman (V-C) of Varanasi Development Authority (VDA) Pulkit Garg and Municipal Commissioner (MC) Akshat Verma, did a field inspection of the construction work of the park being built by the VDA on the roadside public place on Fatman Road in Sigra here late on Monday evening. During his inspection, Jaiswal especially emphasised that the construction work should not become an obstacle in development. While questioning the con-

struction work of the park, he said, "What will be the use of this small park and why will it definitely have an adverse effect on traffic. This public place can be used for road widening." Earlier, the minister held a meeting with the officials at the Circuit House and directed to provide better facilities to the devotees and bathers coming to Varanasi during Prayagraj Maha Kumbh. He said proper traffic arrangements should be ensured on the routes going to Ganga ghats, including Maidagin, Godowlia, Lahurabir etc. Along with this, there should be complete security arrangements on the Ganga ghats. He also laid special emphasis on ensuring proper cleanliness as well as lighting arrangements on the Ganga ghats.

Various programmes to be held on Voters' Day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Various programmes will be organised in the city to make the voters aware and celebrate the 15th National Voters' Day on January 25. At a meeting held under the chairmanship of Chandra Shekhar, in charge ADM (Judicial) discuss about the preparations, it was informed that all the programmes will be organised on the theme 'Nothing like voting, I vote for sure'. National Voters' Day will be celebrated in all government departments, including bank, post office, railway, panchayati raj institutions, civic bodies etc. The Election Commission will organise quiz, essay writing, debate competitions in schools, colleges, universities and distribute prizes to winners. BLO and supervisors who performed well during elections will also be felicitated. At the same time, senior citizens, Divyang and transgender voters will also be felicitated and awarded prizes. ADM (Judicial) Chandra Shekhar directed the officials of various departments to start preparations to celebrate the National Voters' Day in a grand way. Officials attending the meeting were directed to conduct programmes in their respective department aligned with the National Voters' Day theme and



submit the list of winners by January 20. They were further directed to communicate the Election Commission guidelines to all departments, educational institutions including schools, colleges and universities. Voter registration officer, DIOS, District Basic Shiksha Adhikari, District Divyangjan Shashaktikaran Adhikari, District Panchayat Officer, Coordinator- NSS Kanpur Nagar, Chief Commissioner- Scouts & Guides, Deputy Controller Civil Defence, District Information Officer and others were present in the meeting. **TWO ARRESTED:** Two accused under Cow Slaughter Act were arrested in an encounter with police near Tikar Khurd bridge under Purwa police area of Unnao on Monday night. During the exchange of fire, a cop and an accused also sustained bullet injury in their left leg while one of their accomplices managed to escape from the spot. The injured were admitted to CHC.

DM: Free all govt land from illegal occupation by running a campaign

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A meeting of the Anti-Land Mafia Task Force was held in the Commissioner's Auditorium here on Monday under the chairmanship of District Magistrate S Rajalingam in which he directed that action should be ensured to free all government land from illegal occupation immediately by running a campaign on a war footing. "No government or department land should remain in occupation", he said during the meeting and gave instructions to the officers concerned to seek explanation from the executive engineer of Tubewell for not making proper efforts to free the land of the department which has been encroached for a long time and for being absent from the meeting. Similarly, the district magistrate expressed deep displeasure over the non-removal of encroachment on the lands of executive engineers of Irrigation department, Bhadohi block, executive officer of Nagar Panchayat Ganganpur, Cooperative Department etc and their competent officers being absent from the meeting. He instructed the departments to seek explanation from these officers concerned. The DM strictly directed that effective action should be taken to free the land of the departments which are in the possession of land mafia without any delay. He directed to take strict action against the identified land mafia. He



District Magistrate S Rajalingam holding a meeting of officers in Varanasi

said all government land should be freed from encroachment before the next meeting. On the occasion, Additional District Magistrate (ADM/Administration) Vipin Kumar, District Inspector of Schools (DIOS), district agriculture officer and officers of police and other departments were also present. Earlier, the DM reviewed the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana at same venue. While reviewing the status of registration for installation of solar rooftop in the residences of officers/employees, honorarium workers, retired personnel working in the offices of all departments, it was told that according to the information received from 86 departments, a total of 33,937 employees are working in the district, compared to which 23,336 personnel

are residents of Varanasi district. While reviewing the loan facility provided by the bank for installing solar rooftops on the houses of these personnel, the regional manager of Bank of Baroda (BoB) informed that the employees who will apply for loan for solar rooftop installation through Jan Samarth portal will be provided loan within 48 hours. Rajalingam directed the chief development officer in charge to prepare a roster for organising camps for registration of officers/employees in all development blocks, zonal offices of the district and for applying for loan through Jan Samarth portal. District level officers, lead bank manager, Project Director DRDA and control room in charge were present in the meeting.

NCC cycle expedition receives warm welcome

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The 'Sangram 1857 NCC Cycle Expedition' was extended a warm welcome with a grand flag-in ceremony at the Air Force Station, Chakeri (Kanpur) on Monday. Chief of Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal AP Singh and Major General Vikram Kumar, Additional Director General, NCC Directorate, Uttar Pradesh pedalled along with the NCC cadets from Prayagraj via Fatehpur and finally all the way to Kanpur. Their presence underscored the significance of this initiative in inspiring the younger generation to uphold the values of courage and sacrifice. Air Commodore MK Praveen, Air Officer Commanding, Air Force Station, Chakeri, Brigadier VK Poonia, Commandant, COD, Kanpur, Brigadier SPS Rautela, Group Commander NCC, Kanpur, Brigadier Shabrul Hasan, Station Commander, Kanpur, were also present on the occasion. About 250 NCC cadets were present to cheer for the expedition team during the



flag-in ceremony. The event organised to honour and commemorate the unparalleled sacrifices of freedom fighters during the Revolt of 1857 - the First War of Indian Independence - showcased the spirit of patriotism and resilience among the youth. The 15-member NCC cycling expedition team, led by Brigadier NS Chaarag, Group Commander, NCC, Agra Group, included five dedicated NCC girl cadets, exemplifying gender equality and empowerment. Covering a challenging route, the expedition retraced historic paths that resonate

with the legacy of the 1857 uprising, fostering a deep connection to India's rich heritage. This expedition not only commemorates the sacrifices of forefathers but also instils in cadets a profound sense of duty and pride toward the nation. It also highlights the NCC's role in nurturing responsible and patriotic citizens committed to nation-building. The team is covering an average of 113 km each day touching the flash-point of the revolution of 1857. The rally will finish in Delhi with the flagging in by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the Republic

Day celebrations. During its journey it is highlighting the events and sacrifices of country's ancestors and exhorting the youth to stand united and work towards building India a super power. The team was flagged off from Kanpur on Tuesday and moved towards Orai pedalling to Jhansi on January 15 and 16. **SUICIDE:** An youth allegedly committed suicide by hanging himself in Maharajpur police station area on Monday night. He was identified as Hasan alias Roli (25) who was the youngest among his three brothers. According to kin, Hasan often used to quarrel with family members after consuming liquor. On getting information police rushed to the spot and sent the body for autopsy after panch-nama. Station House Officer (SHO) Sanjay Kumar Pandey said prima facie it appeared to be a case of suicide. However, on the basis of kin's complaint and autopsy report further action will be initiated in the matter. However, a probe is on, he added.

Demand raised for separate statehood to Purvanchal

Varanasi (PNS): The demand for separate statehood to Purvanchal (eastern UP) was raised at a meeting of social organisation Purvanchal Movement and Bahujan Samta Party in the party office in Belhupur under the chairmanship of Rajesh Azad here on Tuesday. In the formation of Varanasi Prayagraj Regional Authority was welcomed and supported and gratitude was expressed to the state government and NITI Aayog. For overall development of all districts of Purvanchal, the speakers described the concept of comprehensive development from religious point of view by combining seven districts as beneficial for the people of this backward Purvanchal. Azad said the Varanasi Prayagraj scheme will give a boost to the industrial sector and create new employment opportunities. He said under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi and CM Yogi Adityanath, effective steps will be taken towards implementing the overall development and welfare schemes of Purvanchal soon. He expressed confidence that a separate Purvanchal state would be formed soon and added that the movement being carried out for formation of a separate Purvanchal state under the banner of Purvanchal Movement and Bahujan Samta Party will be given further momentum.

Tea synonymous with quality

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Director of Mohani Tea Dinesh Agarwal said that produced from the select and long leaves of Assam and Darjeeling Tea gardens, Mohani Tea has become synonymous with best quality product. He said famous tea gardens of the world were situated in Assam and Darjeeling. Company's experts select tea leaves from these gardens. After necessary processing, they prepare the tea with the help of automatic machines. After approval of tea testers, the product was sent for packing. Special care is taken while packing the goods so that the quality and flavour of the product is not affected even in adverse weather. He said that its different types were — Mohani Good Time, Mohani Gold, Mohani Hotel Dhaba, Mohani Perfect, Mohani Green Tea and Mohani Red. He said along with the sale of Mohani



tea in the market for general consumers, it is also supplied to central and state government canteens. Apart from being available at reasonable price, its quality is also on par with other international brands. Therefore, it is cheaper than other brands as well as provides complete satisfaction to the consumers. He said the company had a vast marketing network which helps in smooth availability of the products in rural areas apart from urban localities.

Jammu and Kashmir incomplete without PoK: Rajnath Singh

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

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

Noting that Pakistan has not stopped destabilising India and has been promoting illegal infiltration and terrorism since 1965 Singh also cautioned Pakistan to dismantle all the existing 'terrorist training camps operating from PoK.

Addressing a gathering of veteran soldiers on the occasion of the 9th Armed Forces Veterans' Day programme at Tanda Artillery Brigade, Akhnoor, the Defence Minister described PoK as the crown jewel of

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

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



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

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

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh also reiterated the government's top priority is bridging the gap between Kashmir and the rest of India.

"Kashmir was treated differently (by previous govern-

ments) in the past as a result of our brothers and sisters in the region could not get connected with Delhi as it should have been. I do not want to go into the past as our government's biggest achievement is that we have been working to bridge 'dil ki duri' (distance between hearts) between Kashmir and the rest of the country."

"I congratulate Chief Minister Omar Abdullah for taking the right steps to help overcome the little bit of gap (which is still there)," the defence minister said.

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

During his visit to Akhnoor, Rajnath Singh inaugurated a

heritage museum and also hoisted a 108-foot national flag.

The museum showcases weapons used in various wars in J-K and sculptures of war heroes. Certain mobility equipment in terms of Motorised Wheelchairs, Tri Scooters, Scooters and Auto Rickshaws were handed over to the ex-servicemen on the occasion. More than 40 stalls/help desks of various Records Offices, Defence & Government Welfare Organisations, Banks & Employment Agencies were established at the venue for in-situ grievance redressal and awareness.

The Defence Minister also interacted with the ex-servicemen and expressed gratitude to the Armed Forces personnel, both retired & serving, for their selfless service towards protecting the borders with unmatched bravery, dedication, sacrifice and patriotism.

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



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Any patriot who thinks in national interest would realise that continuous elections have become a disaster for the nation.

If elections happen once in five years, people would also be excited," the senior BJP leader said.

"This is the demand of the people. People should take oath supporting simultaneous elections, organisations should pass resolutions in its support," Singh suggested.

He also said that voters are mature and they even vote for different parties in assembly and Lok Sabha polls even if they are held together, citing Odisha as an example.

Referring to Delhi, where assembly polls will be held on February 5, Chouhan expressed confidence that the BJP would win this time.

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday said statistical tools and quantitative techniques play a significant role in effective governance by providing empirical foundation for policy decisions.

The governments rely on national statistical systems to collect data on health, education, population size and employment among others, which form the basis for policy-making, she said addressing the probationers of the Indian Statistical Service (ISS), who had called on the president at the Rashtrapati Bhavan here.

President Murmu said statistics were used even in ancient civilisations, when the rulers used basic census data for taxation purposes.

"Statistical analysis is a tool to bring in transparency and accountability in governance. Statistics is not only the backbone of efficient governance but also a tool for socio-economic development," the president said.

She said it is their duty to collect accurate data, which can be the foundation for sound and objective decisions.

"Government needs data to formulate, implement and monitor policies as well as for policy review and impact assessment. The citizens need data for impartial understanding and assessment of government schemes and programmes. Your job requires high proficiency in statistical methods, which you would use to provide solutions to data and information needs of the country," the President said.

She urged them to be sensitive towards the needs of common people, especially the poor and underprivileged, while collecting data.

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



For example, authentic data in the fields of health and education will serve as the basis for monitoring literacy rates, school enrolment ratios, health infrastructure and prevalence of diseases, she said.

President Murmu said the ISS officers are responsible for preparing national accounts, Consumer Price Index, Index of Industrial Production and other such important indices for measuring various aspects

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

These authentic data act as key instruments for measuring economic development and making effective policies, the president said.

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

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

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

By studying patterns in employment, productivity or

income inequality, you can help policymakers generate targeted solutions, the president said.

"As India moves towards achieving inclusive and sustainable development, statistical research will play a greater role in monitoring environmental impacts and climate change," she added.

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

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

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

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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



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

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

Design Bureau and are equipped with advanced sensors and weapon packages developed primarily in India or through strategic collaborations with leading global manufacturers.

Equipped with modern aviation facilities, Nilgiri and Surat can operate a range of helicopters, including Chetak, ALH, Sea King, and the newly inducted MH-60R, during both day and night operations.

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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



keep doing so in the times to come," he said.

Armed Forces Veterans' Day is celebrated on January 14 every year to recognise the service rendered by the first Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces Field Marshal KM Cariappa, who retired on this day in 1953.

The day was first celebrated in 2016 and it is commemorated every year since by hosting interactive events in the honour of the ex-servicemen.

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

If walls could talk, 24 Akbar Road would write itself a book - of the days of the Raj, of the Burma of the 1960s and mostly of the dramatic ups and downs of the Congress that headquartered itself in its spacious premises 47 years ago.

Always more than an address, the Lutyens era bungalow that witnessed many a story and secret cedes its place as a political nerve centre on Wednesday when the opposition party moves to its new office, the Indira Gandhi Bhawan, at Kotla Road a few kilometres away.

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

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

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

On a chilly January morning in 1978, a team of 20 workers from the Indira Gandhi-headed breakaway Congress entered its precincts, the first Congress members to do so.

It is another cold January. And then, as now, the Congress is again in the opposition, facing mounting electoral challenges as it did post-Emergency under Indira Gandhi and striving to stage a comeback.

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

Pradesh who chose to side with Indira Gandhi at a time when most Congress leaders had distanced themselves from her for fear of retaliation from the then ruling Janata Party.

The story of how and in what circumstances the party moved and the address' previous brush with history is well documented in political commentator Rasheed Kidwai's book "24 Akbar Road".

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

"Back then, 24 Akbar Road was called Burma House - so named by Jawaharlal Nehru in recognition of Daw Khin Kyi's special status," he says.

The house, built by Sir Edwin Lutyens between 1911 and 1925, is regarded as a singularly



fine example of a blend of British colonial architecture and the new modernist style.

As the Congress embraces the new, many would look back at its time at 24 Akbar Road as a mixed bag electorally but acknowledge it had been a witness to shaping India's history for decades.

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

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

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

"Facing the residence of the

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

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

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

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

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

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

Over the years, 10 Janpath and 24 Akbar Road forged an unbreakable link. The two premises next to each other served as the powerhouse of the grand old party and played hosts to many key meetings.

Before Independence, Motilal Nehru's Anand Bhawan in then Allahabad was the Congress party headquarters. After 1947, the party moved to the party's headquarters in New Delhi.

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

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

And now to another new address.

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

The new state-of-the-art AICC headquarters symbolises the Congress party's continuing mission to uphold the vision of its stalwarts, the party has said.

As the Congress moves to the Indira Bhawan, the electoral challenges are daunting, especially on the back of assembly polls defeats in Haryana and Maharashtra.

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



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PAPER WITH PASSION

A Czar in America

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

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



portraying annexation as an economic and security measure. Yet, his claims ignore the deeply interdependent trade relationship and Canada's contributions to NATO. Greenland's strategic importance in the Arctic has long been recognised, particularly as climate change opens new shipping routes. Trump's desire for Greenland stems from its untapped resources and its position as a geopolitical chokepoint. Trump's statements on reclaiming the canal, under the guise of countering Chinese influence, invoke a bygone era of US interventionism in Latin America.

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

PICTALK



A vendor sells balloons, at the roadside in Surat

Engaging the Taliban amid strategic challenges



PARUL CHANDRA

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

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

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

A pariah among Western nations, the Taliban finds itself trying to run an internationally isolated country with a beleaguered economy that's battling crippling economic sanctions. The Taliban's approach to women - their rights and freedom have been severely curtailed - has contributed to Afghanistan's isolation. Amid this backdrop, India's outreach at the foreign secretary level has predictably drawn a positive response from the Taliban leadership.

Not only has it assured New Delhi that it will remain sensitive to India's security concerns,



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

As for Afghanistan, India has had its worries about the Afghan Taliban and its links to Al Qaeda and other terror outfits though, ironically enough, it now finds itself engaging with it formally. Also fuelling Indian anxieties after the Taliban's takeover was the possibility of its nexus with Pakistan, something a jubilant Islamabad had hoped for in the aftermath of the Islamist group seizing power. Instead, Islamabad-Kabul ties have now nose-dived to a point where the initial bonhomie has given way to heightened tensions and mistrust.

Islamabad has accused the Afghan Taliban of allowing the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) - the two have strong links - to use Afghanistan's soil to launch attacks against it. Kabul, of course, has denied the charge. Amid the escalating Islamabad-Kabul tensions, New Delhi saw it as an oppor-



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

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

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

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

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

AAP-BJP POSTER WAR

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

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

Zakir Hussain | Kazipet

IMD CELEBRATES 150 YEARS

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

PM inaugurates Z-Morh tunnel



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

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

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

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

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

Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

CONSERVING INDIAN RIVERS

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

Shreyanshi Jain | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

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

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

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

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

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



ments, but the challenges for the BJP here are substantial. The state lacks leaders with strong grassroots connections and effective leadership skills. Adding to BJP's woes are the growing demands of its allies. According to Sangh sources, the party is inclined to retain the LJP in its traditional form, fearing that a split could fracture its vote base. Leaders like Pashupati Paras, who have long awaited electoral rewards, are now pinning hopes on the 2025 assembly elections.

However, with BJP and JDU unlikely to concede additional seats, Paras and Chirag Paswan must reconcile with the limited number allocated to the LJP in the NDA's seat-sharing arrangement. Bihar's political history underscores three key regions that have long shaped its political land-

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

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

scrambling to retain its seats while identifying new opportunities for the upcoming elections. Amit Shah's electoral groundwork began in February last year, with his campaign kick-off in West Champaran. His focus has extended to constituencies like Shivhar, where BJP workers demand new candidates to replace underperforming veterans. In Seemanchal, a critical region where the MY equation holds sway, Shah faces the additional challenge of countering Prashant Kishore's rising Jansuraj movement.

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

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



RAJESH KUMAR SINGH



FIRST COLUMN DEALING WITH DOOMSCROLLING

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



SHAINY SHARMA

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

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



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

The habit can lead to procrastination, as individuals become overwhelmed by the weight of the issues they are reading about, making it harder to focus on the tasks at hand. Over time, this can erode personal and professional relationships, as well as hinder personal growth. On a broader scale, the prevalence of doomscrolling has implications for societal well-being too. The constant exposure to divisive and fear-inducing content can deepen political and social polarisation, as people become entrenched in echo chambers that reinforce their existing beliefs. This fragmentation undermines collective action and civic discourse, making it harder for societies to address complex challenges effectively.

Addressing doomscrolling requires a multifaceted approach. On an individual level, practising digital mindfulness is crucial. This includes setting boundaries for screen time, curating one's news feed to prioritise reputable sources, and engaging in activities that promote mental wellbeing, such as exercise, meditation, or spending time in nature. Developing a habit of seeking solutions-oriented news content that highlights positive progress and actionable steps can also help mitigate feelings of helplessness. By designing algorithms that prioritize balanced and constructive content rather than sensationalism, these platforms can create a healthier digital environment. Educational initiatives that teach media literacy and emotional resilience can further empower users to navigate the digital landscape responsibly. While it taps into deep-seated psychological tendencies, its effects on mental health, productivity, and society are far-reaching. By fostering awareness and implementing strategies to counteract its impact, individuals and institutions can work together to cultivate a healthier relationship with technology and information. In doing so, they can ensure that the digital age enhances rather than diminishes human well-being.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Relief from high power bills: Delhiites are chasing a mirage



UTTAM GUPTA

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

to indiscriminate power freebies and permit large-scale theft (Delhi is on top of the list). To lend them a helping hand, the Ministry of Power (MoP) issued an order on November 9, 2021, that allowed discoms to impose a surcharge known as PPAC. Levied as a percentage of the 'total energy cost and fixed charge component' of the electricity bill, PPAC is meant to compensate them for variations in the fuel and power procurement cost.

The discoms are allowed to revise this surcharge every quarter. In the case of BYPL, the ongoing PPAC applicable till December 20, 2024, was 32.27 per cent. On this, based on changes in the cost of power purchase during the second quarter ending September 30, 2024, of the current FY, the DERC allowed the discom to recover an additional 5.85 per cent for the three months from December 21, 2024, to March 20, 2025.

As a result, the existing PPAC (before the announcement on December 26, 2024) for BYPL was 38.12 per cent. Making a similar calculation, the regulator fixed PPAC for BRPL at 35.83 per cent and for TPDDL at 36.33 per cent. Following the DERC's 'unexpected' announcement on December 26, 2024, the PPAC will reduce to 13.62 per cent for BYPL - a reduction of around 65 per cent; 18.19 per cent for BRPL - a reduction of more than 50 per cent; and 20.52 per cent for TPDDL - a cut of 45 per cent. It defies logic. Having hiked PPAC to 38.12 per

cent including 5.85 per cent sanctioned in December 2024 - based on data for the quarter ending September 30, 2024, what is this new/extraordinary development that prompted the regulator to bring the surcharge down by almost 2/3rd? It is absurd to believe that power purchase costs would have decreased by that much. In any case, revisions in tariff/PPAC are made based on available data with a time lag and that is Qr ending September 30, 2024, which was already captured in the extant figure of 38.12 per cent.

This gives credence to the possibility that the steep reduction in PPAC has been made with an eye on the impending elections in Delhi; and that the decision could be reversed surreptitiously after the elections are over. There is another compelling reason to believe that this relief (albeit substantial) will be temporary and deceptive.

This has to do with the existence of the so-called regulatory assets (RAs) in the balance sheets of discoms currently at a mammoth Rs 27,200 crore. RAs are created when the DERC accept that the tariffs don't cover discom purchase costs but don't raise rates. The shortfall in revenue at unrevised tariff and the cost is booked by discom as receivable and classified as RA. The Electricity Act (2003) and the National Power Tariff Policy (NPTP) strictly prohibit RAs. These documents emphatically say "tariffs must reflect costs and regulatory assets should not be created". In

December 2022, the MoP even warned against creating a pile of RAs. Yet, RAs have proliferated. These stand at a monumental level despite the discoms imposing PPAC currently at 38.12 per cent (BYPL) as also levying a surcharge of eight per cent - an ad hoc arrangement intended to Take care of the RAs, which are duly permitted by the regulator. With huge RAs piled up in their books, discoms are leaving no stone unturned in recovering the money say by getting sanction of a steep hike in tariff to make up for the entire cumulative deficit in revenue. Indeed, the matter had gone right up to the Supreme Court (SC) which in an order given in early 2023 had directed the DERC to let discoms recover their RAs. If the DERC were to act upon it, this could lead to a 100 per cent hike in tariff. So, it decided to contest that order. At present, the matter is in the court.

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

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

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

The Cloud revolution: Real-time insights, sustainability and strategic transformation In 2025, cloud computing is no longer just a utility—it is the driving force behind digital transformation and innovation

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

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



JESINTHA LOUIS

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

a catalyst for innovation. Major trends expected to dominate cloud computing in 2025: **AI-Powered Cloud Solutions:** The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into cloud computing is poised to revolutionise the industry by 2025. Enhanced automation will streamline complex tasks like resource allocation and anomaly detection, freeing businesses to prioritise innovation over operations.

Predictive analytics powered by AI will help organisations anticipate market trends, optimise processes, and elevate customer experiences. Additionally, intelligent decision-making capabilities, driven by machine learning models, will enable cloud platforms to provide real-time recommendations, fostering

smarter and more impactful business outcomes.

Edge Computing: With the proliferation of IoT devices and real-time applications, edge computing is set to transform industries by 2025. Critical computations will occur closer to data sources, drastically reducing latency for time-sensitive applications like autonomous vehicles and remote surgeries.

Multi-Cloud Strategies: By 2025, organisations will increasingly shift to multi-cloud environments, breaking free from single-vendor dependencies to enhance resilience and flexibility. This approach enables businesses to distribute workloads across multiple cloud providers, optimising performance and cost efficiency. Advanced tools for



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

es can avoid resource overprovisioning while developers concentrate on coding as cloud providers handle infrastructure.

Kubernetes and Docker: Containerisation technologies like Kubernetes and Docker are revolutionising cloud computing, setting the stage for 2025. Kubernetes ensures seamless scalability by orchestrating containerised applications across varied environments, while Docker enhances flexibility with consistent application performance across platforms. By automating deployment, scaling, and maintenance, these tools free developers to focus on innovation, enabling more reliable application delivery.

Hybrid-Multi-Cloud Architectures: Hybrid and

multi-cloud strategies are poised to dominate as businesses aim to optimise their cloud environments. These approaches offer operational flexibility by enabling workloads across on-premises, private, and public clouds, ensuring businesses leverage the best of each. By reducing dependency on a single vendor, multi-cloud setups enhance resilience and continuity while allowing cost-efficient workload allocation without compromising performance.

Data Security in Cloud Computing: As cyber threats continue to escalate, securing cloud environments has become a top priority. Zero-trust architecture enforces stringent identity verification at every level, reducing the risk

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

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

UP govt fostering women's empowerment, self-reliance

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government, is fostering women's empowerment and self-reliance through the State Rural Livelihood Mission. As part of these efforts, 10 Mahila Kisan Producer Organisations will be developed as model Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) to boost women farmers' income and self-reliance. The Yogi Adityanath government has taken historic steps to organise women farmers and increase their income. The primary objective of these FPOs is to support women farmers by organising them into structured groups, facilitating the collection, processing and sale of their agricultural produce at better prices. This initiative will not only provide women farmers with access to local markets but will also encourage innovation in the agricultural sector. The government believes that empowering women farmers will not only improve their financial condition but also contribute significantly to strengthening the rural economy. The Yogi government's Rural Livelihood Mission is playing an important role in improving the financial well-being of women in rural areas. Under this mission,

women are being organised into self-help groups (SHGs) and offered various opportunities for self-employment and entrepreneurship. These groups are being provided with training and financial assistance to engage in diverse economic activities, including cottage industries, dairy farming, agricultural product processing, handloom work, and other handicraft ventures. Additionally, technical and marketing support is being provided to women farmer producer organisations to make them economically self-reliant. With this initiative, women are not only increasing their productivity but also contributing to their families and society. The Yogi government is also focusing on enhancing agricultural productivity and innovation through women-led FPOs. Women farmers are being introduced to advanced techniques and modern equipment, while also being trained in organic farming and sustainable agricultural practices. The goal is not only to provide financial stability but also to inspire self-reliance among women, fostering a sense of pride and accomplishment. This strategic initiative reflects the government's dedication to promoting women's participation across all sectors.

BJP candidates to hold road shows, file nominations

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A total of 33 candidates from the BJP will be filing their nominations on Wednesday including Kalkaji candidate and two time MP Ramesh Bidhuri, New Delhi candidate and two time MP Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma, and Leader of Opposition in Delhi assembly and Rohini candidate Vijendra Gupta. This comes after many candidates were waiting for

'auspicious day' to file their nomination and submit their documents. The last day of filing is January 17. These candidates will be accompanied by senior BJP leaders and Delhi BJP MPs. Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini and New Delhi BJP MP Bansuri Swaraj will accompany National General Secretary of the BJP Dushyant Kumar Gautam, who is party's candidate from the reserved seat of Karol Bagh.

Kite string slits claims four lives in Gujarat

From page 1

"He was riding to his farm at his village Vadbar on motorcycle when his neck was slit by kite string. He was taken to hospital but died during treatment," a Vadnagar police station official said. An unidentified man, riding a motorcycle, was similarly killed on the outskirts of Rajkot city. Ishwar Thakor (35) died in Patdi taluka of Surendranagar district after suffering deep cuts in the neck due to kite string while riding a motorcycle, police said.

Lakhs gather at Ganga Sagar in Bengal for Makar Sankranti dip

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Lakhs of pilgrims defied the cold weather to take a holy dip at Ganga Sagar, the confluence of the Ganges and the Bay of Bengal, on Makar Sankranti. The event, marked by chanting hymns, signifies the harvesting festival in this region. Despite expectations of a lower turnout due to the Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj, over 25 lakh pilgrims attended, surpassing previous years' numbers. Pilgrims performed

PM to address MahaYuti MLAs

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a significant development that comes ahead of the local body polls in Maharashtra Assembly polls, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address the newly elected MLAs from the ruling MahaYuti - comprising BJP, Shiv Sena (Eknath Shinde) and NCP (Ajit Pawar) - during his visit to Mumbai on Wednesday. Wednesday's joint address by Modi is of political importance considering that the event comes within weeks after the BJP-led MahaYuti rode to a spectacular victory in the State Assembly polls which the ruling front won 230 seats out

of the total 288 seats, as against 46 seats secured by the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA). It may be recalled that in the Assembly polls, the BJP walked away with 132 seats out of the total 288 seats, followed by its allies Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena with 57 seats and Ajit Pawar-led NCP with 41 seats. On the other hand, the MVA constituents -- Shiv Sena (UBT), Congress, and NCP -- secured 20, 16, and 10 seats, respectively. The joint meeting comes days after BJP's state-level grand convention in Shirdi, which was addressed by Union Home Minister and BJP's chief

strategist Amit Shah. Modi, who will be in the metropolis on Wednesday to commission two frontline warships and a submarine, will address the legislators of the BJP, Shinde Shiv Sena and NCP (Ajit Pawar), around noon. Among others to be present at the joint MahaYuti meeting will be chief minister Devendra Fadnavis, deputy chief ministers Eknath Shinde, Ajit Pawar and state BJP office bearers. Later in the day, the Prime Minister will inaugurate the Sri Sri Radha Madanmohanji Temple, an ISKCON project at Kharghar in Navi Mumbai.

Congress releases third list for Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Tuesday released its third list of 16 candidates for the upcoming assembly polls in Delhi featuring the name of former Union minister Krishna Tirath from Patel Nagar and councillor Ariba Khan from Okhla. The party has fielded former MLA and senior leader Kunwar Karan Singh from Model Town, Bheesham Sharma from Ghonda, Ariba Khan from Okhla, Dharam Pal Lakda from Mundka, and Krishna Tirath from Patel Nagar, among others. The party also replaced its candidate in the Gokalpur (SC) constituency, fielding Ishwar Bagri in place of Pramod Kumar Jayant. With this list, the Congress has declared a total of 63 candidates for the elections for the 70-member Delhi Assembly. Congress leader Rajesh Gupta has been named from Kirari, Jagat Singh from Shahdara, Rajiv Chaudhary from Vishwas Nagar, and Vishesh Tokas R.K. Puram, Prem Sharma from Hari Nagar, Harbani Kaur from Janakpuri and Mange Ram from Palam among others.

Delhi BJP raises concerns over voter list irregularities

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva on Tuesday raised concerns over alleged irregularities in the voter list ahead of the February 5 Assembly elections. Accompanied by BJP MP Bansuri Swaraj and senior leader Om Pathak, Sachdeva met Election Commission (EC) officials to highlight their grievances. He claimed that over five lakh new voter applications have been filed recently, many of which raised suspicions. "We found that a significant number of applicants are 80 years or older. How can someone of this age not have a voter ID card until now? Who are these people?" Sachdeva questioned. He also accused Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) supremo Arvind Kejriwal of attempting to delete the names of 44 voters associated with a Valmiki temple on Mandir Marg, calling the move "anti-Dalit." "Kejriwal has filed an

application to remove the names of 44 voters from a Valmiki temple. These people have been living there for 22 years. He is anti-Dalit," Sachdeva alleged. Further, he accused AAP of targeting government employees residing in MPs' quarters by filing applications to have their votes removed. "We have demanded an inquiry into these issues and action against those threatening the Purvanchali and Valmiki communities," Sachdeva added. These allegations follow similar claims made by the AAP, which has accused the BJP of orchestrating a "voter scam" to influence the election results. The Kejriwal-led party has alleged that the BJP is resorting to unfair practices to regain control of the capital after more than 25 years. With voting scheduled for February 5 and results set for February 8, the political climate in Delhi remains tense as both parties continue to level accusations against each other.

Terror funding case: Delhi HC denies bail to NSCN-IM leader

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has refused to grant bail to Alemla Jamir, a self-styled "cabinet minister" of the Naga insurgent outfit NSCN-IM, in an alleged case of terror funding. A bench of Justices Navin Chawla and Shalinder Kaur on January 13 said going by the allegations against Jamir, the evidence and the fact that her husband was absconding, her appeal against an order dismissing her bail plea for the second time had no merit. The accused said she was aged about 51 and had spent about 4.5 years in jail with the prosecution being uncertain about the conclusion of her case's trial. The bench observed the trial judge was trying to speed up the trial and the prosecution was also attempting to conclude the trial as soon as possible. "Justice hurried is justice buried. We also cannot lose sight of the element that

quality of evidence that is to be adduced before the trial cannot be compromised," the bench said. Observing Jamir was a flight risk, the court said she allegedly held a high position in the NSCN(IM) and was also in a position to influence the witnesses and tamper with the evidence. "Accordingly, the present appeal is dismissed," the order held. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) lodged a case against Jamir after she was intercepted at the Delhi airport on December 17, 2019, before she could fly to Dimapur with about Rs 72 in cash. The agency said she was unable to explain the source of the recovered cash and an intimation was sent to income tax department prompting an investigation. While opposing the bail plea, the prosecution alleged Jamir and other accused connived and established a "sophisticated network" through the armed cadres of the "Naga Army" to

extort money for terror funding. Jamir said sufficient evidence was not on record to support the alleged serious accusations against her. In the judgement, the court said NIA's investigation revealed NSCN(IM) was a terrorist outfit with sophisticated weaponry and ran a parallel government. "Allegations against the appellant are specific of her being involved in a criminal conspiracy. For raising and collecting lots of funds from businessmen in Dimapur," the order said, "by creating a systematic mechanism for collecting extortion money for the NSCN(IM), for which she had opened, as many as 20 bank accounts, some in fictitious names also." Jamir and other accused persons were acting in a surreptitious manner trying to leave behind no trail of evidence over the extortion of money for carrying out NSCN(IM)'s terror operations, it added.

Shootout in Gurugram, no injuries

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

Two unidentified men wearing helmets riding a motorcycle opened fire outside a locked house in the Ashok Vihar Phase -3 area of Gurugram in the wee hours of Tuesday and swiftly fled the scene. The incident creates panic among the residents of the area. The house was newly constructed and the 'Grah Pravesh' ceremony was scheduled on Wednesday. It is being said that at the time of the incident, no one was injured in the incident.

A police officer privy to the matter said more than 2 dozen rounds of fire outside the three-storey house. Police have recovered several empty shells from the scene. Cops have also questioned the complainant for clues. The house belongs to Ram Niwas, a resident of the Prem Nagar area of Gurugram. He was a building material supplier. Ram Niwas told the police that before this incident, he had not even received any threatening calls from anyone, and he was also surprised by this incident. The source said that after firing, the accused threw a slip

with the name of the Kaushal gang group inside the house. The slip has the names of Kaushal Chaudhary, Pawan Shauknee, Saurav Gadoli, Bhabha Group, Bhuppi Rama and Sukhdeep Buddha, the source said. Meanwhile, the police have tight-lipped into the matter and refused to disclose further details. "We are in the process of filing an FIR against the unidentified criminals. CCTV footage of the area is being scanned to develop the identity of the criminals. The matter is under investigation," a spokesperson of the Gurugram police said.

Coal scam: Delhi court discharges JSW Steel Ltd in corruption case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A Special Court in Delhi on Tuesday discharged JSW Steel Ltd (formerly Monnet Ispat) in a case related to alleged irregularities in the allocation and running of Gare Palma and Rajgamar Dipside coal blocks in Chhattisgarh. Special judge Arun Bhardwaj passed the order, noting the adjudicating authority approved JSW's application of taking over Monnet Ispat via a resolution under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC). The judge passed the order on a discharge plea filed by the JSW on the ground of

immunity granted under the law, submitting it has taken over Monnet Ispat under the code. The judge said the adjudicating authority approved JSW's application to take over. JSW sought the discharge citing Section 32A, which says the liability of a corporate debtor for an offence committed under any law prior to the commencement of the Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP) shall cease and the corporate debtor will not be prosecuted for such an offence from the date, the resolution plan was approved by the adjudicating authority. "Approval of the resolution

plan by the adjudicating authority shows the requirements of Section 32 A of IBC, 2016 were fulfilled. Therefore, the accused number 1 company stands discharged under Section 32 A of IBC, 2016," the judge held. Senior advocate Vikas Pahwa represented the company. The case is one among the several cases stemming from the irregular allocation of coal blocks between 1993 and 2005. The CBI registered a preliminary enquiry on September 26, 2012 to look into the irregularities in the allocation of coal blocks during the period.

Police find NGO, political ties in Delhi...

From page 1

He said that due to the NGO's proximity to a political party, it raises critical questions about a possible larger conspiracy to create public unrest through disruptive tactics. "Through scientific means, digital forensic analysis and other technical surveillance and intelligence apparatus, further deep investigation is in progress to ascertain the angle of larger conspiracy, players involved (directly or indirectly) behind this sinister activity and other such hoax mails," Tiwari said. Meanwhile, this has led to creating a political uproar with BJP MP Sudhanshu

Trivedi stating that the involvement of the NGO and its opposition to Guru's hanging clearly links it to AAP. "Is the child only a shield for such NGOs who want to destroy the law and order of Delhi and create a state of fear for political gains? With the investigation, it is highly likely that the NGO is linked to AAP since we all know the party's deep links with NGO that have supported Afzal Guru and have been involved in anti national activities. Both of the parents of Delhi Chief Minister Atishi supported the clemency petition of Afzal Guru," he alleged. He also demanded that

Kejriwal come forward and clarify the party's relation with the NGO, stating that by not doing so they will deepen the doubt. Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva has also said the 'AAP-da' party will soon be fully exposed after the investigation is complete and will be ousted out of the national Capital for destroying it completely. "I would say that Arvind Kejriwal is not only the enemy of Delhi, he is also the enemy of the entire nation," he said. The police have registered a case under Section 351(3) (criminal intimidation) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) along with Section 66F

of the Information Technology Act, 2000. They have also recovered a laptop and two mobile phones from the minor, which were subjected to preliminary forensic analysis, revealing conclusive and irrefutable digital evidence directly linking the accused to the threatening emails. "Through scientific means, digital forensic analysis and other technical surveillance and intelligence apparatus, further deep investigation is in progress to ascertain the angle of larger conspiracy, players involved (directly or indirectly) behind this sinister activity and other such hoax mails," an officer added.

PARLIAMENT COMMITTEE TO QUESTION META CEO

From page 1

"A lot of people in the United States focus on this as an American phenomenon, but I kind of think that the reaction to Covid probably caused a breakdown and trust in a lot of governments around the world, because 2024 was a big election year around the world. And you know there are all these countries, India, just like a ton of countries, that had elections and the incumbents, basically lost every single one of them," Meta CEO had mentioned in the podcast. This is not the first time that India has been irked by the irresponsible acts by these social media companies as in

year 2020 also the then Information and Technology Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad had written to Zuckerberg accusing the social media platform employees of supporting people from a political predisposition that lost successive elections, and of "abusing" the Prime Minister (Narendra Modi) and his cabinet members. The parliamentary standing committee on IT chaired by Congress MP Shashi Tharoor had summoned Facebook officials on the alleged misuse of its hate speech rules. The Parliament committee has also summoned officials of Amazon and Google on the certain issue earlier.

Release Indians hired...

From page 1

"We offer our deepest condolences to the family of the deceased. Our embassy in Moscow is in touch with the families, and all possible assistance is being rendered," Jaiswal said. "We are working with the Russian authorities for an early transportation of the mortal remains to India. We have also sought an early discharge and repatriation to India of the injured person," he said. "The matter has been strongly taken up with Russian authorities in Moscow as well as with the Russian Embassy in New Delhi today," he added. In October last year, Indian

officials said 85 Indian nationals have been discharged from the Russian military and efforts are on to secure the release of 20 more. In August 2024, the Russian embassy said Moscow and New Delhi are working in close coordination for an early "identification and discharge" of the Indian nationals who voluntarily joined contractual work in the military service and now want to return home. Since April last year, the ministry of defence of the Russian Federation had stopped recruiting citizens of a number of foreign countries, including India, into the military service, it had said.

Retail inflation drops, Sensex, Nifty bounce

From page 1

From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Adani Ports jumped over 5 per cent. NTPC, Tata Steel, Bajaj Finserv, Zomato, Bajaj Finance, Tata Motors, State Bank of India, IndusInd Bank and Maruti were among the other big gainers. From the 30-share pack, Hindustan Unilever, Titan, Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys and UltraTech Cement were the other laggards.

HCL Technologies slumped over 8 per cent after its December quarter earnings failed to cheer investors. IT company HCL Tech on Monday reported a 5.54 per cent uptick in consolidated net profit to Rs 4,591 crore in the December quarter as the CEO expressed optimism for improvement in the demand environment and a discretionary spending and raised the revenue growth guidance.

Brokers said overall sentiments turned better after retail inflation dipped to a 4-month low of 5.22 per cent in December, giving headroom to the Reserve Bank to cut the key interest rate in upcoming monetary policy. The BSE midcap gauge soared 2.13 per cent and smallcap index jumped 1.69 per cent. "As markets were on a downward spiral for the past few sessions, a short-term recovery was on the cards.

Selective buying in banking, telecom, auto, power and metal stocks aided positive sentiment, while broader equity markets too performed well with mid and small-cap stocks witnessing a sharp rebound. "However, caution will continue to prevail as the rupee scaling fresh lows coupled with strong FII fund outflows will remain a major deterrent for markets," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP

(Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said. Among BSE sectoral indices, utilities zoomed 5.21 per cent, power rallied 4.50 per cent, metal (3.51 per cent), telecommunication (2.54 per cent), commodities (2.34 per cent) and services (2.26 per cent). On the other hand, IT, tech, BSE Focused IT and FMCG were the laggards. Retail inflation declined to a four-month low of 5.22 per cent in December, mainly on

account of easing of prices in the food basket, including vegetables - according to government data released on Monday - giving headroom to the Reserve Bank to reduce the key interest rate in upcoming monetary policy reviews. In Asian markets, Seoul, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory while Tokyo was lower. Markets in Europe were trading in the green. US

markets ended on a mixed note on Monday. All Adani group stocks were in heavy demand, with Adani Power surging nearly 20 per cent. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 4,892.84 crore on Monday, according to exchange data. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.12 per cent to USD 81.11 a barrel. Meanwhile, wholesale price inflation rose to 2.37 per cent in December 2024 due to a

spike in prices of non-food articles, manufactured items and fuel and power, even though food items saw marginal easing, government data released on Tuesday showed. Falling for the fourth straight session on Monday, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex tanked 1,048.90 points or 1.36 per cent to settle at 76,330.01. The Nifty dropped 345.55 points or 1.47 per cent to close at 23,085.95.

Hamas close to accepting Gaza ceasefire, hostages release

AP ■ CAIRO

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ICC prosecutor calls to reject Israeli objections to Netanyahu warrant

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

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

AP ■ WASHINGTON

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

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

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

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



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

Biden signs executive order aimed at growing AI infrastructure in US

Los Angeles (AP): President Joe Biden on Tuesday signed an ambitious executive order on artificial intelligence that seeks to ensure the infrastructure needed for advanced AI operations, such as large-scale data centres and new clean power facilities, can be built quickly and at scale in the United States. The executive order directs federal agencies to accelerate large-scale AI infrastructure development at government sites, while imposing requirements and safeguards on the developers building on those locations. It also directs certain agencies to make federal sites available for AI data centres and new clean power facilities. Those agencies will help facilitate the infrastructure's interconnection to the electric grid and help speed up the permitting process. In a statement, Biden said AI will have "profound implications for national security and enormous potential to improve Americans' lives if harnessed responsibly, from helping cure disease to keeping communities safe by mitigating the effects of climate change". "However, we cannot take our lead for granted," the Democratic president said. "We will not let America be out-built when it comes to the technology that will define the future, nor should we sacrifice critical environmental standards and our shared efforts to protect clean air and clean water". Under the new rules, the departments of Defense and Energy will each identify at least three sites where the private sector can build AI data centres. The agencies will run "competitive solicitations" from private companies to build AI data centres on those federal sites, senior

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

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

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



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

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

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

NATO launches mission to protect Baltic Sea undersea cables

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

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

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

off on January 3. The Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials and police pledged more forceful measures to detain Yoon while they jointly investigate whether his brief martial law declaration on December 3 amounted to an attempted rebellion. The National Police Agency has convened multiple meetings of field commanders in Seoul and nearby Gyeonggi province in recent days to plan their detainment efforts, and the size of those forces fueled speculation that more than a thousand officers could be deployed in a possible multi-day operation. The agency and police have openly warned that presidential bodyguards obstructing the execution of the warrant could be arrested. The anti-corruption agency and police haven't confirmed when they might return to the presidential residence, which has been fortified with barbed wire and rows of vehicles blocking entry paths. But Chung said he understood "D-day" to be Wednesday, without specifying the information he had. Anti-corruption agency and police officials met with representatives of the presidential security service on Tuesday morning for unspecified discussions regarding efforts to execute the detention warrant for Yoon, the agency said. It wasn't immediately clear whether any kind of compromise was reached. Yoon declared martial law and deployed troops around the National Assembly on Dec. 3. It lasted only hours before lawmakers managed to get through the blockade and voted to lift the measure. His presidential powers were suspended when the opposition-dominated assembly voted to impeach him on Dec. 14, accusing him of rebellion. His fate now rests with the Constitutional Court, which has begun deliberating on whether to formally remove Yoon from office or reject the charges and reinstate him.

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

Union Minister Piyush Goyal launches National Turmeric Board in Telangana

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

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

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

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



in Telangana. This historic decision reflects PM Modi's commitment to farmers and his visionary leadership in recognizing the importance of turmeric as a vital crop for India's agricultural economy, a release from the office of Arvind Dharmapuri said on Monday.

The announcement also fulfilled a 40-year-old demand of turmeric farmers who had long sought dedicated support and infrastructure to bolster turmeric cultivation and trade. Over the last decade, the

average price for Nizamabad turmeric hovered around Rs 6,000 per quintal. However, in 2024, the price touched an all-time high of Rs 18,000 per quintal, a trend that continues this season, it said.

The National Turmeric Board will provide targeted support to turmeric farmers by promoting research and development, facilitating infrastructure development such as setting up of processing units, enhancing exports, and ensuring better prices for their produce, the release said.

Wholesale Price Inflation rises to 2.37 per cent in December



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Wholesale price inflation rose to 2.37 per cent in December 2024, led by spike in manufactured products even though prices of food items eased, government data released on Tuesday showed.

The Wholesale Price Index (WPI) based inflation was 1.89 per cent in November 2024. It was 0.86 per cent in December 2023.

As per the data, inflation in food items eased to 8.47 per cent in December 2024, as against 8.63 per cent in November. Inflation in vegetable stood at 28.65 per cent, as against 28.57 per cent in November.

Inflation in potato continued to be high at 93.20 per cent, and in onion it spiked to 16.81 per cent in December. Among food items, cereals, pulses, wheat saw easing in inflation in December.

The fuel and power category witnessed a deflation of 3.79 per cent in December, against a deflation of 5.83 per cent in November. In manufactured items, inflation was 2.14 per cent, against 2 per cent in November.

Retail inflation data released on Monday showed that consumer price index (CPI) based inflation eased to 4-month low of 5.22 per cent in December on easing food prices.



Government approves alternative payment methods for rooftop solar installation

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

The ministry has notified scheme guidelines for implementation of 'Payment Security Mechanism'

component and 'Central Financial Assistance' component for RESCO models/utility-led aggregation models under PM-Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana, an official statement said.

Under this scheme, Rs 100 crore has been earmarked for payment security mechanism (PSM) for de-risking investments in RESCO-based grid-connected rooftop solar models in residential sectors, which may be supplemented through other grants, funds and sources after due approval, the statement said. Under the RESCO model, third-party entities invest in rooftop solar installations,

enabling consumers to pay only for the electricity consumed without bearing the upfront costs. Under the utility-led aggregation (ULA) model, power distribution companies or state designated entities install rooftop solar projects on behalf of individual households.

The ministry further clarified that these guidelines are in addition to the existing mode of implementation undertaken by consumers (capex mode) through the national portal and said these alternative models will supplement the national portal-based implementation of the scheme.

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



PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee rebounded from its lowest-ever level and settled 8 paise higher at 86.62 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday as the American currency retreated from record high.

Some recovery in domestic equity markets after the release of macroeconomic numbers also supported the Indian currency even though it remained under pressure due to elevated crude oil prices and continuous outflow of foreign funds.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 86.57 and touched the intraday high of 86.45 before closing for the day at 86.62 (provisional) against the greenback, registering a gain of 8 paise from its previous close.

On Monday, the rupee logged its steepest single-day fall in nearly two years and ended the session 66 paise down at its historic low of 86.70 against the US dollar. The currency's previous record one-day fall of 68 paise was witnessed on February 6, 2023.

The local unit has plunged more than Re 1 in the past two weeks from the closing level of 85.52 on December 30. It had breached the 85-per-dollar mark for the first time on December 19, 2024.

The unit had depreciated 18 paise to settle at 86.04 against the US dollar on Friday, a day after registering a marginal gain of 5 paise. In the preceding back-to-back sessions on Tuesday and Wednesday, it had plunged 6 paise and 17 paise, respectively.

Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said the rupee recovered from all-time lows on a slight

bounce back in the domestic markets and a weak US dollar. Cooling retail inflation and easing dollar brought some respite to the falling rupee, he said, but added that the Indian currency is expected to remain weak as crude oil prices continue to remain elevated, raising inflationary pressures.

"Traders may take cues from PPI (producer price index) data from US today and CPI data from US tomorrow. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 86.40 to Rs 86.85," Choudhary added.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.39 per cent lower at 109.38. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.10 per cent to USD 81.09 per barrel in futures trade.

In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 169.62 points, or 0.22 per cent, to settle at 76,499.63 points, while the Nifty rose 90.10 points, or 0.39 per cent, to 23,176.05 points.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 4,892.84 crore on Monday.

Government data released on Tuesday showed, wholesale price inflation rose to 2.37 per cent in December 2024, led by a spike in manufactured products even though prices of food items eased.

Retail inflation, however, declined to a four-month low of 5.22 per cent in December amid easing of prices in the food basket, giving headroom to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to reduce the key interest rate in upcoming monetary policy reviews, according to the data released on Monday.



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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Jaguar Land Rover and Tata Communications have strengthened their collaboration for connected car technologies, the companies said in a joint statement on Tuesday.

As part of the enhanced collaboration, Tata Communications will offer its MOVE platform to enhance JLR's connected vehicle ecosystem, transforming the driving experience for customers worldwide.

The partnership will empower JLR's next-generation software-defined vehicles with continuous connectivity and access to intelligent services even in the remotest locations across 120 countries, the auto maker said in a statement.

The latest tie-up is an extension of their existing partnership to future-proof the carmaker's digital transformation. Leveraging the MOVE platform, JLR's upcoming medium-sized SUVs built on the new electric modular architecture (EMA) will seamlessly transition between mobile networks and operators, enabling non-stop access to personalised connected services, such as media streaming, it said.

The platform will also enable greater and more secure data exchange between JLR and its customers' vehicles, delivering more efficient Software Over-the-air (SOTA) updates and supporting the rollout of evolving Advanced Driver Assistance Systems (ADAS), it added.

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India and Oman are holding the fifth round of talks for a proposed free trade agreement here to boost bilateral economic ties, an official said on Tuesday.

The two-day talks started on January 13, the official said. The negotiations for the agreement, officially dubbed as Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), formally began in November 2023. Oman is the third largest export destination among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

According to the think tank GTRI (Global Trade Research Institute), Indian goods worth USD 3.7 billion like gasoline, iron and steel, electronics, and machinery



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

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

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

A duty of 100 per cent is applicable on specific meats, wines and tobacco products. India already has a similar agreement with another GCC member UAE which came into effect in May 2022.

On the imports front, India's merchandise imports from Oman dipped to USD 4.5 billion from USD 7.9 billion in 2022-23. Key imports are petroleum products and urea. These account for over 70 per cent of imports. Other key products are propylene and ethylene polymers, pet coke, gypsum, chemicals, and iron and steel.

The bilateral trade stood has declined to USD 8.94 billion in 2023-24 from USD 12.39 billion in 2022-23. India's exports stood at USD 4.42 billion in the last fiscal.

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Weighing in on the 90-hour workweek controversy, ITC Ltd Chairman Sanjiv Puri said that it is more important for the workers to be aligned to the grander vision of the company rather than the number of hours put in.

Giving an analogy of many workers building a castle, he said, "If you ask a mason what he is doing, he might say he is laying a brick, another might say he is building a wall but some might say he is building a castle.

It is that vision that workers should have," he told PTI in an interview.

Asked if he is saying that



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

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

involved and kind of feel the urge amongst themselves to make a difference to the enterprise. That's how we look at it".

The cigarettes-to-consumer goods conglomerate allows a flexible work environment, including work from home on two days every week, he said.

ITC, he said, provides a lot of flexibility in working. "Also two days a week, you can work from home," he said.

"So it's not so much about, you know, really monitoring each individual's number of hours.

It's more about enabling individuals, helping them to actualise their potential, and then reviewing what goals

people have achieved. His comments follow a controversy SN Subrahmanyam, Chairman and Managing Director of India's largest engineering and construction company Larsen & Toubro Ltd, sparked on social media when he said employees should work 90-hour a week including on Sundays rather than sit at home.

"I regret I am not able to make you work on Sundays," Subrahmanyam said in an undated video of his discussion with staff.

"What do you do sitting at home? How long can you stare at your wife, and how long can the wife stare at the husband." The video, which was

circulated widely on social media platforms X and LinkedIn, led to heated debate about work-life balance.

"I know that he (Subrahmanyam) has been debated a lot, but let me tell you the philosophy with which you look at it," Puri said.

He then went on to explain how empowering the employees with the company vision and goal was important.

Vision, values and vitality are what ITC is all about, he added.

"So we put a lot of effort in making sure that everybody understands the vision of the enterprise. We use a part of the vision

and want to contribute to making the vision a reality. And we enable vitality by our processes, by the resources we provide, by the freedom to act, that we provide, the empowerment that we provide, which are very different and very clear goals for individuals to achieve, and these are the primary things that we look at," he said.

While Subrahmanyam's comments sparked a heated debate about work-life balance in the country, a Larsen & Toubro spokesperson last week said that the chairman's remarks reflect the company's "larger ambition".

"We believe this is India's decade, a time demanding

collective dedication and effort to drive progress and realise our shared vision of becoming a developed nation," the company had said in a statement.

L&T head's views drew criticism from some peers in the business community. RPG Group Chairman Harsh Goenka said longer working hours was a recipe for burnout and not success.

Subrahmanyam's comments followed Infosys co-founder Narayana Murthy's suggestion of a 70-hour workweek and Adani Group chairman Gautam Adani's "biwi bhaag jayegi (wife will run away)" remark if one spent more than eight hours at home.

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The rising duo of Tanisha Crasto and Dhruv Kapila have sparked renewed hope for India in mixed doubles badminton with a series of strong performances while enjoying every bit of their journey together. Before the two joined hands post the Paris Olympics, Jwala Gutta and V Diju were India's best mixed doubles pair, achieving a career-high world ranking of six. Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Ashwini Ponnappa also made significant strides before parting ways, with the former focusing on men's doubles alongside Chirag Shetty. "We played a couple of tournaments before the Olympics and saw a lot of potential in this partnership. I think it was a good decision for both of us to start this journey together," Tanisha told PTI. "Dhruv is a very talented mixed

doubles player. He has a great understanding of the game, and I enjoy playing upfront. It's a combination that works well and makes us a dangerous pair." Tanisha and Dhruv on Tuesday progressed to the second round of the India Open Super 750 tournament with a 8-21 21-19 21-17 win over Chinese Taipei's Chen Cheng Kuan and Hsu Yin-Hui. Interestingly, Tanisha, along with Ishaan Bhatnagar, had made a serious push for the Paris Olympics before an unfortunate injury derailed their plans. "Sometimes, setbacks lead to better opportunities. Mixed doubles is my main focus now. I'm not sure how long Ashwini will continue playing, so I'm fully focused on this event," said Tanisha, who competed in the Paris Games last summer. The duo had finished runner-up at Syed Modi Super 300 tournament last December and climbed 13 places to reach world



number 56. They also reached the semifinals of couple of Super 100 events in Vietnam and Guwahati last year. Both Tanisha and Dhruv are seasoned players with notable success at the highest level, albeit with different partners in women's and men's doubles. Dhruv, known for his mixed doubles style even in his junior days, initially played men's doubles with MR Arjun, with some success. However, an injury to Arjun led Dhruv to refocus on mixed doubles. "I wasn't fully into mixed doubles initially because I didn't have a partner, and everyone else was already paired up. Arjun and I were playing well, but eventually, I decided to concentrate on one discipline," Dhruv said. "Unfortunately, Arjun got injured, but he's fine now and playing with Vishnu." The return of renowned Malaysian coach Tan Kim Her

has further boosted their confidence. "He's been a great help to both Dhruv and me," Tanisha said. "He understands our weaknesses and helps us work on them together. It's very comfortable talking to him, and he helps us refine our game, both individually and as a pair. It's been really beneficial for us." As for filling the void left by Jwala-Diju, both Tanisha and Dhruv are cautious but optimistic. "We need to improve further. We can't set expectations too high just yet," Dhruv said. "Our focus is on this year. We're taking it step by step -- starting with performing well in Super 500 and 700 events. "We aim to reach the quarter-finals and semi-finals. We're not there yet, but we're learning from every tournament, and our short-term goal is continuous improvement over the next few months."



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

PTI ■ OTTAWA

Former England captain Casey Stoney said she's confident she can move Canada past the drone spying scandal that shook the women's national team at the Olympics last summer. Stoney was named head coach of Canada's women on Monday. She signed a three-year contract with Canada Soccer that runs through the 2027 Women's World Cup, with an option for 2028. Stoney takes over the Canadian team from Bev Priestman, who was fired in the wake of a drone surveillance scandal at last year's Olympics. "It's about now what we can do moving forward, how we can improve the team," Stoney said. "The team's done fantastic. I'm here to just support, make it better and make sure that the players are completely focused on what their job is, which is to win football matches." Stoney will formally take over Canada ahead of next month's Pinatar Cup in Spain. She most recently coached the San Diego Wave in the National Women's Soccer League and was named the league's Coach of the Year in 2022, the team's inaugural season. She was dismissed by the Wave last June in the midst of a seven-game losing streak. Kevin Blue, Canada Soccer CEO and general secretary, said the federation is

committed to learning from the past so that mistakes aren't made going forward. "This sort of humble approach about understanding what happened and learning from it and then continuing a agenda of change and reform is something that the federation is committed to," Blue said in a conference call with reporters Monday afternoon. "Hopefully bringing in people obviously like Casey, who is a world class coach with a strong values and character, is an example of what we're trying to do." Stoney appeared in 130 games for England as a player and was also captain of the Britain squad at the 2012 London Olympics. She played in three World Cups for England and won the bronze medal at the 2015 tournament in Canada. She also played in three Women's European Championships. "I think the fact that I played 18 years internationally really helps me with the players. I understand some of the things they've been through, some of the things they've faced. I've faced them in my own career," Stoney said. "I said to the players on Saturday morning, 'I'm a players' coach,' but I have trust in Kevin and the way he's leading this organization. I know that they've been through a troubled past, but I wouldn't have taken this job if I wasn't confident that it was moving in the right direction."

Ratchanok Intanon eyes Asian Games medal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Once a formidable force in world badminton, star Thai shuttler Ratchanok Intanon believes her on-court wizardry and handwork is a "god's gift" and she will continue to nurture her skills despite the challenges that come with aging. With the years catching up, Intanon's focus has shifted towards staying fit. She is eyeing a medal at the Asian Games and a spot in the top-8 of the world rankings. Intanon is part of a golden generation of players, including PV Sindhu, Carolina Marin, and Tai Tzu Ying, all of whom are in the twilight of their careers but are trying to find a second wind. The 29-year-old, a 2013 world champion, has faced setbacks in recent years, but her resilience shines through. After struggling for form, she marked a solid comeback by reaching the semifinals of the Malaysia Open—her first appearance at a Super 1000 event since June 2023. On Tuesday, Intanon showed she's still a force to be reckoned with, cruising into



the second round of the India Open Super 750 with a convincing 21-13, 21-15 win over Japan's Nozomi Okuhara, who herself is recovering from an injury and searching for past glory. "I failed in the Olympic Games, but I have to rise again," Intanon admitted, reflecting on her quarterfinal exit from the Paris Olympics. "I try not to think too much and just focus on getting back to my fitness. I know it's hard, especially as I get older with each passing year. But I do my best to take care of myself," she told PTI. "I trust my technical skills and my handwork, and I push harder to improve my fitness. Since last week, it's

been getting better, and I'm happy with my performance now." I still feel like I'm 18. While Intanon might be in the final stretch of her illustrious career, her approach to the sport remains youthful. "Everything feels different now," she says. "Badminton is something I've been playing since I was very young, so it becomes automatic. But the mental side also requires training, and for me, I put extra focus on my fitness. As it improves, my handwork becomes automatic again." I still feel young, like I'm 18 years old. I know all the other players are strong, but I try to change

my mindset and not think I'm too old or too slow. If I want to keep playing, I have to push harder and aim to get back into the top-8. That's my goal for this year." Her immediate focus is the Asian Games, where she is determined to bag her first individual medal. "I'm mainly focused on the next two years because my target is the Asian Games. I want to achieve a medal there, that's my main goal. As for the next Olympic Games, I'm unsure about my fitness, but I'll keep working hard and taking care of myself," she shared. While the younger generation is fast emerging, Intanon believes experience still gives them an edge. "It depends on mentality and whether you feel ready. If you want to continue, you have to give it 100%. I don't want to just play without a goal. I'm aiming to get back to the top," she said. "My friends, like Tai Tzu or Sindhu, are also recovering. Carolina Marin is still in her recovery phase, so I hope they all get better, and we can continue playing against each other. That would be very exciting for all of us," she added.



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

PTI ■ PARIS

Some of the medals from the Paris Olympics seem to be quickly losing their shine. The French mint told The Associated Press on Tuesday that it is replacing a number of medals from the 2024 Paris Games and Paralympics after athletes complained that they have already deteriorated — with some posting pictures on social media. The Monnaie de Paris declined to say how many medals have been returned, but French website La Lettre put the number at over 100. Contacted by the AP, the French Olympic committee and the IOC also would not reveal figures. In total, the French mint produced 5,084 medals for the Paris Olympic and Paralympic Games. "The Monnaie de Paris has taken the issue of damaged medals very seriously since the first exchange requests in August, and has mobilized its internal teams," the French mint said. "Since then, the company has modified and optimized its relative polishing process. The Monnaie de Paris will replace all damaged medals at the athletes' request during the first quarter of 2025." Parisian jewelry house Chaumet designed the medals, which were part of the Games' lasting legacy. A hexagonal, polished chunk of iron taken from the iconic Eiffel Tower was embedded in each gold, silver and bronze medal.

But concerns about their quality emerged before the Games had even ended last summer when American skateboarder Njah Huston posted a video showing how quickly his bronze medal had deteriorated. Many other athletes have since also complained. French swimmers Yohann Ndoye-Brouard and Clément Secchi recently posted images of their medals on social media, describing them as looking like "crocodile skin," or dating back to 1924. The IOC told the AP that Paris organizers are in contact with the national Olympic committees of the athletes concerned. It confirmed that the replacement process will start in the coming weeks, and that the French mint is working with Paris organizers to understand the circumstances and cause of any damage. "Damaged medals will be systematically replaced by the Monnaie de Paris and engraved in an identical way to the originals," the IOC said. The iron pieces embedded in the center of the Olympic medals each weigh 18 grams (about two-thirds of an ounce). They were cut from girders and other bits that were swapped out of the Eiffel Tower during renovations and stored for safekeeping, according to Joachim Roncin, head of design at the Paris Games organizing committee.

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

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Former world number one Rohan Bopanna and his new Colombian partner Nicolas Barrientos bowed out of the Australian Open men's doubles event with an opening-round loss to the Spanish team of Pedro Martinez and Jaume Munar here on Tuesday. Bopanna and Barrientos went down 5-7, 6-7 (5) in a match that lasted close to two hours. The 14th-seeded Indo-Colombian pair began on a promising note but faltered in crucial moments, allowing the Spaniards to capitalise and secure victory. Bopanna and Barrientos got off to a solid start, holding serve comfortably in the initial games. However, the Spanish pair



gradually gained momentum, showcasing consistency from the baseline and tactical net play. The decisive moment came late in the set when Martinez and Munar earned a crucial break to take the opener. In a roller-coaster second set, both the pairs pushed each

other to the limit. Martinez and Munar first cruised to a 5-3 lead and appeared poised to close out the match while serving for it. However, Bopanna and Barrientos staged a spirited fightback, breaking their opponents' serve to level the score at 5-5.

The set ultimately went to a tie-break in which the Spaniards kept their composure, edging past the 14th seeds 7-5 to clinch the match. The 44-year-old Indian had won the 2024 edition with his Australian partner Matthew Ebden. That historic victory made Bopanna, who was 43 at that time, the oldest man in the Open Era to win a Grand Slam title. However, the Bopanna-Ebden partnership concluded after the Turin ATP Finals in November last year leading to his new pairing with Barrientos. Earlier, India's top ranked singles player Sumit Nagal also made a first-round exit, losing to world No.25 Tomas Machac of the Czech Republic in straight sets on Monday.

Indian community playing big role in popularising kho kho in England

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

For teenage kho kho players from England, Jaian Saunders and Anya Shah, the traditional Indian sport is not just a means to win medals and popularise the game back home but also a way to remain connected to their roots here. Indian-origin players Janan and Anya are part of the 30-member England contingent touring India for the Kho Kho World Cup and say their adopted country has a competitive structure to rival India, a powerhouse of the sport. Jaian, 16, took up the sport because of his grounding in athletics. An accomplished 200m runner, he finished fourth in the U17 age-group national athletics championship and missed making the England team. But kho kho provided him another opportunity to remain connected with sports. "I developed a liking for kho kho through my Oshwal community. It

gave me the opportunity to play in the nationals. I made it to the England trials from the nationals, following which I was scouted by coaches. "I think, my sporty background, being an athlete and a sprinter, helped me in kho kho," said the teenager, proudly informing that his team had beaten Germany in the opening match of the World Cup at the IG Stadium. Jaian, whose grandparents moved to the UK from Gujarat, said England has a well-established structure, which is helping kho kho prosper. He said that the sport is played in almost all the top universities in the country and players, predominantly Indians, number in thousands. "We have a very competitive structure. We have communities playing the sport in almost every part of England... London, Leicester, to name a few." Jaian comes from the Oshwal community, which has 10 players



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

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

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

"I suppose 70 percent of the players are Indian origin and the rest are from different backgrounds. But they are all born in England," said Jaian, whose younger sister too wants to play kho kho competitively. Anya stated playing kho kho when she was nine years old and said that at 17 she feels she has been playing for ages. "I am 17 years old now. I took up the sport when I was nine, so have been playing it for quite some time," said Anya, whose team beat Australia in the World Cup opener. "I got inspired seeing my Indian friends playing the sport in the community. I thought let's give it a try and I really enjoyed it. My parent and grand parents moved to England from Jamnagar in Gujarat," said Anya, who too is from the Oshwal community and got selected into the England side through the national trials. While she cannot put a number on how many kho kho players are

there in England, but said they would be in thousands. "I have no idea how many women play kho kho in the country but we play the game all over the country. It could be in thousands. It is community and university-based. Even the top five universities in the UK play kho kho," she said. One of the major reasons for the sport becoming popular in England is the ease of playing it, said Anya. "It's easy, it's a fun game with very little equipment required. Besides, social media has played a huge role in popularising it. We are the first national kho kho team from England and we feel we are the big staking names," said the Economics and Physical Education student. She hoped that with kho kho's popularity growing in the country, the country will have better equipment in future. "We are not there yet, but hopefully next year we will have that equipment."

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

PTI ■ DUBAI

India pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah was on Tuesday named ICC Men's Player of the Month for December 2024 after his sensational performance during the recent tour of Australia for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. Leading India's attack single-handedly, Bumrah relentlessly kept Australian batsmen under intense pressure, claiming 22 wickets in three Tests in December last year at an outstanding average of 14.22.

He ended with 32 wickets in the five-match series which concluded on January 5. The first match was played in November.

His match-winning contributions included a nine-wicket haul in Brisbane and a five-wicket display in Melbourne as he edged out Australian skipper Pat Cummins and South African Dane Paterson for the award, stated the ICC.

He also reached a significant milestone, becoming the first



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

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

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

the first innings, keeping India within striking distance.

He followed this up with a sensational display in Brisbane, where his six wickets in the first innings dismantled Australia's batting order. Bumrah added three more scalps in the second innings to complete a nine-wicket match haul. His efforts ensured the rain-affected match ended in a draw, keeping India alive in the series.

The Boxing Day Test in Melbourne saw Bumrah deliver yet another stellar performance.

He picked up four wickets in the first innings, providing a rare bright spot in an otherwise lacklustre bowling effort by the Indian team.

He then secured a five-wicket haul in the second innings, bowling Australia out for 234. Despite his heroics, India's batting faltered, resulting in a 184-run defeat.

India lost the Border-Gavaskar Trophy 1-3. In a challenging tour for the Indian team, Bumrah emerged as the lone warrior, earning him the Player of the Series Award.



Real Kashmir FC hold fort against Sreenidi Deccan FC

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

Down to 10 men in the very first minute of the match, Real Kashmir FC held fort to settle for a 2-2 draw with Sreenidi Deccan FC in a crucial I-League clash that had everything from penalties and goals to a red card here on Tuesday.

Sreenidi Deccan took the lead twice in the match through Faysal Shayesteh (2nd minute) and Angel Orelie (15th) only to see Real Kashmir's Paulo Cezar (4th) and Muhammad Hammad (22nd) scoring timely equalisers.

Real Kashmir's Cameroonian recruit Aminou Bouba was shown the red card in less than a minute.

The draw meant Real Kashmir occupy the eighth spot in the table with 10 points from eight games.

Sreenidi Deccan, on the other hand, also have the same number of points after playing an identical number of matches but they see themselves at ninth spot because of an inferior goal difference.

The match got off to an intense start when Bouba was dismissed for a foul inside the penalty area, leading to Shayesteh converting a penalty in the second minute to put Sreenidi Deccan ahead. Contrary to expectations, the 10-man Real Kashmir side did not retreat but responded swiftly. In the fourth minute, a cleverly taken short corner

allowed Lalramsanga to assist Cezar, whose precise header restored parity.

Undeterred by the setback, Sreenidi Deccan regained the lead in the 15th minute. Following a series of passes that dissected the Kashmir defence, Orelie found himself with space to unleash a fierce shot that found the net, demonstrating the attacking prowess of the Deccan Warriors.

The persistent spirit of Real Kashmir shone through yet again as they equalised for the second time in the 22nd minute.

From a well-placed Lalramsanga free-kick, the Sreenidi Deccan keeper managed only a partial clearance, and Hammad was on hand to pounce on the rebound, driving the ball home to level the scores.

As the match progressed, both teams had opportunities to clinch the win. Sreenidi Deccan, inspired by their recent comeback victory against Aizawl FC, pushed hard.

Vanlaremdika struck the woodwork, and Munoz's header was brilliantly saved by the Real Kashmir goalkeeper, who also denied Orelie's long-range effort that rattled the crossbar. Despite playing with a man less for virtually the entire match, Real Kashmir's defence stood resilient, managing to hold off Sreenidi Deccan's late surges to ensure the points were shared.

SA20: MI Cape Town beats Paarl Royals



PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

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

the team to post a formidable 172/7. Hendricks was ably supported by Rassie van der Dussen (43 off 33 balls). The pair shared a 78-run partnership off 54 balls before the in-form Delano Potgieter smashed another 18-ball 29 to provide the late innings momentum.

The Royals' chase began positively with Joe Root (26) and Lhuan-dre Pretorius (26) smashing 38 runs in just the three overs.

However, the introduction of Kagiso Rabada into the attack reaped immediate rewards with the fast bowler dismissing both Root and Pretorius within a couple of overs of each other. Both were wicket maiden overs from Rabada.

The Royals never recovered from the double blow with MI Cape Town's spin twins George Linde and Rashid Khan adding to their woes.

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

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Star Australian batter Steve Smith has described the elusive 10,000-run mark in Tests as a "different beast" after falling just one run short of touching it at his home ground of Sydney in the fifth and final game against India during which the milestone weighed heavily on his mind.

Smith needed 38 runs to achieve the landmark but managed 37 during the game that Australia won by six wickets to reclaim the Border-Gavaskar Trophy after more than a decade. "I don't read too much into stats and stuff, but, 10,000 is a bit of a different beast," Smith told SEN 1170 Breakfast.

"It probably was (on my mind), to be honest. Normally I sort of don't buy



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

"I knew I needed 38, and all I could actually picture trying

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

"But, it is what it is, fortunately, we were able to win that game in the end, so

it didn't really matter," he said. Australia will next tour Sri Lanka for a two-match Test series beginning in Galle on January 29 and Smith hopes to do it on day one of the series itself if Australia get to bat first.

"It would have been great to have been able to do it in Sydney in front of all my friends and family because you're joining a pretty elite group there I suppose, but it wasn't to be.

"As a kid, I never would have dreamt of that, I dreamt to play cricket for Australia and have a career playing for Australia, but to have been able to get to this mark, it's a dream come true in a way," he added.

Smith would become the 15th overall and only fourth Australian Test player ever to achieve the CSK mark.

Struggling Rohit trains with Mumbai team ahead of Ranji resumption

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Embattled India captain Rohit Sharma practised with the Mumbai team here on Tuesday as the side geared up for the resumption of Ranji Trophy from January 23 but there was no clarity on whether he would play for the side in its upcoming fixture.

The 37-year-old, who endured a horror run with the bat in the national team's tour of Australia recently, took part in a morning practice session which lasted a couple of hours at the Wankhede stadium here.

"As is the process and routine owing to the gaps between tournaments, the management speaks with the players about their availability," a Mumbai Cricket Association official told PTI.

"Rohit will also be approached around the time of selection for the Ranji Trophy game against Jammu



and Kashmir from January 23," he added when asked about Rohit's availability for the clash.

Rohit batted with Mumbai stalwart and his India teammate Ajinkya Rahane during the session.

His participation in the match may not be clear yet but it is learnt that Rohit will continue to practice with the team.

The past few weeks have been tumultuous for Rohit. He managed just 31 runs across three Tests during his time Down Under and was forced to drop himself from

the series-deciding fifth and final Test in Sydney due to his poor form.

Rohit handed over the leadership duties to Jasprit Bumrah in that game, sparking widespread speculations about his future. However, in an interview to the host broadcaster of the series, Rohit asserted that he was not going anywhere.

Despite his future as a red-ball cricketer hanging by a thread, Rohit attended a review meeting on Sunday to assess the team's performance.

He was joined by head coach Gautam Gambhir and BCCI's new secretary Devajit Saikia during the deliberations. Mumbai will play their match against J&K at the MCA-BKC ground and the game holds significance as far as advancing to the knockouts is concerned. Rohit last played for Mumbai in a Ranji game way back in 2015 against Uttar Pradesh.

Gambhir's position as head coach to reevaluated post Champions Trophy

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gautam Gambhir's position as head coach will be "reevaluated" on the basis of India's Champions Trophy performance next month amid concerns that there is discontent in the dressing room due to his push to end the long-prevalent "superstar culture" in the team.

Since Gambhir took over in July last year, the Indian team has lost six out of 10 Tests and also a bilateral ODI series in Sri Lanka.

The results have left Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma's international future in significant disarray thanks to their own poor form.

But Gambhir's position has also become slightly shaky. Adding to the drama is his speculated rift with prominent players during the Border-Gavaskar Test series in Australia which India lost 1-3. "If India doesn't do well in the Champions Trophy, the head coach's position could become untenable. Yes, his contract runs till the 2027 World Cup



but the process of evaluation continues.

"Sport is result-oriented and till now, Gambhir hasn't given any tangible results," a senior BCCI source told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

There has already been a review of the team's performance in Australia by the BCCI. It is understood that Gambhir and senior players aren't on the same page on the issue of team culture. "Gambhir wants to end the superstar culture that has been prevalent for so many years

now. As captain of Kolkata Knight Riders in 2012, he had dropped Brendon McCullum from the playing XI for the IPL final against CSK.

"He has come here to dismantle the superstar culture and that's what has caused discomfort for some playing members," a source, who has seen Gambhir's functioning closely, said. He cited another instance from his Delhi playing days to explain Gambhir's mindset.

"Once, as Delhi Ranji captain, Gambhir decided that they

will play home matches at the Roshanara Ground in Delhi North-West where the pitches were green-top.

"But one huge superstar, who was also out of the Indian team, wanted to play the games at the Jamia Milia Islamia ground, which was closer to his south Delhi residence. Gambhir turned him down. Similarly, in the Indian team, he doesn't want star culture to breed," the person added.

It is learnt that the head coach was not pleased with how some star players gave specific demands about hotels and practice timings during the tour of Australia. But, on the other side, senior players have felt a lack of communication from his end.

Selection committee's take Amid this ongoing tussle is the view of the national selection committee, which does not want the head coach to have too much of a say in selection matters. A former selector said Gambhir has shown shades of mercurial former coach Greg Chappell in his approach.

The Australian, who came amid much fanfare, left in chaos after developing differences with senior players over his training methods.

"Either you be like a Ravi Shastri, who would be media-friendly, give those sound bites propping up players making them look like alpha males," said the former selector, who toured a lot during Shastri's tenure as coach.

"Or be like Rahul Dravid, Gary Kirsten or John Wright, who would remain aloof, letting the players hold the limelight."

"The 'Chappell Way' doesn't work in India. Gambhir or Shastri or Dravids will go but players will stay," he added. The BCCI brass is also upset with how Gambhir's personal assistant shadowed the team everywhere in Australia.

"Why was his PA sitting in the car specified for national selectors? They can't even discuss things in private with an unknown third person in the car. Why was he allotted space in the BCCI's hospitality box in Adelaide?" an irritated BCCI official said.

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

PTI ■ RAJKOT

Dominant India will fancy their chances of completing a clean sweep of the women's ODI series against Ireland in the third and final match here on Wednesday, having recorded two convincing wins in the preceding games.

With another power-packed batting performance, the Indian team will be aiming to continue their impressive run and finish on a high note.

Pratika Rawal, after scoring her third half-century in just four innings, will be eager to translate her start into a

maiden hundred. Her blistering opening partnerships with skipper Smriti Mandhana have been the biggest takeaway of the series.

The duo added 156 runs for the first wicket in their previous outing, marking their third century-plus stand in five innings.

Mandhana's consistency at the top continues to be a major highlight for India as the flamboyant left-hander has carried on her form across formats from the West Indies series.

Harleen Deol, who initially struggled for momentum, found her rhythm later in the

innings, scoring an important 89.

Thanks to Jemimah Rodrigues, who displayed patience and composure before accelerating in the final stages of the innings, India smashed their highest-ever ODI total of 370/5 in the last game.

Promoted to No. 4 in Harmanpreet Kaur's absence, Rodrigues showed maturity after getting a reprieve on 34, and it took her just 28 balls to reach her second fifty.

"It was an added responsibility... Initially I showed a lot of patience, which was again a big positive for me because it was



important for me to spend time there to get those runs," Rodrigues said.

"And you know, I was getting the runs. But I was not spending enough time to

make it bigger. So I was happy I could do that today." Seasoned batter Tejal Hasanbis also made a fine comeback with an unbeaten fifty in the opening ODI.

In the absence of big hitters like Shafali Verma and Kaur, who has been rested, the series also highlighted the performance of the emerging talents with Pratika making the most of it.

India's bowling though has raised some concerns, as the team has struggled to take wickets consistently in home conditions and allowed Ireland to post 254/7 in pursuit of 371.

While India are missing

Renuka Singh, the injury to Pooja Vastrakar has compounded their misery. Deepti Sharma, who played in her 100th ODI in the last match, has been the standout bowler with four wickets at 19.50, while the likes of Priya Mishra, Sayali Satghare, Titas Sadhu have not been able to impress.

The Irish batting has largely revolved around the trio of skipper Gaby Lewis, Christina Coulter-Reilly, and Leah Paul, each of whom has posted a half-century.

However, the Irish fielding has been a cause for concern with the team conceding unnecessary runs.

Teams (from): India: 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.

Ireland: Gaby Lewis (C), Ava Canning, Christina Coulter Reilly, Alana Dalzell, Laura Delany, Georgina Dempsey, Sarah Forbes, Arlene Kelly, Joanna Loughran, Aimee Maguire, Leah Paul, Orla Prendergast, Una Raymond-Hoey, Freya Sargent, Rebecca Stokell.

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