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INSIDE

WORLD 9
ELON MUSK SOFTENS STAND
ON H-1B VISA PROGRAMME,
CALLS FOR 'MAJOR REFORMS'

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AMRIT BHARAT USHERS IN 2025



Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

Pak opens Shaheed Bhagat Singh Gallery at Poonch to tourists

PTI ■ LAHORE

Pakistan's Punjab government has opened to tourists the Bhagat Singh Gallery at the historical Poonch House here, where the independent freedom fighter's trial was conducted some 93 years ago.

The gallery houses historical documents, including pictures, letters, newspapers, details of trial and other memorial articles related to his life and freedom struggle. Punjab Chief Secretary Zahid Akhtar Zaman inaugurated the gallery on Monday.

"Tourists will have access to the gallery under an agreement between the



departments of industry, commerce and tourism of the Punjab government," Zaman said, adding that the historical building of Poonch House has been restored to its original form.

"The gallery showcases Bhagat Singh's struggle for independence," he said.

Pakistan's Punjab Archives Department in 2018 for the first time had displayed some records of the legendary freedom fighter's case file, including his execution certificate, letters, photographs and newspaper clippings and other material. Singh, 23, was hanged by British rulers on March 23, 1931 in Lahore, after being tried under charges for hatching a conspiracy against the colonial government. The case was filed against Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru for allegedly killing British police officer John P Saunders.

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Manipur CM says sorry for the ethnic conflict; Opp asks to quit

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Tuesday apologised to the people of the state for the ethnic conflict occurring there since May 2023 and appealed to "forgive and forget" the past.

He also said "Peace is being restored in Manipur, and the only solution lies in discussion and dialogue, which the Central government has already initiated," while addressing a news conference in Imphal. However he came under attack of the Opposition leaders who said the CM failed to safeguard lives and livelihood of people and should, therefore, resign. Nearly 250 people, so far, have died in the violence.

The CM's regret came couple of days after former Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla was appointed as Governor of Manipur.

"This entire year has been very unfortunate. I want to say sorry to the people of the state for what's been happening today, since last May 3. Many people lost loved ones. Many people left their homes, I feel regret. I apologise. But now, I hope, after seeing the last three to four months progress towards peace, normalcy will be restored in the state in 2025," Singh said. sporadic violence since May 3, 2023, between the majority Meiteis and the Kukis over quotas and economic benefits. The ongoing violence has killed over 200 people and displaced thousands.

The Centre has deployed forces in vulnerable zones bordering the hill and valley districts, leading to a dip in incidents of firing in peripheral areas.

The Chief Minister said 2,058 displaced families have been resettled in their original homes in Imphal West, Imphal East, Kangpokpi, and Churachandpur. To curb violence along the national highways, the government has deployed 17 and 18 additional companies of security personnel along NH-2 (Imphal-Dimapur) and NH-37 (Imphal-Silchar via Jiribam), respectively.

"Whatever happened has happened... I want to appeal to all communities to forgive and forget our past mistakes and start life afresh by living together in a peaceful and prosperous Manipur," he said.

Singh said firing incidents have declined in the



Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh addresses a press conference PTI

state over the last 20 months since the ethnic conflict began in May 2023.

"From May to October, 2023, 408 firing incidents were reported. From November 2023 to April 2024, there were 345 firing incidents, whereas from May this year till now, 112 firing incidents were reported," he said.

He said that of all the looted weapons, 3,112 have been recovered and 2,511 explosives have been seized during the period. The chief minister further said that 625 people have been arrested and 12,047 FIRs registered so far. More than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and adjoining hills-based Kuki-Zo groups since May last year.

Meanwhile, Manipur, which has been witnessing prolonged ethnic violence between majority Meitei and tribal Kuki communities, accounted for about 77 per cent of the total violence in the entire northeastern region in 2023, according to the latest annual report of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

In 2023, Manipur witnessed an increase in violent incidents owing to the prevailing ethnic strife and the resultant increase in the casualties of civilians and security forces personnel as compared to 2022.

The state accounted for about 77 per cent of the total violent incidents in Northeastern region in 2023, according to the MHA annual report. Among the total 243 violent incidents occurred in the Northeast, 187 took place in Manipur.

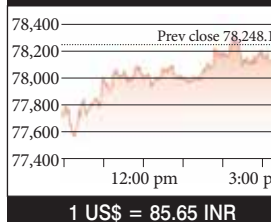
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the pioneer

wishes its readers
HAPPY NEW YEAR
2025
As the offices of The Pioneer will remain closed on Jan 1, the next issue of the newspaper will be available on Jan 3, 2025.

MARKETS

SENSEX 78,139.01 ↓ -0.14%



WEATHER

LUCKNOW
MAX 14.1°C(-7.0)
MIN 12.0°C(+4.6)

India ready to support its citizen in Yemen



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India on Tuesday said it is extending all possible help to explore relevant options in the case of an Indian nurse facing death sentence in Yemen.

Nimisha Priya, hailing from Kollengode in Kerala's Palakkad district, has been reportedly handed capital punishment for allegedly murdering a Yemeni citizen.

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) official spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said New Delhi is extending all possible help in the matter.

"We are aware of the sentencing of Nimisha Priya in Yemen. We understand that the family of Priya is exploring relevant options," Jaiswal said. "The government is extending all possible help in the matter," he added. Jaiswal was replying to a media query.

Reports said Priya was handed capital punishment by a trial court in 2020 and Yemen's Supreme Judicial Council upheld the verdict in November 2023. Yemen's President Rashad al-Alimi has reportedly approved Priya's death sentence. She is in prison since 2017.

Priya was arrested for the alleged murder of Yemeni national Talal Abdo Mehdi in July 2017. A trial court in Sana'a sentenced her to death in 2020 and her appeal was dismissed by Yemen's Supreme Judicial Council in November 2023.

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Congress to file cases against Delhi CM, says Sandeep Dikshit

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Former MP and senior Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit on Tuesday lashed out at Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) supremo Arvind Kejriwal, calling him a "pathological liar" and said he will file defamation cases against Delhi chief minister Atishi and AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh over their allegation against him of taking money from the BJP.

"A few days ago, the Delhi CM said that we took money from the BJP. After this Press conference, I will file a criminal and civil defamation case against (CM) Atishi and Sanjay Singh. I will ask for Rs 10 crore and out of that money, I will donate Rs five crore to Yamuna cleaning and the remaining half will be donated to clean the polluted air in Delhi," he said. They used to say that they have increased sewage treatment by 1.5 times in Delhi. "When the Congress lost the elections, the sewage treatment capacity was at 604 MGD and it remains the same today. The former chief minister lies that he has increased sewage treatment work," Dikshit alleged.

The Lieutenant Governor took a review in 2023 and it was found that the pollution effluent going into Yamuna has doubled in the last seven



Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

to eight years, he said. The Congress leader said they have also claimed that they have saved money in construction of flyovers. Dikshit is son of former Delhi chief minister Sheila Dikshit who served as CM from 1998 till 2013. In 2013, Dikshit lost to Arvind Kejriwal in the New Delhi constituency in the election that witnessed a Congress rout. "The initial estimate of Madhuban to Mukarba Chowk flyover by Sheila Dikshit's government was Rs 422 crore, but we built it at Rs 297 crore. The former government estimated the construction of Mangolpuri to Madhuban Chowk at Rs 423 crore, we built it at Rs 323 crore," Dikshit said, adding that they have given five to seven examples.

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LG confront Atishi's temples demolition 'act'

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In yet another round of confrontation between the AAP-led dispensation and the Raj Niwas, chief minister Atishi on Tuesday raised concerns over the order for the demolition of multiple religious structures including temples and Buddhist places of worship in the city, and urged Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena to reconsider the orders.

Meanwhile, the Lieutenant Governor's office refuted the allegations saying neither are any temples, mosques, churches or any other place of worship being broken/demolished, nor has any file to this effect come. In a statement, the Lieutenant Governor's office said the chief minister is playing cheap politics to divert attention from her's and her predecessor Chief Minister's failures. The latest exchange of letters comes amid growing political tensions between Atishi and the Lieutenant Governor. Earlier, in a separate letter, Atishi had criticised the LG's office for acting as a proxy for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Delhi.

In a letter addressed to Saxena, Atishi said that the Religious Committee had decided to demolish several temples and Buddhist structures across Delhi, including those held dear by the Dalit community and demolition of these structures would hurt the



religious sentiments of communities. Atishi wrote, "It has been decided by the Religious Committee - on your directions, and with your approval - to demolish multiple religious structures across Delhi. Atishi, in her letter, said, "It has been brought to my attention that the Religious Committee has ordered the demolition of numerous religious structures all across Delhi, in a meeting on 22nd November. Until last year, all decisions of the Religious Committee would be sent to you, via the CM and the Minister (Home), Delhi. As elected representatives who are constantly in touch with the people of Delhi, we would ensure that no religious sentiments were hurt."

However, in an order issued last year your office stated that demolition of religious structures is a matter related to 'public order', and does not fall under the purview of the elected government and will be

directly under the purview of the Hon'ble LG. Since then the work of the Religious Committee has been directly monitored by you. All files of the Religious Committee are routed from the Home Department to the LG, completely bypassing the CM and Minister (Home), the letter said.

She further said, "It has been decided by the Religious Committee on your directions, and with your approval to demolish multiple religious structures across Delhi. As you can see the list of religious structures to be demolished includes many temples, and Buddhist places of worship that are revered by the Dalit community. These included temple situated near Nallah Market at West Patel Nagar, temple at Dilshad Garden, statue at Sunder Nagri, temple at Seema Puri, temple at Gokal Puri and temple in side of New Usmanpur MCD flats near."

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Punjab farmer to comply with SC, as per condition

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Punjab Government on Tuesday informed the Supreme Court that farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who has been on an indefinite fast for over a month, has agreed for medical aid given the Centre accepted his proposal to hold talks. A vacation bench of Justices Surya Kant and Sudhanshu Dhulia took note of a plea moved by Punjab government seeking an additional three days to comply with SC's December 20 order.

"...As per the negotiators there is a proposal given by the farmers to the Central government that in case they get an invite for a talk, Dallelwal is ready to take medical help as desired," Punjab advocate general Gurminder Singh said, therefore, the state government was seeking some more time and work positively towards compliance of the

directions." The bench said, "We will not comment on what's going on as far as negotiations or your law and order is concerned. If something happens, which is acceptable to both sides and all stakeholders concerned, we will be equally happy. At the moment, we are only concerned with the compliance of our orders. If you want more time, we in peculiar circumstances are inclined to grant you some time." Singh agreed with the bench on the point that no comments should be made on the negotiations at this stage and sought some time.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre and Haryana government, said he did not have any instructions on this issue. Punjab AG said the intervenors and negotiators had tried complying with the court directives by engaging with the farmers in a dialogue.

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Anji Khad bridges the Kashmir-Kanniyakumari gap

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

With the successful load tests with freight trains and trucks on Indias first cable stayed Anji Khad railway bridge, all eyes are set on the visit of the Commissioner of Railway Safety (CRS) to conduct a final inspection of the 17-km long Katra-Reasi section ahead of connecting Kashmir valley with the rest of the country. The bridge is a part of the 326-km rail line connecting Udhampur to Baramulla via Srinagar. More than two decades in the making, the delayed construction of the Anji Khad bridge in Jammu's Reasi district is a major rail link to

seamlessly connect Kashmir to rest of India.

The final nod to launch the train services will be given by the Commissioner of Railway Safety after the inspection. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to inaugurate the first Vande Bharat train from Delhi to Srinagar. The much-awaited inspection visit will likely be scheduled in the second week of January 2025.

With the launch of the Vande Bharat train services the accessibility to the beautiful Kashmir Valley will improve further. The Vande Bharat Sleeper train will cover a distance of over 800 kilometers, in under 13 hours.



Last week, Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw also posted videos of the load tests with freight trains and trucks on the Anji Khad cable-stayed

bridge on X (earlier Twitter). According to official sources, a freight train loaded with 3,300 tons of weight was brought to the cable bridge

from the Reasi railway station while later 57 dumpers (trucks) were placed on an additional route built along the railway track with each

dumper loaded with 9 tons of boulders, totaling 513 tons. The freight train and dumpers were on the cable bridge for nearly two hours

with a combined weight of over 33,500 tons. After two hours, all the dumpers were removed completing the necessary safety protocol. The most challenging task between the 17 km long Katra Reasi section was the completion of T-33 tunnel. The last leg of the 17 km long section of the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla rail link was completed on December 13. "Historic milestone; final track work on the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link is complete. The ballastless track work for the 3.2 km-long Tunnel T-33, located at the foothills of the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine and connecting Katra to Reasi,

was completed," Railways Minister said in a statement. Considered an engineering marvel, next to the world's highest rail bridge over the Chenab River in Reasi's Kouri village, the cable-stayed rail bridge has 96 cables. The total length of cable strands is 653 km weighing 848.7 MT. The bridge connects the T2 tunnel on the Katra side and the T3 tunnel on the Reasi side and has a single-line railway track and a 3.75 metres wide service road. The bridge is 725 metres long, including a 473 metres long asymmetric cable-stayed bridge balanced on the axis of a central pylon of height 193 metres from the top of the foundation.

NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS

Devotees flood UP's religious hotspots

PTI ■ AYODHYA/MATHURA/
VARANASI/MIRZAPUR

As the New Year approaches, Uttar Pradesh's iconic religious destinations — Ayodhya, Varanasi and Mathura — are experiencing an overwhelming influx of devotees. With enhanced security measures and detailed crowd management plans in place, these holy cities are prepared to accommodate the huge number of pilgrims flocking to temples and sacred sites for a spiritual start to 2025. Ayodhya is witnessing a massive surge in devotees ahead of the New Year, particularly with the newly consecrated Ram temple attracting thousands eager to seek blessings from Lord Ram. The hotel accommodations in Ayodhya and nearby Faizabad are completely booked and the temple trust has extended the "darshan" hours to manage the expected crowd. "We are ready to welcome the devotees and all our rooms have been reserved till January 15," said Ankit Mishra, owner of a hotel. While the Hindu New Year is celebrated around March-April, many devotees opt to visit on the first day of the English calendar year for a glimpse of Ram Lalla. "They wish to start the year with blessings from the deity," explained Ramakant Tiwari, a

Party time for youth in city, family affair for others

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

People in the city rang in the New Year with excitement and energy on Tuesday, as celebrations filled the air despite the chilly weather. Hotels, clubs, and resorts were packed with people enjoying special packages offering unlimited food and drinks. The streets were alive with people dancing and greeting one another. Youth gathered in large numbers at popular spots like 1090 crossing and Hazratganj crossing, while some took the opportunity to

visit temples to mark the occasion. Others ventured into bustling market areas to join in the festivities. Sushmita Banerjee, a student, said, "We are going to a hotel for the gala dinner and celebrations. The best part will be the company of my friends," she said. For Rupali Srivastava, a housewife, the celebration was more intimate. "We are celebrating at home with a home-cooked dinner, making dishes like fried fish and baked chicken, and cutting a cake. It is peaceful and away from the chaos of hotel parties," she explained.

Vimal Tewari, another student, said he would be having a blast with his friends by ordering food from outside. "The evening has been full of fun, and we're planning more for New Year's Day," he added. A senior psychologist commented that the New Year brings a sense of renewal and optimism. "It's a time for fresh beginnings, to leave the past behind and embrace change. The energy of the moment encourages people to make resolutions, though many may not follow them," she said.

local priest. This New Year marks the first since the Ram temple's consecration, making it a particularly significant occasion. Ayodhya Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Rajkaran Nayyar confirmed robust security arrangements across key religious sites like the Ram temple, Hanumangarhi and Guptar Ghat. Varanasi is also bracing for an unprecedented number of visitors this New Year. To handle the influx, the Kashi

Vishwanath Temple has banned "sparsh (touch) darshan" from December 31 to January 1. The visitors will be allowed to view the deity from a distance to avoid overcrowding. The police have implemented extensive security measures, with 45 duty points across major locations, including Assi Ghat and Sankat Mochan Temple. Kashi Zone Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Gaurav Bansal said the NDRE, Water Police and PAC teams

have been deployed at key points. With an estimated five to seven lakh visitors, the temple area has been divided into five sectors and 12 quick reaction teams are on standby to handle any emergency. Mathura-Vrindavan is also seeing an enormous crowd of devotees. The temple authorities have urged the elderly, sick and children to avoid visiting during peak time. "We advise the devotees to assess the crowd before visit-

ing to prevent inconvenience," said Munish Sharma, the manager of Banke Bihari Temple. The temple has implemented a strict one-way entry and exit system to prevent jostling. To manage the influx, the security personnel have been increased and heavy vehicles have been banned from Vrindavan. E-rickshaws have been introduced to transport the visitors to the temples. The police have set up barriers and deployed officers to ensure smooth movement and safety, with special parking arrangements for the visitors arriving from different routes. The district administration in Mirzapur has made special arrangements to accommodate the expected influx of devotees at Maa Vindhyavasi Temple. Vindhyachal Temple, revered as the Adi Shakti Peeth, holds immense spiritual significance. According to local MLA Ratnakar Mishra, over four to five lakh devotees are expected to visit the temple on the first day of the new year. The local administration, recognising the surge in numbers, has deployed additional security measures, including 14 Inspectors, 85 Sub Inspectors, 360 Constables, and specialized forces at the Ganga Ghats. Extra parking arrangements and barriers have been set up to manage the crowd.

PNS/PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Large swathes of Uttar Pradesh experienced intense cold, with the maximum temperature dipping by more than 5 degrees Celsius in at least 50 districts, the Met office said on Tuesday. The intense cold conditions are expected to continue till Wednesday, it added. The minimum temperature was recorded at 13 degrees Celsius. With overcast skies and the day temperature hovering near the 15 degrees Celsius mark, the temperature difference between day and night came down significantly. The difference between day and night temperatures typically hovers between 5 and 7 degrees Celsius. Explaining the unusual weather pattern, Atul Kumar Singh — a senior scientist at the Met office in Lucknow — said, "Due to stability in the lower troposphere, radiational heating during the day and radiational cooling of the night have been blocked. This has led to a reduced temperature difference between day and night." The ongoing cold conditions were exacerbated by cold northwestern winds sweeping in from the mountainous regions, leading to a marked drop in day temperatures. However, the night temperatures at most places have remained higher than normal



at above 10 degrees Celsius. Singh noted that the current cold spell was expected to persist till Wednesday. "After the fog layer dissipates under the influence of the next western disturbance, temperatures are likely to rise again." With the cold intensifying, the administration has advised people to take precautions to guard against the chill, especially during the night. Tuesday was the second day in succession in Lucknow when the sun made no appearance even as chilly winds added to the cold weather conditions on the eve of New Year. Senior scientist at the Met department, Mohammed Danish, said the cold day con-

ditions occurred because of the uplifted fog in the sky. There was only a slight difference between the maximum and the minimum temperature recorded in Lucknow. The maximum temperature was 15.2 degree Celsius, while the minimum temperature settled at 12 degree Celsius. Meanwhile, doctors asked people, especially those suffering from cardiac conditions, to not step out in the cold weather and wear extra layers of woollens. "Children should also avoid getting exposed to the cold weather conditions," a doctor said, adding home-cooked food and hot soups should be consumed to keep the body warm.



NOTICE

I have Lost My Original Sale Deed of PVT Factory Plot no of Arazi no.858, (kha) & 1135 (kha) Factory Area Jajmau Distt. Kanpur Nagar from my office Mariyam International. Its use will be Illegal Owner KHALID MAQBOOL

NOTICE

I Priyanka Kumari W/o HAV Umesh Kumar army no. 3007969F 4 Rajput R/o Samastipur, Bihar, in my husband army service record my name entered Priyanka and my DOB entered 08/01/1988 which is incorrect my correct name is Priyanka Kumari and my DOB is 01/01/1990 vide affidavit dated 28.12.2024 before notary public. Lucknow.

NOTICE

I, Rajesh Kumar Verma S/o Bhagauti Prasad Verma R/o 354 Taqi Nagar Unnao, I have lost my original deeds my House Moti Nagar Unnao. Executed by Ramadhin in favour Bhagauti Prasad Urff Bhagwati Prasad Regd. at SRO, Unnao in Vol. 303 Sl. 1111 dt. 14.12.1961 & B-1 Vol. 309 Sl. 1041 dt 12.10.1962. I have not used the said sale deeds in any financial institution.

NOTICE

I Magan Kanwar M/o LNK Puran Singh army no. 3010948N, 4 Rajput R/o Sikar, Rajasthan, in my son's army service record my DOB entered 01/01/1953 which is incorrect my correct DOB is 01/01/1963 vide affidavit dated 28.12.2024 before notary public. lucknow.

NOTICE

I, No. 9426251H, RFN, Ramesh Singh son of Mohan Singh, Unit 6/11 GR C/o 56 APO hereby declare that in my Service Record my son's name inadvertently mentioned as AADITTY SINGH while his correct name is ADITYA SINGH which may be recorded in my Service record.

NOTICE

Mr. Sunil Kumar son of Mr. Baburam (Borrower) have agreed to create mortgage in respect of House No. 764/9 Siddharth Nagar, Taudhakpur, Kanpur Nagar Built over Plot No. 9 Situated at Bingsawan Kanpur Nagar admeasuring 41,805 sq. Mts with HERO HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED, and ORIGINAL Sale deed dated 21/01/2016 executed by Smt. Nishi Bhadauriya through her constitute attorney Sri. Ashish Kumar in favour of Smt. Archana Diwakar which is registered in Book No. 1, Vol. No. 18453 on Pages 49 to 76 of Serial No. 16301 at the office of Sub Registrar Zone-3 Kanpur Nagar And Original Power Of Attorney dated 26-06-2016 executed by Smt. Nishi Bhadauriya In Favour of Sri Ashish Kumar which is registered in Book No. 4, Vol. No. 250 on Pages 85 to 104 at Serial No. 576 at the office of Sub Registrar Fifth, Lucknow are lost, If any person having any claim against the said Property can contact to me, within 10 days. Anand Kumar Gupta, Advocate Office- Chamber No. 4, Motilal Adhivakta Bhawan Civil Court Compound, Kanpur Nagar. Mob-9044013993

Police investigate family link in murder of snack seller

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In the case of the murder of a snack seller in Thakurganj, the police investigation has turned towards a family member, but they are treading cautiously before making any revelations. "Looking at the crime scene, it seems that whoever is the accused, they had knowledge of the entire house. The police will interrogate them on Tuesday," a police officer said. Sources said since the main gate was closed, it seemed that after the incident, the accused must have escaped through the roof. Apart from this, there are many questions which the police will investigate. On Monday, the body of Shatrughan Rathore was found in his house in suspicious circumstances. Shatrughan used to run a shop selling khasta. Shatrughan (50), who was a

resident of a locality near Bright Career School in New Haiderganj Colony, is survived by his wife Rakhi Rathore and four daughters. His shop is located near Punjab National Bank in Rajajipuram (D-Block). On Sunday night, he closed the shop and returned home. After this, he went to sleep in his room after having dinner. His wife was sleeping with their four daughters in another room. At around 1.30 am, his wife heard screams from the other room. She ran to go out of the room, but the door of her room was locked from outside. She then called her brother Ramu Rathore, who reached the spot, climbed from the house next door and opened the door. He took out his sister and niece. Seeing Shatrughan lying unconscious, he was taken to a hospital, where doctors

declared him dead. The police handed over the body to the family after the post-mortem examination. In the initial investigation, the cause of death has been found to be strangulation. There was a towel under Shatrughan's head on the bed where he was lying unconscious. In such a situation, it is expected that his throat was strangled with the same towel. The accused left through the roof as they are not visible in the CCTV footage installed nearby. In such a situation, all suspicion is on someone close. DCP (West) Vishwajeet Srivastava said investigation was underway. "Till now, it is understood that someone close has committed the murder. The family will be questioned on Tuesday. After this, the investigation will proceed further," he added.

Fake social media accounts of DGP created to collect funds

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Cyber criminals have created a fake Instagram account and YouTube channel impersonating Uttar Pradesh's Director General of Police (DGP) Prashant Kumar to solicit donations for victims of the recent truck accident on Ajmer Road in Jaipur, an officer said here on Tuesday. The scammers used QR codes to collect the funds, exploiting the tragedy that killed 20 people and left many more severely injured. Following the incident, which occurred on December 21, the fraudsters took advantage of public sympathy, crafting a fake Instagram profile named prashantk_dgp.up and using the DGP's photo to make it appear legitimate. They also created a fraudulent

THE SCAMMERS USED QR CODES TO COLLECT THE FUNDS, EXPLOITING THE RECENT TRAGEDY IN JAIPUR THAT KILLED 20 PEOPLE AND LEFT MANY MORE INJURED

YouTube channel under the name Prashant Kumar IPS, promoting the same fraudulent cause. The scammers have also set up a website for donations and are sending QR codes to potential victims. In response to the incident, DGP Prashant Kumar has ordered a thorough investigation. Sub-Inspector Ghulam Husain lodged an FIR at the cyber police station in Lucknow, and

the cyber cell has begun tracking the fraudsters. The truck accident in Jaipur, caused by an LPG tanker explosion, resulted in a devastating loss of life and widespread destruction. The fraudsters have taken advantage of the accident's scale to deceive generous individuals hoping to help. Cyber police revealed that the fraudsters are asking for donations to help victims of the accident by directing people to scan QR codes for payments. The Instagram photo used by the perpetrators is an 11-month-old image of DGP Kumar, taken when he assumed the position of acting DGP on January 31. His tenure is expected to last until May 2025. Authorities are working swiftly to track down the criminals and bring them to justice.

Woman alleges rape, fraud by constable by hiding his real name

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A nursing teacher has accused a constable of rape and duping her of Rs 55 lakh under the pretext of marriage. A complaint in this regard has been filed at the Chinhat police station, an officer said on Tuesday. The victim alleged that the accused, constable Badshah Khan from Shahjahanpur in HarDOI district, threatened to make an obscene video of her viral. She further claimed that Khan initially introduced himself as Amit to deceive her and lured her into a relationship with false promises of marriage. According to the victim, she first met Khan in 2014, after which they became friends and began meeting regularly. Khan, a 2015-batch constable, is currently posted in Shahjahanpur. She alleged that he exploited her both physically and financially by repeatedly promising to marry her. The victim said Khan continuously demanded money from her, both online and in cash. When she discovered his real identity, she confronted him, but he silenced her by reiterating his promise to marry her. She also alleged that Khan married another woman on February 14, 2020. When she opposed the marriage, he assured her that he would divorce his wife and marry her instead. However, she claimed that Khan, along with his brothers Sahil Khan and Azim Khan, extorted Rs 55 lakh from her on various pretexts. On December 27, 2024, the accused allegedly demanded an additional Rs 10 lakh. When she refused, Khan threatened to release her obscene video and harm her family. Chinhat Inspector Bharat Pathak confirmed that a complaint has been received and that legal proceedings are underway.

Dalit youth beaten to death, cousin injured

Muzaffarnagar (PTI): A Dalit youth was beaten to death and his cousin seriously by some men after a dispute in Paldi village here on Tuesday, police said. Superintendent of Police (City) Satyanarayan Prajapat said that some people have been detained in connection with the murder of 20-year-old Sunny. Sunny was returning to his village from Khatauli along with his cousin Shilu on a motorcycle. A quarrel broke out between Sunny and the village head's son who was travelling in a car, the police said. The argument escalated and the two brothers were attacked with lathis by the accused in which Sunny died and Shilu got injured, they said. The body has been sent for post-mortem examination. Meanwhile, security has been tightened in the village and extra police force have been deployed in the area as a precautionary measure. Efforts are on to nab the accused, police said.

MAN KILLED BY SON-IN-LAW

Aligarh: A middle-aged man was bludgeoned to death in Aligarh district allegedly by his son-in-law and his family, police said. According to Iglas Circle Officer (CO) Bhawar Diksha Arun, the incident occurred on Monday at Nagla Balram. The CO said the victim, Nisar Khan, a resident of village Rigaspuri, received a distress call from his daughter Asma, who had been married three years ago. She told her father that her husband and his family were torturing her for bringing "insufficient dowry". Accompanied by other family members, Nisar Khan immediately rushed to the village where his daughter resides. Upon arriving at Nagla Balram, it was decided to hold a village panchayat to amicably resolve the issue. "However, during the proceedings, tempers flared and the victim and his family members were brutally attacked by his son-in-law Sameer and half-a-dozen others, who used lathis and bricks to assault the father. Nisar Khan succumbed to his injuries before he could reach the nearby health centre," said the CO.

Thieves decamp with ornaments worth several lakh from jeweller's shop

Lucknow (PNS): Thieves made off with ornaments worth several lakh from a jewellery store in the Krishna Nagar police station area on Monday night. When the jeweller reached his shop on Tuesday morning, he found the lock broken. The thieves had broken the glass inside the shop and committed the theft. The victim informed police and also gave a written complaint to the Krishna Nagar police, who are investigating the matter. As per reports, the victim, Ramendra, runs his shop located in Ali Nagar Sunhara in the Krishna Nagar police station area. In his complaint, he stated that he had closed the shop on Monday evening. When he reached the shop on Tuesday morning, he found the lock of the shutter broken. The glass inside the shop was shattered. Upon entering the shop, it was found that about 3 kg of silver and 60 grams of gold had been stolen. Krishna Nagar police station incharge PK Singh said the thieves had broken the lock of Pushpanjali Jewellers at night and committed the theft. The value of the stolen goods has not been disclosed in the complaint. A case has been registered, and an investigation is ongoing. A spokesperson said four teams have been formed to crack the case, and the police are taking help from surveillance teams and the BTS method (a method used to check the active mobile phone numbers at the time of the incident).

Youth arrested for raping, forcing minor to convert

Gorakhpur (PTI): A 20-year-old man was arrested for allegedly raping a minor girl and forcing her for conversion, police said on Tuesday. The accused was identified as Akbar Hussain, a resident of Kushinagar district, police said. Circle Officer Abhishek Pratap Ajeya said Hussain had abducted, raped and forced a Hindu minor girl for conversion. Based on the complaint lodged by the girl's father, a case was registered against him under sections 137(2) (kidnapping), 87 (kidnapping, abducting or inducing woman to compel her marriage, etc.) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Religious Conversion Act, on December 15, Ajeya said. On Monday evening, police arrested the accused and additional charges under section 64 (punishment for rape) and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act were added, he added.

Fire breaks out in mattress warehouse

Lucknow (PNS): A fire broke out in a mattress warehouse in the Rahim Nagar area on Tuesday afternoon. When smoke was seen rising from the warehouse, the shop owner promptly alerted the fire brigade. Residents living nearby evacuated their homes and gathered on the road. Six fire engines were dispatched and worked for four hours to control the blaze. Goods worth lakhs were destroyed in the fire. Reports said that Mahmood Ali (60), the owner of Mona Furniture showroom at Rahim Nagar crossing, operates the mattress warehouse behind the showroom. Around 3 pm, smoke suddenly started billowing from the warehouse. Initially, employees attempted to control the fire but were unsuccessful as it spread rapidly. The fire department was notified, and a fire tender was sent from Indiranagar. As the fire grew, additional fire tenders

were called in. The thick smoke inside the showroom made it difficult for firefighters to enter. CFO Mangesh Kumar said once the area was cleared, firemen were able to enter and began the rescue operation. Dr Ajay Shankar from Lokbandhu Hospital, who lives next to the showroom, reported that his wife called him around 3 pm to inform him about the fire. Upon returning home, he saw smoke coming from the warehouse. His family evacuated the house and gathered on the road. The smoke filled the entire house, and it took approximately two hours to clear it. Meanwhile, workers formed a human chain to transport the mattresses outside. However, about 100 mattresses from various companies were destroyed in the fire. To facilitate the relief work, the local electricity supply was temporarily cut off.

SHUBHAM HOUSING DEVELOPMENT FINANCE CO. LTD.
Corporate Office : 425, Udyog Vihar Phase IV, Gurgaon-122015 (Haryana)
shubham Ph. : 0124-4212530/31/32, E-Mail: customercare@shubham.co website : www.shubham.co

POSSESSION NOTICE (FOR IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES)

Whereas the undersigned being the authorized officer of the Shubham Housing Development Finance Company Limited (hereinafter called Shubham) under the Securitisation 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 demand notice calling upon borrowers to repay the amount within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

The borrowers having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrowers and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described hereinbelow in exercise of powers conferred on him under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with rule 8 of the Security Interest Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

The borrowers in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealing with the property will be subject to the charge of Shubham Housing Development Finance Company Limited for an amount detailed below 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. Details are as below:

S. No.	Loan No./Borrower(s), Co-Borrower	Demand Notice Amount	Date of Demand Notice	Secured Asset	Date of Affixation
1.	0GKP2306000005064810, Ram Prasad, Manju	Rs. 14,87,354/-	23-09-2024	House No. 378D Khasra No 140/1min Village Humayunpur Uttari Tappa- Kasba Pargana Haveli Tehsil- Sadar, Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh- 273017	28-12-2024
2.	0BSR2401000005077317, Rahul Singh, Harvul Khatna	Rs. 8,90,611/-	23-09-2024	Part of Gata no. 278 G Village Bharana, Pargana & Tehsil Sikandrabad, Distt. Bulandshahr, Uttar Pradesh-203205	28-12-2024
3.	0LKW2106000005037044 & 0LKW2102000005035069, Mohd Rafiq, Mohd Rafiq	Rs. 7,00,968/- & Rs. 8,48,233/-	23-09-2024	H.No. 551 GA/134A (Old H.No. 551 GA/92) Old Sardari Khera Ward Om Nagar Alambagh, Lucknow Uttar Pradesh-226018	28-12-2024
4.	0ALB2312000005074179, Suresh Chandra, Sushma Sharma	Rs. 7,68,851/-	23-09-2024	House Built on Plot Part Of Arazi No. 8, Min Situated At Village Chak Gulam Mohammad Karchhna Prayagraj Uttar Pradesh-211008	28-12-2024
5.	0GKP2304000005061708, Suraj Kumar Jayaswal, Sheela Devi	Rs. 8,55,043/-	23-09-2024	House on Plot Area 40.5 Sq. Mtrs. Situated at Nagar Panchayat Kaptanganj Tappa- Parvarpar Tehsil Hata, Distt. Kushinagar, Uttar Pradesh- 274301	28-12-2024
6.	0LKO2203000005045329, Chand Mohammad, Shabana Bano	Rs. 27,99,123/-	23-09-2024	Flat No. 304, 3rd Floor, Constructed on land of House No. 12, Known as "Falkon Apartment" Nagar Nigam No. 21/ 011D, Area Measuring 780 sq.ft., Situated at Dalibagh, Butler Road Ward- Rajaram Mohan Rai, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh-226001	28-12-2024
7.	0ADR2305000005062797, Dhananjai Tiwari, Kiran Tiwari	Rs. 6,04,128/-	22-10-2024	House No. 624B/166/52/03, Mohalla Chinhat Ward Chinhat Tehsil & Distt. Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh-226001	28-12-2024
8.	0LKI230700000506734, Ramanand Gupta, Aradhana Srivastav	Rs. 18,55,780/-	22-10-2024	House No 545KA/1/DK-213, Built On Part Plot No.-324, Part Of Khasra No.- 1333 SA, Situated At Village - Sarosa Bharosa Pargana - Kakori Tehsil - Sarojini Nagar, Distt.- Lucknow Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh-226009	28-12-2024

PLACE:- GURGAON, DATE :- 31-12-2024

Authorized Officer,
SHUBHAM HOUSING DEVELOPMENT FINANCE COMPANY LTD.

CM calls for highest standards of cleanliness, hospitality

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday said that Prayagraj will set a benchmark in cleanliness and hospitality. Addressing a press conference after the review meeting for Maha Kumbh preparations in Prayagraj on Tuesday, he appealed to the local people to uphold the highest standards of cleanliness and hospitality during the grand event.

Extending his New Year wishes, the chief minister remarked, "With everyone's cooperation, the honour of hosting the Maha Kumbh with full grandeur will not only reflect the efforts of the double-engine government but also the pride of the people of Prayagraj. I appeal to the residents of Prayagraj to seize this opportunity to surpass the remarkable example of cleanliness and hospitality they set during the 2019 Kumbh. This time too, our Prayagraj will shine as a model of cleanliness and exemplary hospitality."



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath inspects preparations ahead of Maha Kumbh 2025 in Prayagraj on Tuesday

made within the city to establish holding areas both at railway stations and in their vicinity, he pointed out. Additionally, the Mela Authority has identified and developed parking spaces across 5,000 acres, located 2 to 5 kilometres from Sangam along key routes to Prayagraj. These parking areas are equipped with checkpoints, robust security arrangements, and public address systems to ensure smooth and safe operations during the Maha Kumbh, he said. The chief minister shared that during the 2019 Kumbh, the number of pontoon bridges was increased to 22, and for the upcoming Maha Kumbh, this has been further raised to 30.

Of these, 28 have already been completed, with the remaining two set to be finished within the next three to four days. A 12-kilometre-long temporary ghat is also being prepared, with most of it nearly ready. Additionally, a permanent ghat is under construction near Arail and is expected to be completed within two to three days. He highlighted that approximately 530 kilometres of checkered plates have been laid across the area, along with a 450-kilometre pipeline for supplying clean drinking water. The fair is now almost fully prepared, with more than 7,000 organisations participating and over 1.5 lakh tents arranged by the Mela Authority. The chief minister remarked

that both the nation and the world are eager to witness this monumental spiritual and religious gathering in Prayagraj. "This Maha Kumbh is a rare and auspicious event occurring after 144 years, and people from across the globe want to experience it firsthand," he said. He also emphasised that the "double-engine government is working tirelessly" to ensure all necessary arrangements are in place for this grand occasion. CM Yogi said that the first holy bath of Paush Purnima will take place on January 13, followed by the second bath on Makar Sankranti (January 14), which will also be an Amrit Snan. On January 29, the significant Mauni Amavasya bath

will be held, expected to draw the largest gathering, with an estimated 6 to 8 crore devotees participating in it. The chief minister highlighted the importance of this holy time, mentioning that Basant Panchami on February 3 will mark another major bath. Additionally, two more baths are scheduled on February 12 and February 26, making a total of six holy baths during the event. CM Yogi emphasised that there will be no protocol restrictions on the day of the main bath, ensuring an inclusive atmosphere. He also shared plans to arrange floral showers to honour revered saints and welcome devotees on this auspicious occasion.

'Duty of admn to ensure safety, well-being of Kumbh visitors'

PNS ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Highlighting that the safety and convenience of every pilgrim and tourist at Maha Kumbh is the government's foremost priority, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath emphasised on Tuesday that it is the duty of the administration to ensure the well-being of everyone—whether they are Indians or foreigners, NRIs, or residents of Prayagraj—without any discrimination. The chief minister stressed the need for further strengthening disaster management, cyber security, fire safety, ghat security, and emergency medical services during Maha Kumbh, adding that all security agencies must remain vigilant and active round the clock.

Underscoring the importance of enhanced intelligence measures, the chief minister directed the effective deployment of anti-drone systems and called for raising public awareness about cyber threats, including identifying and taking action against fake websites and apps exploiting the Maha Kumbh theme. He also expressed concern over reports of fraudulent activities by anarchist groups or individuals collecting money in the name of Maha Kumbh. He instructed the police to identify and take strict action against those involved in such frauds. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, during his visit to Prayagraj to review preparations for the Maha Kumbh, assessed the progress of work from all departments in detail. He instructed the authorities to expedite the police verification

of all street vendors, auto-rickshaws, and e-rickshaw drivers. Additionally, he emphasised the need for systematic traffic management on all inter-district routes leading to Prayagraj.

The chief minister also stressed the importance of curbing fake news on social and digital media. He remarked that individuals opposed to Indian culture and tradition are spreading misinformation about the Maha Kumbh and called for a strong response to counter such propaganda. Mela Adhikari Vijay Kiran Anand informed the chief minister that land allotment for Akharas, Mahamandaleswar, Khalsa, Dandibara, Khakchowk, and other institutions has been completed, while the process for allotment to Prayagraj and other new institutions is ongoing. Necessary resources are being provided to meet their requirements. Expressing satisfaction with the progress, the chief minister emphasised the importance of respecting the sentiments of Akharas, saints, and sadhus. He instructed officials to maintain regular communication with them to address their concerns. Yogi directed construction of a new bathing ghat in the Arail area within three days. He also announced that approximately 550 shuttle buses would operate during the Maha Kumbh starting January 5, ensuring no driver or conductor works continuously for more than eight hours. Additional provisions were instructed for the convenience of divyangians, the elderly, and women. Furthermore, the chief minister

revealed plans for flower showers from helicopters on all six major bathing festivals and directed officials to finalise the necessary arrangements for the same. Officials informed CM Yogi that preparations for the Maha Kumbh are progressing swiftly, with the entire police force and sanitation workers expected to be deployed in Prayagraj by January 3. Additionally, all doctors and paramedical staff have already been assigned. Key infrastructure updates include completion of 28 pontoon bridges, 520 km of checkered roads, 610 signages, 494.30 km of DIP line for drinking water, 304 km of GIP line, 4,270 drinking water stand posts, over 176 km of drainage clearance, 54,700 streetlights, 173 km of HT line, 1,280 km of LT line, and 206 electricity substations. For healthcare preparedness, 3,305 beds have been reserved in Swaroopnari Nehru Hospital, Sapru (Bailey) Hospital, Motilal Nehru Hospital, Dufferin Hospital, and private hospitals. A 1,200 sqm jetty has been constructed, all riverfront roads are ready, and 3,339 poles for thematic lighting, seven façade points, and more than 90,000 toilets have been installed, officials added. The chief minister instructed officials to complete any remaining work within the stipulated time. To achieve the vision of a 'Swachh Mahakumbh - Swachh Prayagraj', he urged cooperation from the residents of Prayagraj, saints, and citizens. He also directed officials to launch a campaign to ensure the city is entirely encroachment-free before the Maha Kumbh.

Swami Adhokshajanand Devtirth lauds govt

PTI/PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR/ LUCKNOW

Ahead of the commencement of the Maha Kumbh 2025, Govardhanmath Peethadheeshwar Jagadguru Shankaracharya Swami Adhokshajanand Devtirth has lauded the administration for creating an environment conducive to spiritual practices, the UP government said in a statement on Tuesday. The Maha Kumbh will take place in Prayagraj from January 13 to February 26. Swami Adhokshajanand Devtirth said "the spiritual power emanating from Maha Kumbh will establish Sanatan Dharma worldwide". "UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, being a saint himself, has been personally overseeing the arrangements, strengthening the faith and morale of devotees. This has fostered an ideal atmosphere for 'sadhana', 'yagya' and 'tapasya', he said. The Shankaracharya further emphasised that the rituals and prayers conducted during Maha Kumbh would bless not only the state but also Adityanath personally. Lauding the current leadership, Swami Adhokshajanand said, "Our religious traditions were neglected. Today, the leadership

rooted in Sanatan Dharma has restored its sanctity, and this transformation is evident here," he said. The Shankaracharya said only a ruler with humility and faith is accepted by the pilgrimage. Arrogance and irreverence have no place here, he added. "As much as the chief minister has devoted himself to our dignity and welfare, we too will offer prayers for his prosperity, welfare, economic growth and continued success," the seer said. Speaking about the challenges faced by Sanatan Dharma, he said, "Demonic tendencies have long sought to harm Sanatan and spread confusion. At times, they appear victorious, but whenever such a crisis arises, God incarnates to restore balance. "This Maha Kumbh will empower the followers of Sanatan Dharma, spreading its essence globally. The spiritual power emanating from Maha Kumbh will establish Sanatan Dharma worldwide," he said. Speaking on the development of religious places in the country and the state, he noted that a truly civilised ruler always seeks to understand past injustices and addresses the wounds inflicted on the cultural and religious heritage of the people. "Our Gods, Goddesses, deities,

monasteries, temples and sacred rivers like the Ganga and Yamuna, along with the Himalayas, are integral to our faith. Their honour brings happiness to the society. There was a time, when our temples and monasteries were desecrated, and our cultural symbols were deeply hurt," he said. But when demonic forces prevail, the Shankaracharya said, divine powers also inevitably rise. These powers manifest as saints, ascetics, scholars, Acharyas and sometimes as great rulers, he added. "Today, we live in a time of joy, with a ruler who is favourable to our faith, values and deeds," Jagadguru Shankaracharya said. Meanwhile, mats made from banana leaves and sourced from Assam are set to be a unique attraction at Swami Adhokshajanand's camp during the Maha Kumbh. Already 151 mats have arrived at the camp in Sector 18, along with a significant quantity of coconuts and raw betel nuts (tambul) from the North East. These items will be used in the havan ceremonies at the yagyashala during the Maha Kumbh. Explaining the process behind the mats, Swami Adhokshajanand said banana trees are cut, opened, dried and then carefully joined to create mats. He said this is the first

time such mats have been brought to the Maha Kumbh, adding a distinct element to the event. In addition to the supplies from the North East, coconuts and betel nuts are also being brought in large quantities from other states to support the rituals and ceremonies, the UP government said in the statement. **BJP MP PRAISES YOGI** Bharatiya Janata Party MP Dinesh Sharma praised Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for boosting economic growth through religious tourism ahead of the Maha Kumbh 2025 in Prayagraj, calling it an "unprecedented" effort that deserves recognition. Sharma's comments came in response to Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav's concerns about the government's preparedness for the event. Responding to Akhilesh's statement about the alleged lack of preparedness for Maha Kumbh, the BJP MP said: "The last Kumbh Mela held under the leadership of CM Yogi was hailed worldwide. This time, around 40 crore people are expected to visit... After the Kumbh, don't call him 'Yogi Baba', but call him 'Arth Prabandhan Baba' (Economic Management Baba).

Akharas, Kalpvasis to get subsidised ration during Maha Kumbh 2025

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

In a move to support Akharas, institutions, and Kalpvasis during Maha Kumbh 2025, the Uttar Pradesh government has launched a subsidised ration scheme, offering flour at Rs 5/kg and rice at Rs 6/kg. In the Kumbh Mela area, 138 fair price shops have been set up for smooth distribution, officials said here. Dedicated to making Maha Kumbh 2025 a grand and spectacular event, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has instructed officials to make comprehensive arrangements, with special attention to the food requirements of devotees, they added.

The government has effectively opened its "food granary" for the Maha Kumbh, arranging for 1.2 lakh white ration cards for Kalpvasis to access subsidised items. Kalpvasis, Akharas, and institutions will benefit from significantly reduced prices on essential supplies. Flour will be available at Rs 5 per kilogram, rice at Rs 6 per kilogram, and sugar at Rs 18 per kilogram, officials said. Additionally, the government has allocated 800 permits to Akharas and institutions. In addition to subsidised rations,



Pilgrims receive food ahead of Maha Kumbh 2025, at Sangam in Prayagraj on Tuesday

CM Yogi has ensured comprehensive facilities for cooking food during Maha Kumbh 2025, they added. Agencies have been appointed in all 25 sectors to provide new gas connections to Kalpvasis, Akharas, and institutions, along with seamless refilling services. Kalpvasis with their own empty gas cylinders can also avail of refilling facilities. Special arrangements have been made to accommodate three types of gas cylinders—5 kg, 14.2

kg, and 19 kg—to cater to varying needs. To ensure uninterrupted food supply, 138 fair price shops have been set up in the Maha Kumbh area. Additionally, five food storage warehouses have been prepared, stocked with 6,000 metric tonnes of flour, 4,000 metric tonnes of rice, and 2,000 metric tonnes of sugar. These facilities aim to prevent any inconvenience for Akharas, Kalpvasis, and institutions. Under this initiative, each

Kalpvasi will be provided with 3 kg of flour, 2 kg of rice, and 1 kg of sugar. This ration facility will be available from January through the end of February. The 'One Nation One Card' scheme will also be implemented to ensure accessibility for all eligible beneficiaries. To further streamline the distribution process, each shop has been stocked with 100 quintals of goods to meet the daily needs of participants, officials said.

Govt intensifies drive to make UP poverty-free

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

With the Uttar Pradesh government intensifying the zero-poverty campaign, the government has set the target to make the state poverty-free by October 2, 2025. To meet this objective, the government has deployed digital technology, and a mop-up app is being used to survey extremely poor families. The government has decided to extend the benefits of the welfare schemes to every poor family in UP, officials said here. To achieve this target, extensive surveys and verification processes have been initiated, forming a cornerstone of the 'Zero Poverty' campaign. This initiative underscores the government's commitment to transforming Uttar Pradesh into a poverty-free state, officials said. The government is conducting a state-wide survey with the assistance of Panchayat Sahayaks, Rozgar Sevaks, BC

Sakhis, and self-help groups (SHGs) to identify 15 lakh extremely poor families. Priority is being given to families who are homeless, reside in kutcha houses, are landless, or depend on daily wages for their livelihood. Once the survey is completed, the collected data will undergo verification by village-level committees to ensure accuracy. This ambitious initiative is leveraging digital technology for efficient execution. A mop-up mobile app is being used to conduct surveys and verify data. Key details such as Aadhaar numbers, bank account information, and photographs of the beneficiaries are being uploaded through this app. After the survey, members of village-level committees, including the village head, former head, school headmaster, self-help group leaders, ASHA workers, and Anganwadi workers, will verify the selected beneficiaries.

The government has deployed digital technology, and a mop-up app is being used to survey extremely poor families, the government has decided to extend the benefits of the welfare schemes to every poor family in UP

At least three out of five committee members must approve the selection. To ensure transparency, all records will be accessible on the mop-up app and the Zero Poverty Portal. CM Yogi Adityanath aims to

improve the quality of life for every poor family in Uttar Pradesh by ensuring they benefit from government schemes, officials noted. In the first phase of the plan, priority is given to families who have not yet received any benefits. The chief minister has emphasised the importance of timely implementation and reaching every needy individual. The administration is incorporating Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds alongside government resources to support its ambitious poverty eradication plan. Partnerships with various companies and organisations will help uplift the living standards of identified impoverished families. At the village level, panchayat assistants, who are residents of their respective gram panchayats, are playing a key role in this initiative. Following CM Yogi's directive, these assistants are

actively contributing to freeing their communities from poverty, officials said. The government has also addressed their concerns, including the prompt clearance of pending honorariums, they added. The list of selected families will be displayed at Gram Panchayat Secretariats and other public places and will also be available on the Zero Poverty Portal, ensuring transparency. With a target to make Uttar Pradesh poverty-free by October 2, 2025, the government has instructed officials and employees at the grassroots level to ensure the campaign's complete success, officials said. Panchayati Raj Minister Om Prakash Rajbhar stated that the plan aims to bring positive changes to the lives of the state's poorest families by providing them with access to government schemes and improving their quality of life.

बैंक ऑफ बड़ोदा Bank of Baroda		Regional Office, Kanpur Metro Region: 118/330, 1st Floor, Gunti No. 5, Kaushalpur, Kanpur - 12
Possession Notice (Branch : Birhana Road, Kanpur)		
Whereas the undersigned being the Authorised Officer of Bank of Baroda 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 calling upon the borrower & guarantor to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being with in 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.		
The borrower/guarantor having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrowers/guarantors and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/her under section 13 (4) of the said Act read with rule 8 & 9 of the said rules.		
The borrower/guarantor in particular and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the first charge of Bank of Baroda for amount & interest thereon.		
The borrower's attention is invited to provision of sub-section (8) of 13 of the act, in respect of time available to redeem the secured assets.		
Sl No.	Name and Address of Borrower/Guarantor & Description of Mortgage Property & O/S Amount as per Demand Notice/Demand Notice Date & Possession Notice Date	
1.	Borrower : Shri Alok Singh Bhadauria S/o Shri Amar Singh Bhadauria, R/o : E-416, Block-EWS, Phase-7, Scheme Swarn Nagari, Swarn Jayanti Vihar, Kanpur Nagar. Demand Notice Date: 10-04-2024 • Date of Constructive Possession: 26-12-2024 Property : Land and Building Builtover Plot No. E-416, Block-EWS, Phase-7, Scheme Swarn Nagari at Swarn Jayanti Vihar, Kanpur Nagar in the name of Shri Alok Singh Bhadauria S/o Shri Amar Singh Bhadauria, Area : 35.04 Sq. Mtr., Bounded-North : 4.50 Mtr. Path, South : 4.50 Mtr. Wide Road, East : Plot No. E-415, West : Plot No. E-417. Outstanding Amount as per Demand Notice : Rs. 26,91,305.66 + Intt. +Others Charges Total Dues Amount as on Dated 22-12-2024 : Rs. 29,23,543.57 + Intt. +Others Charges	
2.	Borrower : M/s Baba Automobile, Proprietor : Shri Uttam Meer Khan S/o Shri Tajmer Khan, Address : 111/1, Harsh Nagar, Kanpur Nagar, Guarantor : Shri Nihal Khan S/o Shri Tajmer Khan, R/o : 111/1, Harsh Nagar, Kanpur Nagar. Demand Notice Date: 17-01-2024 • Date of Constructive Possession: 26-12-2024 Property : Land and Building at Part of House No. 112/146, Benajhabar, Arya Nagar, Kanpur in the name of Shri Uttam Meer Khan S/o Shri Tajmer Khan and Shri Nihal Khan S/o Shri Tajmer Khan, Area : 47.49 Sq. Mtr., Bounded-North : 6 Ft. Gali then House No. 112/148, South : House of Kalo Pakistanis, East : Gali No. 3 then House No. 112/150, West : Part of House No. 112/146-B Outstanding Amount as per Demand Notice : Rs. 14,04,692.67 + Intt. +Others Charges Total Dues Amount as on Dated 24-12-2024 : Rs. 15,12,883.32 + Intt. +Others Charges	
Date : 26-12-2024 Place : Kanpur Authorised Officer		

Maha Kumbh a manifestation of entire Hindu society's faith: VHP leader

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

In the successful organisation of Maha Kumbh, Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) along with the government is working hard for the success of this event so that the message of this festival reaches the country and the world, said VHP central organisation general secretary Milind Parande while talking to the press representatives here on Tuesday. He said that the VHP is constantly making efforts in this direction as the festival of Maha Kumbh is the world's largest religious and spiritual fair which is held on the holy banks of Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati in Prayagraj, in which 40 crore devotees from all over the world are expected to gather, where in this festival of social harmony, forgetting everything, everyone will take a dip in the confluence together with the objective of 'We Hindus are one'.



VHP central organisation general secretary Milind Parande addressing a press conference in Varanasi on Tuesday.

Maha Kumbh is a manifestation of the faith of the entire Hindu society and Kashi is the spiritual and cultural capital of the world, so the organisation expects the cooperation and contribution of the society in this pious work. He said the activities of the organisation will be conducted from January 13 to February 28 in the VHP camp of Maha Kumbh, in which religious leaders and revered saints of 150 sects from all over the country will participate. The VHP leader

said that in the proposed meeting of the Central Guidance Board, in which there will be discussion and guidance on family enlightenment, social harmony, conversion, Hindu birth rate and decreasing Hindu birth rate. "Saint youth conference and sadhvi saint conference will be organised. This year a large number of saints and acharyas from the southern part of India will come for Ganga bath, along with a large number of saints will arrive from the North-East provinces. Besides, senior teachers of Buddhism from the country and abroad and people engaged in the service of VHP will arrive. Tribal and forest-related society will also arrive in large numbers", he said. According to him, in view of social harmony, all sections of the society will arrive in large numbers. A big conference of organisations and workers working in the field of cow protection and cow conservation through VHP will be organised. A conference of thousands of workers and organisations

working among all castes with the sentiment 'We are Hindus first' will be organised in the camp. A huge Mata-Bhagini conference will also be organised on ideas like family enlightenment, love jihad, erosion of Hindu rituals, women's respect, women power, said the VHP leader. A conference of thousands of workers engaged in the work of stopping the conversion of Hindu society across the country and welcoming people of other religions who want to return to Hinduism, a conference of organisations and workers working in the field of Ved and Sanskrit promotion will be organised, said Parande, adding that in the VHP camp, the daily Kumbh bath, the service offerings of the common devotees and religious leaders who take the Ganga bath will be organised continuously through the camp. Along with this, he said that Sita Rasoi Bhandara will also be organised every day in the Maha Kumbh Mela. Regional organisation secretary Gajendra was also present in the press conference.

Jewellery, cash stolen from shop

Kanpur (PNS): Jewellery worth around ₹1.25 crore and approximately ₹1.25 lakh in cash were stolen from a jeweller's shop in Sarafa Bazar o Nawabganj police area on Monday night. The jeweller along with family members had stayed overnight at his sister-in-law's place. The incident came to light on Tuesday morning when he reached to open the shop. Police along with forensic team and sniffer dog squad rushed to the spot and carried out investigation. On the ground floor of his three-storied house, Jugal Kishore runs a jewellery shop in the name of 'Shri Swami Darbar Hari Shanker Saraf'. His sister-in-law Kajol who lives in Gumti is pregnant. His wife Naina along with children Vivan (10) and Kunj (1) had been staying there since December 28 to take care of her. Jugal Kishore also used to visit Gumti after closing his shop and return home by the night. On Monday also he went to Gumti and stayed there overnight due to severe cold. On Tuesday morning, he found the shop burgled. He said thieves broke into his shop through the adjacent vacant plot and stole gold and around ₹1.25 lakh cash from there. Miscreants also took away some gold coins and dress made of golden wire of the deities from the shop. Inspector Nawabganj Dinanath Mishra said CCTV footages are being examined and claimed that the case will be worked out soon. **CHAMPIONSHIP:** The three-day UP State Close Squash Championship would be organised here at the TSH courts from January 2 to 4. Addressing mediapersons, UPSA secretary Vinay Pandey said around 100 players, including 23 of Kanpur, from all over the state divided in seven age group categories (U-11, 13, 15, 17, 19, Men and Women) will be seen in action.



A devotee performs 'Ganga Aarti' after taking a holy dip in the Ganga river during a cold winter morning on Tuesday ahead of Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 at Sangam in Prayagraj

Railways prepare plan for entry & exit at all stations

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Railways has prepared a plan for entry and exit at all stations based on the number of devotees coming on the main bathing festivals — Makar Sankranti, Mauni Amavasya, Basant Panchami and Maghi Purnima. Public Relations Officer (PRO) of Prayagraj division of NCR, Amit Singh said on the day of main bathing festivals, entry at Prayagraj Junction will be allowed only from the city side i.e. platform number 1 and exit will be allowed from the Civil Lines side only. The entry to Chheoki station will be done only from the COD route connecting Prayagraj-Mirzapur highway and exit will be allowed only

from GEC Naini Road. Similarly, entry to Subedarganj station will be only from Jhalwa, Kaushambi Road and exit will be from GT Road. The entry to Prayag station will be from Chatham Line, platform number one and exit will be from Rampriya Road platform No 4. But reserved passengers will be allowed entry only from the second entrance from Sahason Marg. At Phaphamau station, entry will be allowed only from the second entrance towards platform No. 4 and exit will be from Phaphamau market. Passengers will be allowed entry to Rambagh station only from the main entrance from Hanuman Mandir Chauraha and exit will be from Lowther Road. Apart from this,

Prayagraj Sangam station will remain closed on the days of main bathing festivals. **MISHAP:** A village development officer (VDO) was killed after being hit by a speeding dumper near Malak Harhar Tiraha under Phaphamau police station on Monday night. When the people present on the spot chased the dumper, the driver left the vehicle and managed to flee. The police sent the body for postmortem examination. Ajay Kumar Yadav (50) was working as a VDO in Shringverpur block and lived in TB Colony Teliyarganj with his wife, son and daughter. Police station in charge Ashwani Kumar Singh said a search for the absconding driver is on.

Petrol pump manager looted

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Armed bike-borne miscreants looted ₹78,000 from a petrol pump manager on the new bridge under Panki police station area late on Monday night. The victim lodged a complaint with the police. Reports said Kusumla of E Block, Panki, owns a petrol pump in Ratanpur, Shatabdi Nagar. Hira Prasad of Rawatpur is employed as Manager in her petrol pump. Hira said as usual on Monday also when he was going to the owner's house with the cash at night, three bike-borne miscreants stabbed him in the back on

the new bridge mere 200 metres away from the Panki Mandir outpost. After he fell on the road miscreants snatched the bag containing cash from him and escaped. As he was wearing a sweater and jacket, he narrowly escaped the knife injury but sustained injury on his hand and legs after falling on the road. After parking the two-wheeler on the roadside, he informed the petrol pump owner about the incident. Panki inspector Manvendra Singh said a probe was carried out on the spot. Local residents were being quizzed. He had received the complaint and will initiate action in the matter.

DM reviews implementation of investment proposals

Varanasi (PNS): The meeting of the District Level Committee, District Udyog Bandhu Committee related to MoU implementation was held on Monday in the Collectorate Auditorium under the chairmanship of District Magistrate S Rajalingam in which, during the review of the implementation of investment proposals received by the district, in reference to the problems of entrepreneurs related to various departments, the DM directed the departments concerned, including Ground Water, Revenue Department (Sub-

District Magistrates of Sadar / Pindra) to settle them as per the rules. Regarding the closure of the operation of illegal brick kilns, the DM directed the committee constituted teshil wise in this regard to conduct on-site investigation. Regarding the review of Investment Mitra portal, the Deputy Commissioner of Industries informed that three cases are pending after the time limit, on which the DM directed the departments concerned to dispose of the cases immediately so that the ranking of the district remains good on the Nivesh Mitra portal.

Cleanliness drive launched in Varanasi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A massive cleanliness drive was launched by many organisations, including Namami Gange, at different Ganga ghats on the last day of the year here on Tuesday. They awakened the consciousness of cleanliness on the other side of Ganga and appealed to listen to the 'call of Ganga' in the new year. The Namami Gange volunteers went to the other side of Dashashwamedh Ghat and organised a public awareness campaign for Ganga cleanliness and conservation under the leadership of Kashi area coordinator and Municipal Corporation's Swachhata Brand Ambassador Rajesh Shukla. The main objective of this programme was to make Ganga clean and pollution free in view of the upcoming year 2025. After cleaning the garbage lying on the other side of Ganga, it was appealed to the



Namami Gange activists welcoming New Year 2025 in Varanasi on Tuesday.

public not to litter on the other side of Ganga or on the ghats in the excitement of the new year. Shukla said Ganga is not only our cultural heritage, but is also the lifeline of millions of people. It is the responsibility of all of us to keep it clean. He called for active participation in the cleanliness drive and not to throw plastic,

garbage and other polluting elements in the Ganga. City coordinator Bina Gupta, Shaurya Jaiswal, Ajit Gupta, Aakriti Gupta, Dheeraj, Narayan Prasad etc participated in it. Besides, with the aim of ensuring public participation in the Ganga Nirmalkaran Abhiyan of Namami Gange, a cleanliness drive was run at

Rajendra Prasad Ghat. People participated with enthusiasm and zeal in the massive cleanliness drive run under the joint aegis of Namami Gange Ganga Vihar Manch, 137 CETF 39 GTC Ganga Task Force, Jaitley Taekwondo Club and Municipal Corporation. On the last day of the year, the members of these organisa-

tions, carrying placards inspiring for Ganga cleanliness, made thousands of devotees aware till Dashashwamedh Ghat. District coordinator of Namami Gange Ganga Vihar Manch Shivam Agrahari announced the resolution of 2025 for clean Ganga and clean water through a loudspeaker. Everyone did 'shramdaan' by raising slogans like 'Har Har Ganga', 'Namami Gange Nah Rukenge Hum Swachh Karenge', 'Sabka Saath Ho Ganga Saaf Ho' etc. Ganga Task Force Subedar Dhanesh Kumar said cleaning of Maa Ganga is very important from the point of view of environmental protection. Shivam Agrahari, Dhanesh Kumar, Daya Singh, Krishna Bahadur, Bhupendra Singh, Ankita Jaitley, Sapna Verma, Kiran Pandey, Preeti Ravi Jaiswal, Manzoor Ahmed, Vijay Prasad, Kameshwar Seth, Mahesh Kumar, Dinesh, Sunita, Sevi, Sunil, Shambhu etc were present.

Complex case managed successfully at IMS-BHU

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

In a remarkable medical achievement, a complex case of placenta praecenta, involving invasion into the bladder, was successfully managed by a multidisciplinary team of specialists at Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University (IMS-BHU). This rare and high-risk condition, often associated with severe complications, was addressed with a series of advanced techniques and innovative procedures that ensured the safety and well-being of both the mother and child. The intricate procedure began with a meticulous balloon occlusion of the

bilateral common iliac arteries, skillfully performed by Dr Ashish Verma, Dr Ishan Kumar and Dr PK Singh. This critical step, designed to reduce blood flow to the affected area, was followed by the surgical intervention conducted by Dr Sangeta Rai and her dedicated team. Bladder reconstruction was expertly executed by Dr Ujjwal and his team, ensuring optimal recovery of the urinary tract. Notably, the entire procedure was carried out in the Department of Radiology's DSA (Digital Subtraction Angiography) lab, an advanced imaging facility that enabled real-time monitoring and precision throughout the surgery. In

an exceptional outcome, the patient experienced remarkably low blood loss (only 600ml) compared to the typical 4 litres observed in similar high-risk cases. This outcome highlights the efficacy of the collaborative approach, cutting-edge techniques, and the skill of the surgical and radiological teams. "Both the mother and child are currently in stable condition, and their recovery is progressing smoothly. This case serves as a testament to the expertise and commitment of the medical professionals involved, who have successfully navigated one of the most challenging obstetric emergencies," claimed the team members.

BLW initiative to raise awareness about TB

Varanasi (PNS): A grand public awareness rally was organised at Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW) here on Tuesday under the '100-Day TB-Mukht Bharat Jan Bhagidari Abhiyan' (Public Participation Campaign). The objective of this programme was to raise awareness about tuberculosis (TB) and take a significant step toward making India TB-free.

The rally commenced at 8 am from the Golf Course Gate was flagged off jointly by BLW General Manager (GM) Naresh Pal Singh and president of the Women's Welfare Organisation (WVO) Hima Singh Chauhan. The rally passed through various key locations within the BLW campus, including Golf Course, Surya Sarovar, BLW Inter College, Bank of Baroda, BLW

Stadium and concluded near Kundan crossing. Throughout the route, participants enthusiastically chanted slogans against TB, spreading awareness and pledging to fight the disease. The rally witnessed active participation from BLW officers, members of the WVO, employees, paramedical staff, medical experts, students, athletes, differently-abled individuals, the

Railway Protection Force (RPF), Civil Defence Organisation, St John Ambulance Brigade, Bharat Scouts and Guides, members of the Sarovar Sanrakshan Club, trainees and instructors from the Technical Training Centre (TTC), and local citizens. This mass participation highlighted Team BLW's collective commitment to eradicating TB. The WVO extended New Year greet-

ings and emphasised that unity, awareness, and participation are crucial to defeating diseases like TB. Principal Chief Electrical Engineer SR Srivastava provided detailed information about TB prevention and its symptoms. Principal Chief Medical Officer Dr Devesh Kumar shed light on early symptoms of TB, the screening process and preventive measures.

Varanasi (PNS): Under the banner of Centre for Sanatan Research and Trident Seva Samiti Trust, a 51-member team from Kashi, which includes scholars, saints, religious leaders and social philanthropists, left from Nariya on Tuesday to visit five Shakti Peethas. In their journey, they will first visit Shonakshi Shakti Peeth located in Amarkantak in

Anuppur district (Madhya Pradesh), the place of origin of Narmada and Son rivers, Sanatan Research Centre in-charge Ramakrishna Pandey and spokesmen Pappu Yadav said. They will then go to Maa Maihar Devi (Sharda Shakti Peeth) in Satna district, Ramgiri Shakti Peeth in Chitrakoot, Alopi Devi Shakti Peeth in Prayagraj and Maa

Vindhyavasini Devi Dham in Mirzapur. After reaching these Shakti Peeths, the participating scholars will discuss the speciality of all these five Shakti Peeths along with darshan puja. The delegation includes spiritual guru Dr Chetan, Dr Madhavi Tiwari, Dr Sachchidanand, Dr AK Pandey, Arun Kesari and other scholars.

KDA works on expansion of Swarn Jayanti Vihar Scheme

Kanpur (PNS): Apart from acquiring land for the New Kanpur City Project, the Kanpur Development Authority (KDA) has also started preparations for the expansion of Swarn Jayanti Vihar Scheme (SJVS) on 70 hectares of land. The 50 hectares of land of this scheme had already been developed in the past. Against the acquisition of additional land, the KDA had also paid compensation to the farmers. Despite this, farmers were found selling the land and buyers carrying out construction on it. To take stock of the situation, KDA Secretary Abhay Pandey inspected the spot with officials on Monday. He said no unauthorised possession on this land should be allowed under any circumstances. He directed the officials to demolish illegal construction forthwith and initiate legal action against the guilty. The



KDA is set to launch Swarn Jayanti Vihar Scheme in Sakrapur, Satbari and Nagwa villages. The scheme had already been implemented on 50 hectares of land while preparations for acquiring more land were on since 2010. During the inspection, secretary Abhay Pandey directed to stop illegal construction and demolish the ones already carried out there. The KDA is yet to acquire about 70 hectares of land for expansion of the scheme. He said as KDA had already paid 80 per cent cost against the acquisition of this land to ADM (Land Acquisition), how farmers were still involved

Several milestones for Knp Metro in 2024

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Kanpur Metro achieved several historic milestones for the city in 2024. The key accomplishments include the erection of the steel box girder over the flyover at Naubasta intersection and the completion of tunnels and tracks up to Kanpur Central. This year also saw the commencement of civil construction work for Corridor-2 (CSA to Barra-8). Following the successful test run of metro trains on both lines (upline and downline) from Motijheel to Kanpur Central, preparations are now in the final stages to launch passenger service to Kanpur Central at the start of the new year. By the end of 2025, passenger service will extend to Naubasta, the last station of Corridor-1, connecting the city's key centres — educational institutions, markets, railway



Kanpur Metro used steel box girders between the viaducts of Basant Vihar and Kidwai Nagar stations at Naubasta intersection.

stations, bus stands—and further strengthening the public transport system. Here's a look at some of the major developments related to Kanpur Metro throughout the year: Tunnel construction completed from McRobert Ganj to Kanpur Central; steel spans made the impossible possible; track, third

rail and system installation progress in underground section; Kanpur Metro train reaches Central Station for the first time; stations on Baradevi-Naubasta elevated section took shape; civil construction work on Corridor-2 gains momentum and Kanpur Metro station becomes a hub for cultural

and literary activities. On Women's Day, a pre-launch event for the book 'Metro Ka Pehla Dabba' featured storytelling sessions with notable authors. In September a three-day photo exhibition titled 'Prakrati Ke Rang, Kanpur Metro Ke Sang' was held. A poetry seminar was hosted on the metro train on November 7 and another at the station on December 28, receiving enthusiastic responses from passengers. Additionally, the Kanpur Metro organised colourful events on Republic Day, Women's Day, Environment Day, Independence Day, Yoga Day and the third anniversary of operations. The other events included a book fair, blood donation camp and exhibitions, while commuters also enjoyed various celebrations, kitty parties and educational excursions inside the metro.

Awas Plus Survey begins today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Instructions have been given by the Central government to complete the Awas Plus Survey-2024 starting from January 1 to March 31 to add names of eligible beneficiaries in the Awas Plus list under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G). For the Awas Plus Survey, 234 surveyors of various departments have been nominated in the rural areas of the district and a nodal officer has been nominated for each development block. Giving information here on Tuesday, Chief Development Officer (CDO) Himanshu Nagpal said to complete the Awas Plus survey error-free and within the stipulated time limit, nodal officers have been nominated for each development block. Project Director (DRDA) has been nominated in Kashi Vidyapeeth development

block while district development officer in Harhua, deputy commissioner (Self-Employment) in Chiraigaon, deputy agriculture director in Arazilines, basic shiksha adhiakar in Baraogaon, district inspector of schools (DIOS) in Cholapur, additional chief officer (District Panchayat) in Pindra and Deputy Commissioner (Industry) in Sewapuri. According to the CDO, on November 11, the Government of India provided information to all surveyors and all officers / employees of the development blocks on how to survey the eligible beneficiaries in the Awas Plus list through webcast. On November 20, at the district level, all the surveyors appointed in the development blocks and all the officers and employees of the development blocks were trained to conduct survey on Awas Plus by Technical Officer Ajit Singh from Lucknow headquarters.



DD to screen 4K restored version of Manthan on Jan 1

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

National broadcaster Doordarshan on Tuesday announced that it will ring in the new year by screening the 4K restored version of Shyam Benegal's film 'Manthan' as homage to the veteran filmmaker. Benegal, the pioneer of the parallel cinema movement in Indian cinema in the 1970s and 1980s, died on December 23 at a hospital here due to chronic kidney disease. He was 90. Film Heritage Foundation (FHF), which restored the 1976 classic film for its premiere in the Cannes Classic section at the Cannes Film Festival earlier this year, shared the update on its official X page. According to FHF, 'Manthan' will be broadcast on Doordarshan on Wednesday at eight pm. "To pay tribute to the late Shyam Benegal, Doordarshan will begin the new year with a screening of

'Manthan' (1976) restored by FHF with support from the Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation Ltd. (Amul) on Jan 1, 2025 at 8 p.m. On Doordarshan," the foundation said. "Manthan" was inspired by the groundbreaking milk cooperative movement by Dr Verghese Kurien that transformed India into one of the largest milk producers in the world. The Hindi film, titled "Churning" in English, was financed by 5 lakh farmers of Gujarat 48 years ago who contributed Rs 2 each. The opening credits of the movie read: "500,000 Farmers of Gujarat present." "Manthan" narrates the story of how a young veterinary doctor (Girish Karnad) fights against oppressive forces to establish a milk cooperative that empowers rural farmers. It also starred Smita Patil, Naseeruddin Shah, and Amrish Puri.

Naxals violence declined by 48%: Ministry of Home Affairs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The latest report from Union Home Ministry, facing tough action from the security forces, the Naxals are making efforts to seep into new areas along inter-state borders but without any notable success. The Government's multipronged approach -- anti-Naxal operations by paramilitary and state police and simultaneous development initiatives in Maoist-affected areas -- has resulted in a 48 per cent reduction in violent incidents, from 1,136 in 2013 to 594 in 2023, the report said. A 65 per cent reduction was also noticed in the deaths of civilians and security forces, which came down from 397 to 138 in 2023 as compared to 2013, it said. Home Minister Amit Shah has said that the country would be free of Naxalism by March 31, 2026. The geographical spread of Left-Wing Extremist (LWE) violence has shrunk considerably. In 2023, 171 police stations in 42 districts reported such incidents, compared to 328 police

stations in 76 districts in 2013, the Union Home Ministry's report said. "The arc of violence has been considerably restricted with just 25 districts accounting 91 per cent of the LWE violence," it said. According to the Ministry's annual report 2023-24, the CPI (Maoist) continues to be the most potent among the various LWE outfits in the country, accounting for more than 90 per cent of total violent incidents and 95 per cent of resultant deaths. "Amidst increasing reverses, the CPI (Maoist) has been making efforts to expand to new areas along inter-state borders, albeit without any significant success," the report said. "They wish to keep the population in their areas of influence marginalized to perpetuate their outdated ideology, it said. "Consequently, the process of development has been set back by decades in many parts of the country under LWE influence," it said. Various measures adopted by (state) governments and the developmental outreach by the Union government have

seen an increasingly large number of LWE cadres shunning the path of violence and returning to the mainstream. Continued operations and crackdowns in the "core Maoists' areas" have slightly increased the number of resultant deaths and casualties to security forces when compared with the corresponding period in 2022, the report said. Noting that improvised explosive devices cause the majority of casualties to security forces in anti-LWE operations, the Home Ministry issued a Standard Operating Procedure to promote best practices in IED management besides putting in place extensive counter-IED capacity building of CAPFs and state police forces, it said. "During the first half of 2024, the LWE situation has witnessed quantum positive jump (1.7 times) in security forces-initiated operations (59 to 103), which have consequently resulted in a more than five-fold increase in the neutralization of Maoists (30 to 159) as compared to the corresponding period of 2023," the report said.

The overall improvement in the LWE scenario can be attributed to a greater presence and increased capacity of the security forces across the LWE affected states, better operational strategy and better monitoring of development schemes, it said. In addition, beefing up intelligence coordination has also played a major role in planning action against the Naxals. Round-the-clock intelligence sharing through Multi Agency Centre (MAC) at the Central level and State Multi Agency Centre (SMAC) at the state level, setting up of Joint Command and Control Centre at Jagdalpur (Chhattisgarh) and Gaya (Bihar), and strengthening of technical and human intelligence have helped in action against Naxals, the report said. Besides, thrust on the generation of real-time intelligence and creation as well as strengthening of State Intelligence Bureaus (SIBs) in the LWE affected states for which central assistance is provided through the SIS have also helped security forces take action against Naxals, it added.

CBI cancels medal of officer caught accepting bribe

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Government has "forfeited" the Union Home Minister's medal for Excellence in Investigation awarded to CBI Inspector Rahul Raj in 2023 who was later caught by the agency red-handed, allegedly receiving Rs 10 lakh bribe and dismissed from the service, officials said. The action comes on the recommendation of CBI Director Praveen Sood who has cracked down on corrupt elements detected in the agency's internal vigilance process. Raj, a recipient of a prestigious medal in 2023, was caught "red-handed" on May 19 while allegedly accepting an illegal gratification of Rs 10 lakh from Malay College of Nursing chairman Anil Bhaskaran and his wife Suma Anil, an official alleged. The couple were also arrested. The CBI swung into action after inputs and surveillance by its internal vigilance unit indicated that one of the support teams constituted on the orders of the Madhya Pradesh High Court to examine the infrastructure in nursing colleges in the state was indulging in corruption. Officials in the know of developments said that CBI

Director Sood had made it clear in no uncertain terms that "internal vigilance is prerequisite to external action". They said that, following its policy of "zero tolerance to corruption and misdemeanours," the CBI dismissed its officer under Article 311 of the Constitution within days of his arrest. The CBI also recommended cancelling his medal, which the home ministry has accepted. "Union Home Minister's Medal for Excellence in Investigation-2023 awarded to Rahul Raj, Inspector of the Central Bureau of Investigation vide Ministry's notification No. 11024/05/2023-PMA dated 17/11/2023 published in...Gazette of India on November 17, 2023 is hereby cancelled and the medal forfeited under Rule-9 of the Rules governing the award of Union Home Minister's Medal for Excellence in Investigation," the notification issued by the Ministry on Monday said. Following its zero-tolerance policy towards internal corruption, three CBI officers were dismissed without enquiry under Article 311 of the Constitution while five were compulsorily retired under 56J rule in 2023-24, officials said.

BJP accuses AAP of using kids for poll gains

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Tuesday accused Aam Aadmi Party leader Arvind Kejriwal of using children for political gains, charging him with practising "petty, cheap and dirty" politics. Addressing a press conference, BJP national spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia said Delhi's ruling party has not taken down a post, which shows some children raising pro-Kejriwal slogans, despite the National Human Rights Commission raising serious concerns on the matter. Such a depiction of children is a violation of the Juvenile Act and the Election Commission guidelines, he said. "Kejriwal and Chief Minister Atishi are not sparing even children. They are violating the dignity of children. Is it because Kejriwal knows that he is losing the elections in Delhi," Bhatia asked. He asked why Kejriwal was "playing with young and

impressible minds for his petty, cheap and dirty politics". The BJP, he claimed, will ensure that the "destroyer of children and a hater of children" is thrown out of power. He accused the AAP government of converting school toilets into classrooms for children and deliberately failing students in Class 9 and Class 11 to ensure higher pass percentages in Class 10 and Class 12. He added that people will celebrate "Happiness Utsav" -- a Delhi government initiative to commemorate the 'Happiness Curriculum' in its schools -- by teaching the AAP a lesson in the upcoming polls. The AAP government opened no new school despite promising over 500 of them, and is behind the vacancy of almost 80 per cent post of teachers, he alleged. Bhatia dubbed Kejriwal's announcement of Rs 18,000 monthly honorarium to temple and gurudwara priests as yet another "false promise" by the AAP, claim-

ing the former chief minister knows that his "political life" is coming to an end. Until recently his government was opening liquor shops outside religious places, he said. The BJP spokesperson noted that the AAP government has also promised a similar amount to imams but has not paid them for 17 months. "There has been no bigger fraud and deceitful politician in India than him," he alleged. Asked about the Congress' charge that the BJP government at the Centre has disrespected former prime minister Manmohan Singh, the BJP leader hit back at the opposition party's "insult" of former PM P V Narasimha Rao, saying it did not even allow his cremation in the national capital. There has been a bitter war of words between the Congress and the ruling BJP over arrangements at Singh's funeral and over the setting up of a memorial to the ex-PM.

Three Crore applications disposed in governance drive

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Nearly three crore service delivery applications were disposed of during a recently concluded campaign aimed at further ensuring ease of governance mainly at the grassroots level, a senior government official said on Tuesday. He said through the nationwide "Prashasan Gaon ki Ore" campaign conducted from December 19-24, the government has tried to implement Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision and made the eco-system transparent, faster by simplifying procedures and processes at every level. "Through various citizen centric initiatives, including redressal of public grievances, disposal of service delivery applications, the government expanded the outreach of service delivery mechanisms and made them more effective,"

said Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) Secretary V Srinivas. He said the emphasis is on projecting the immense potential of technology to bring citizens and government closer, as a powerful tool to empower citizens as well as a medium to optimise transparency and accountability in day-to-day functioning. The Prashasan Gaon ki Ore campaign was conducted in 700+ districts across India, said Srinivas, a 1989 batch Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer of Rajasthan cadre. A total of 2,99,64,200 applications were disposed of under service delivery category and 18.29 lakh public grievances were redressed (14.84 lakh raised on state portals and 3.44 lakh on the Centre's CPGRAMS), he said. "The campaign represents a milestone for doorstep delivery

of services on a size and scale that makes it India's largest people centric campaign for good governance," Srinivas said. In Uttar Pradesh, the Prashasan Gaon ki Ore was conducted in all 75 districts, in Madhya Pradesh (55 districts), Rajasthan (50 districts), Bihar (in all 38 districts), in Assam (all 35 districts), in Maharashtra (in 33 of the 36 districts), in Gujarat (in 32 of the 33 districts), in Chhattisgarh (in all 33 districts), in Karnataka (in all 31 districts), in Odisha (all 30 districts), in Jammu and Kashmir (all 20 districts) and in Jharkhand (in 23 of 24 districts), he said. The campaign was spearheaded by the chief secretaries, principal secretaries of Administrative Reforms and district collectors across the nation, the senior bureaucrat said.

Gurugram Police resolve 97,896 complaints, 5,759 pending

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

The Gurugram Police have received a total of 1,03,655 complaints through various means, out of which 97,896 complaints have been resolved by the district police and 5,759 pending complaints are being investigated this year so far, police said. According to the police, these complaints were received by the Gurugram Police through various channels including a total of 693 complaints received in the Police Commissioner's Office, Gurugram through various commissions (NHRC, HHR, NCW, HSWC, NCPDR, HCPCR, out of which 664 complaints have been resolved and 29 complaints are being investigated.

Similarly, a total of 1642 complaints were received in the Gurugram Police Commissioner's Office, through the office of the Director General of Police, Haryana, out of which 1635 complaints have been resolved, and 07 complaints are being investigated. A total of 8390 complaints were received in the office of Commissioner of Police, Gurugram all these 8,390 complaints have been resolved by the police. Likewise, a total of 12,559 complaints through e-mail were received all these complaints have been resolved by Gurugram Police, the police said. The city Police has also received a total of 919 complaints during public hearings in the police commissioner's office, out of which 829 complaints have been resolved.

Suvendu Adhikari threatens Mamata with jail

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Bengal Opposition Leader Suvendu Adhikari on Tuesday said that his party would institute a commission on atrocities against women in Sandeshkhali when it comes to power and send Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to jail for the alleged offences she had committed. Adhikari, who was addressing a "reply rally" at Sandeshkhali a day after the CM held her own, stated, "Mamata Banerjee has accused the BJP of misleading the villagers and asked the women not to fall into the trap of 'mischievous' people. I must say that the biggest mischievous person is Mamata."

Quad celebrates 20 years of cooperation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and other Quad member nations on Tuesday reaffirmed the grouping's steadfast commitment to work towards a free, open and peaceful Indo-Pacific amid China's increasing military muscle-flexing in the region. The foreign ministers of the member nations of the grouping made the pledge in a joint statement commemorating the 20th anniversary of "Quad cooperation". India, the US, Australia and Japan came together 20 years ago to extend assistance in response to the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami, and that coalition subsequently took form of the Quad. In the last few years, the Quad has rolled out a number of initiatives addressing some of the most pressing needs and challenges of the Indo-Pacific region, including in areas of maritime securi-

ty, infrastructure and connectivity. India is scheduled to host the next Quad Summit that is likely to take place in the second half of 2025. The foreign ministers of the four nations said the Quad will work together in responding to the future needs of the Indo-Pacific. "As four partners, we share a vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific that is peaceful, stable and prosperous, underpinned by effective regional institutions," the joint statement said. The Quad foreign ministers also talked about the centrality of 10-nation grouping Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the Indo-Pacific. "We reaffirm our unwavering support for ASEAN's centrality and unity as well as mainstreaming and implementation of the EAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific," the ministers said. "We respect Pacific-led regional architecture, foremost the Pacific Islands Forum. We are also steadfast in our support for

the Indian Ocean Rim Association, the region's premier organisation," they said. The Quad foreign ministers also referred to the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami and how the four countries came together to respond to the challenges. "The tsunami was one of the worst disasters in history, claiming the lives of nearly a quarter million people and displacing 1.7 million across 14 countries," they said. "Together our four countries contributed over 40,000 emergency responders, working with other partners across the Indo-Pacific region to support millions of people affected by the catastrophe." In the statement, the ministers further noted that the foundational commitment of the four nations to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief remained strong. "We continue to work side-by-side to prepare for and respond quickly and effectively to disas-

ters across the region," they said. "In 2024, our four countries collectively supported disaster preparedness and life-saving relief efforts across the Indo-Pacific and we continue to build on those efforts to identify new ways to respond rapidly to humanitarian crises and disasters," they added. The ministers also briefly highlighted the Quad's focus on addressing complex challenges in the Indo-Pacific. "What began as an emergency response to a catastrophe has grown into a full-fledged partnership delivering positive outcomes for the people of our region," the statement noted. It said the Quad countries now work together and with partners across the Indo-Pacific to address complex challenges -- from fighting climate change, cancer and pandemics, to bolstering quality infrastructure, counter-terrorism efforts, critical and emerging technologies, and cyber security.

Fake cancer and diabetic drugs seized in Kolkata raid

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A joint investigation conducted by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) and the Drugs Control Directorate, West Bengal at the premises of a wholesale firm in Kolkata recently led to the seizure of spurious drugs estimated to be worth Rs 6.6 crore. The investigation has led to the arrest of a woman identified as the proprietor of the wholesale firm who was taken into custody by the Drugs Inspector of CDSCO, East Zone, the Union Health Ministry said in a statement. The raid, carried out at the firm 'Care and Cure For You' in Kolkata resulted in the seizure of a large quantity of anti-cancer, anti-diabetic, and other drugs suspected to be spurious.

The drugs, labelled as being manufactured in various countries including Ireland, Turkey, the USA, and Bangladesh, were found without any supporting documents to prove their legitimate importation into India, it said. In the absence of such documentation, these drugs are deemed to be spurious, the ministry said. The investigating team also discovered several empty packing materials, further raising concerns over the authenticity of the seized products, the statement said. The total market value of the drugs seized is estimated at approximately Rs 6.60 crore, it said. To ensure proper investigation, samples of the drugs have been sent for quality testing. The remaining seized quanti-

ty is being kept in safe custody by the CDSCO, the statement said. A court granted judicial custody of the arrested proprietor for 14 days and permitted further interrogation. Further investigation into the matter is ongoing. "The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare remains committed to ensuring the safety and well-being of the public. The seizure and ongoing investigation underscore the government's zero-tolerance policy towards the circulation of counterfeit and substandard drugs in the market," the statement stated. The CDSCO and state authorities will continue to work in close coordination to combat the threat posed by spurious drugs and to safeguard the interests of consumers, it stated.

Unnao startup honours Jimmy Carter with peanut butter tribute

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Thousands of miles away from his home in Georgia where he breathed his last, former US president Jimmy Carter will live on -- in the form of two new varieties of peanut butter dedicated to the "champion of peanut farming" from Unnao-based startup Nutty Village. Carter, who was elected in the wake of the Watergate scandal and the Vietnam War, died at his home in Plains, Georgia on Sunday at the age of 100. Nutty Village has decided to honour Carter for his "commitment to agriculture", Aman Kumar, who started the com-

pany in 2020, told PTI. "As a tribute to the former president of the United States of America, considered a champion of peanut farming and rural development, we will be dedicating our upcoming range of coffee-flavoured peanut butter and barbeque-flavoured peanut butter in his honour," the 29-year-old entrepreneur said. The two new flavours -- coffee and barbeque -- are being added to the existing dark chocolate, jaggery and unsweetened varieties. Carter was the third American president to visit India. A village in Gurugram district, Daulatabad Nasirpur, was named Carterpuri at the sug-

gestion of the then Indian prime minister Morarji Desai. According to The Carter Center, he was the only one with a personal connection to India as his mother, Lillian, had worked there as a health volunteer with the Peace Corps during the late 1960s. Kumar said the Nutty Village's tribute acknowledges Carter's life-long commitment to agriculture and sustainable development. Nutty Village, co-founded with Sushant Berma, was inspired by small farmers around Ganga, who cultivate peanuts but struggle to receive fair prices due to dependence on intermediaries and lack of market linkages, he



said. "Observing this challenge, we designed a solution to empower these farmers by ensuring better price realisation through direct market access." "Nutty Village works with around 50 farmers and purchases groundnuts from 5-6 farmers for its peanut butter. It is working with the women self-help groups to do both the primary and secondary processing to make peanut butter, creating livelihood opportunities as well as the grassroots level," added Kumar, who has a Master's in Social Entrepreneurship from Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS). Peanut farmers also benefit from

the almost triple purchase price Nutty Village offers them, he said. Fourteen-fifteen villages in Unnao district have around 10,000 farmers who grow peanuts, 2,000 of whom use organic farming techniques. Manish Singh, a 36-year-old farmer from Unnao, said, "We first met Aman when he wanted to discuss how we could all work together for better profits. He brought us seeds and we worked on figuring out the best farming methods." Chandkali, a 60-year-old member of a self-help group, said being involved in the secondary processing of the peanuts gets her good money.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

A wish list for 2025

As we reflect on the year that has passed and welcome the new one, let us resolve to make this a year of progress and unity

As we welcome year 2025, the world stands at the cusp of opportunities and challenges. The new year offers a chance to reflect, reset, and reimagine the future. Amidst the advancements and setbacks of recent years, 2025 should be a time for hope, action and collaboration. Here is a wish list for a better world and an earnest appeal to global and Indian leaders to strive for transformative change. The urgency of addressing climate change cannot be overstated. We hope for concrete actions to reduce carbon emissions, promote renewable energy, and protect biodiversity. Let 2025 be the year when words transform into impactful deeds. The pandemic underscored the disparities in healthcare access. A global commitment to equitable healthcare systems, and increased investments in public health are essential. Bridging the digital divide, improving infrastructure and making quality education accessible to marginalised communities should be a universal priority. As AI and other technologies advance, their application should focus on solving pressing global issues— from poverty to climate resilience—rather than exacerbating inequalities.



The crises we face are interconnected and so must be our solutions. A concerted effort is required under the UN to bring an end to wars raging in Ukraine and West Asia. The untold misery of Gaza people must end. All involved must work to deescalate tensions and bring about a lasting peace in the region which has seen enough misery and human tragedy. Policies should reflect empathy and foresight, ensuring that no one is left behind. India, with its diversity and potential, holds a unique position in shaping the global future. As we

step into 2025, Indian leaders must focus on rural development, job creation and support for small businesses to bridge economic disparities. They should invest in vocational training and innovation to prepare the youth for a competitive global market. Ambitious climate targets must be implemented, alongside enhanced urban planning for sustainable cities and promotion of water and energy conservation. Transparency, accountability and citizen participation must remain central to policy-making, fostering trust and unity. The fringe elements must be brought to mainstream and efforts must be stepped up in places like Manipur to bring about a lasting peace. The government and the citizens alike must work to have a country which is as per the wishes of our Constitution makers—a country which ensures dignity, liberty and freedom for all and no section of society is alienated. The people on the fringe—tribals and dalits need to be given their due and efforts must be made in that direction. The minorities must not feel alienated and targeted. They deserve their due respect and dignity. All religious issues must be settled amicably as per the law. The democratic institutions must be strengthened and parliamentary democracy must work for the people in the right earnest. Wishing all our readers a very happy new year!

PICTALK



Devotees look at a sand sculpture themed on 'clean Mahakumbh' ahead of Mahakumbh 2025, in Prayagraj PTI

New year resolutions: Small steps, lasting change

A meaningful new year vow isn't about dramatic reinvention; it is about mindful reflection, small adjustments and cultivating habits that truly last

On every new year eve a lot of people take a vow to make a new beginning. Families come together, friends exchange greetings, and bold resolutions quietly take shape. "I'll wake up at 5 a.m.," someone might vow, or "This year, I'll get back in shape." However, by February, alarms are snoozed, fitness goals abandoned, and life returns to its familiar rhythm. Why do resolutions often fail? They are usually ambitious yet unrealistic, conceived more in the excitement of the moment than with a long-term perspective. A meaningful New Year doesn't demand grand reinvention; it thrives on small, deliberate adjustments—holding on to what works, letting go of what doesn't, and fostering habits that last. The New Year feels unique due to the "fresh start effect," a concept psychologists use to describe how temporal milestones—such as January 1, birthdays, or even a new week—create a mental reset. These milestones give the illusion of starting afresh, prompting us to buy planners or sign up for gym member-



ships. But enthusiasm alone doesn't guarantee success. Without reflection and structure, even the most well-intentioned plans falter. Reflection is the starting point—not the kind that dwells on failures but one that evaluates life with curiosity. What brought joy or progress last year? Perhaps it was reconnecting with family, starting an evening walk routine, or improving time management. What left you feeling drained? Overcommitting to work, excessive screen time, or trying to please everyone might top the list. Psychologists recommend "self-distanced reflection," where you analyse your life as if observing someone else's. Why did this person abandon their plans? Why did they agree to activ-

ities they didn't enjoy? This detached perspective helps pinpoint habits to retain and those to discard. Even with clarity, life is seldom linear. Setbacks are inevitable, but resilience—the ability to adapt and recover—makes all the difference. Resilience isn't innate; it can be nurtured through practices like gratitude, mindfulness, and reframing challenges. Gratitude shifts focus to what's working. Recognizing small positives rewires the brain to spot opportunities over obstacles. Mindfulness, on the other hand, anchors the mind in the present—whether during a heartfelt conversation or a quiet morning. These practices reduce stress and enhance focus. Reframing failure is equally crucial. Unmet resolutions aren't defeats; they're feedback. Adjusting goals is far more effective than abandoning them altogether. Strong relationships are another cornerstone of happiness. This insight resonates deeply in India, where family bonds and social networks are integral. However, maintaining

these connections in today's fast-paced world requires conscious effort. Being present is challenging in a world of constant notifications, endless emails, and overflowing to-do lists. Yet studies show that mind-wandering—even toward pleasant thoughts—correlates with reduced happiness. The richest moments are those we fully engage in, whether during a family meal, a morning walk, or a simple act of kindness. Adaptability is another essential skill. Life rarely unfolds as planned, and the ability to pivot determines how well we navigate change. After reflection and building resilience, action must follow. Instead of sweeping declarations like "I'll meditate for an hour daily" focus on creating systems. Systems grounded in routine, rather than fleeting motivation, are more sustainable. The New Year isn't magical. It's a psychological cue to pause and reassess, but its real value lies in how you use it. Progress, not perfection, is the key to a fulfilling year. (The writer is author and DGP and head, Haryana State Narcotic Control Bureau; views are personal)



O P SINGH

A turning point in Taliban politics

The assassination of Maulvi Khalil-ur-Rahman Haqqani, a key leader in the Haqqani network, has sent shockwaves across Afghanistan and the region



NISHAKANT OJHA

The assassination of Maulvi Khalil-ur-Rahman Haqqani, the Taliban's Minister for Refugees and a senior figure in the Haqqani network, has exposed significant fractures within the Taliban leadership and deepened the complexities of regional geopolitics. Claimed by the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP), the attack not only highlights the Taliban's internal divisions but also reshapes the broader strategic landscape, especially for India. On December 11, 2024, Khalil Haqqani was killed in a high-profile suicide bombing in Kabul. This incident underscored the Taliban's failure to ensure internal security and revealed growing tensions between its Kandahar faction, led by Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada, and the Haqqani network, headed by Sirajuddin Haqqani. These tensions have been fueled by the Haqqani's perception of neglect or even sabotage by the Kandahar faction. In response to this crisis, Sirajuddin Haqqani convened an emergency meeting in Gardez with key network leaders to address security breaches and the escalating threat posed by ISKP. This development points to potential fragmentation within the Taliban, which carries significant implications for regional stability and India's security. A fragmented Taliban could destabilize Afghanistan, creating fertile ground for extremist groups like ISKP. This faction's hostility toward both the Taliban and regional actors, including India, raises the specter of increased attacks targeting Indian interests. The resultant instability might also spill over into Pakistan, indirectly affecting India's border security, particularly in Jammu and Kashmir. Another concern lies in the potential strengthening of the Pakistan-Taliban nexus. Pakistan's historical ties to the Haqqani network could enable it to leverage this faction against Indian activities in Afghanistan, including infrastructure and



development projects. Such a scenario could escalate cross-border terrorism, particularly in Jammu and Kashmir, and erode India's strategic influence in Afghanistan. Indian investments in key infrastructure projects like the Zaranj-Delaram Highway and the Chabahar Port route may face heightened risks amidst this instability. India also faces an increased terror threat as ISKP may collaborate with groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), which are active in Pakistan. Such alliances could intensify attacks on Indian targets, while prolonged conflict in Afghanistan might radicalize vulnerable populations across the region, including within India. Regionally, these developments complicate India's diplomatic landscape. Iran, for instance, might shift its focus to countering Afghan instability, potentially undermining its collaboration with India on projects like Chabahar Port. Similarly, a stronger Pakistan-Haqqani alliance could align with China's ambitions under the Belt and Road Initiative, further sidelining India in the region. Globally, Pakistan's backing



FOR INDIA, THE ASSASSINATION OF KHALIL HAQQANI SIGNIFIES A CRITICAL MOMENT TO RECALIBRATE ITS APPROACH. INDIA MUST BOLSTER ITS INTELLIGENCE CAPABILITIES AND BORDER SECURITY, PARTICULARLY IN SENSITIVE AREAS LIKE JAMMU AND KASHMIR

of the Haqqani network provides it with a lever to influence Afghan politics but risks alienating the Kandahar faction and exacerbating internal Taliban conflicts. ISKP's growing power, meanwhile, poses a direct challenge to South Asian security, threatening to destabilize the region and affect India's geopolitical interests. For India, the assassination of Khalil Haqqani signifies a critical moment to recalibrate its approach. India must bolster its intelligence capabilities and border security, particularly in sensitive areas like Jammu and Kashmir. Strengthening partnerships with Iran, Central Asia, and Russia could counterbalance Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan. Coordinating with international allies to combat ISKP and other extremist groups will also be vital. Furthermore, India must protect its investments in Afghanistan through global partnerships and maintain diplomatic efforts via multilateral platforms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the United Nations. The killing of Khalil Haqqani has revealed the fragile balance within the Taliban and underscored the potential

for regional destabilization. For India, this evolving scenario demands vigilance, proactive diplomacy, and strengthened security measures to safeguard its interests amid shifting geopolitical realities. For India, the implications are profound, ranging from the potential rise of terrorism to a weakening of its strategic foothold in Afghanistan. The escalating instability could embolden extremist groups like ISKP, Lashkar-e-Taiba, and Jaish-e-Mohammed, increasing the risk of attacks targeting India. To address these challenges, India must adopt a multi-pronged strategy. Enhancing intelligence capabilities, securing its borders, and deepening ties with Iran, Central Asia, and Russia are crucial steps. Engaging multilateral platforms to combat the ISKP threat and protect investments is equally vital. The situation demands vigilance and proactive measures to safeguard India's interests in an increasingly volatile region, ensuring its strategic and security objectives remain intact amidst shifting dynamics. (The writer is an eminent expert on counter terrorism in West Asia; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

AUSTRALIA DEFEATS INDIA

Madam—India's hopes for the World Test Championship final took a major hit with a big loss to Australia in the Boxing Day Test at Melbourne, when Australia beat India by 184 runs in the fourth Test of the Border-Gavaskar series to take a 2-1 lead in the 5-match series. The match played at the Melbourne Cricket Ground saw Australia take seven wickets after tea on day five to secure a famous win. Despite a valiant effort from Yashasvi Jaiswal, India's batting collapse on the final day sealed their defeat. Meanwhile, Australia has bettered their chances to face South Africa in the WTC Final at Lord's next year with the win. The Proteas have booked their spot in the WTC final after a thrilling two-wicket win over Pakistan on Sunday. Interestingly, the Australian last wicket fought hard for adding more than 60 runs, whereas after the final day tea break India's last seven wickets tumbled for just 34 runs in 20.3 overs. Wicket had no devils. This fragile nature of the Indian team is very discouraging. Fighting till the last ball - spirit is missing. And we are now blaming the third umpire for Jaiswal's out to malign the Aussies victory and India's shocking performance. But the true cricket lovers are completely agreeing with the Indian skipper Rohit Sharma about Jaiswal's controversial dismissal at the post-match press conference: "Look, I really don't know what to make of that because the technology didn't show anything. With the naked eye, it seemed that he did touch something. I don't know how the umpires want to use the technology, but in all fairness, he did touch the ball." Now it is the time to assess Team India's performance. Actually, Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and Ravindra Jadeja passed their prime sometime ago but they won't gracefully retire like Ashwin. Please drop them out to build a future team. We only do hero worshipping - only to be disappointed by our so-called heroes. Indian fans and media need to immediately stop making celebrities of hero worship. Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

Elon Musk stands with immigrants



A rift has emerged among the supporters of US President-elect Donald Trump over the contentious issue of immigration. The faction spearheaded by billionaire Elon Musk and fellow entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy contrasts sharply with Trump's MAGA (Make America Great Again) base, which firmly endorses his stringent anti-immigration policies. Amid the simmering row, the President-elect seems to be aligning with Musk and other supporters in the tech industry over the immigration visa issue. Those who claim to be "natives" of the country themselves have foreign roots. It is meritocracy that has thrived in that country over the centuries and that has made America the world's most powerful nation by attracting top talents in many fields from across the globe. However, many people may claim that the next century belongs to China or some other country, the fact is that behind all modern day tech innovations and inventions have all been the products greatly attributable to the 'American Dream.' That dream will keep the United States of America as the land of opportunities for a long time to come. That is what will attract the best brains from across the world to sail the oceans to reach the shores of America and create new ideas and innovations that the world will need to use. N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

make them more foolproof. More than deterrent acts combined efforts of all institutions and socially conscious individuals, irrespective of political lenience should make sustained efforts to tide over this menace. A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

JIMMY CARTER PASSES AWAY
Madam—The 39th president of the United States has died at age 100. Jimmy Carter was a peanut farmer and US Navy lieutenant before going into politics, eventually serving one term as governor of Georgia and as president of the United States from 1977 to 1981. He was the only former US president to reach 100 years old. He championed the human rights at the centre of US foreign policy, Carter forged a still-standing peace treaty between Egypt and Israel. He will always be remembered for his key policy decisions making and action-driven blueprint into the execution. Dimple Wadhawan | Kanpur Nagar

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FIRST COLUMN

EMPOWERING ADOLESCENTS WITH SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE

Spirituality can help adolescents face life's challenges with resilience



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJJI

We all know that as per the laws of nature, we live our lives through various stages such as infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age. Of these life stages, the most adventurous and interesting stage is adolescence which represents an inner emotional upheaval, a struggle between the eternal human wish to cling to the past and the equally powerful wish to get on with the future. It's indeed a very critical phase in the life of every human being because, in this phase, there is intense growth not only physically but also morally, cognitively, emotionally and intellectually.

Hence, in this stage of life, parents elders or peers must provide adolescents with proper guidance, and support and create an environment to facilitate their holistic development. The primary goal of every adolescent is to achieve complete independence, for which they often seek a lot of space and freedom. They start to think more rationally and abstractly as they form their moral code. In the process, they may often become assertive, rebellious, non-conformist, self-opinionated and aloof. Therefore, they need to be guided and supported with great sensitivity and maturity.



To attain a well-integrated maturity, a series of factors need to be addressed for adolescents, like they need to acquire self-certainty, be ready to try out new roles, strive for achievement, acquire a self-identity, balance their rights with responsibilities and identify personal goals and ideals. One should understand that while dealing with the problems of adolescents, one should try and step into the young person's world and treat them with discerning respect rather than suspicion. It always helps when we share their joys and sorrows and genuinely address their questions whilst engaging them in moral and spiritual discipline.

It is so unfortunate that in the formative stage of adolescence when children need a strong sense of direction & guidance, there is no source for them to get it. The family is no longer the strong institution it used to be. Hence, under this scenario, adolescents try to find support from other means such as their peer group, TV, internet, books etc.

Tempted by the glamour and gloss that is promoted by the media, there is a constant conflict that adolescents go through to measure up to their peer group's values and to cope with the ideals and the reality of life. Unfortunately, in the absence of proper guidance, it is natural that many adolescents are pulled into crime, abuse and drug addiction. While family, educational institutions and social groups do have a major role to play in guiding and supporting adolescents, spirituality lends a deeper and stronger basis for forming a clear identity and value system upon which the edifice of a strong character can be raised.

Since spirituality touches on the core goodness of every human being, it is the most potent tool for guiding all sections of society. The process of empowering adolescents begins with the practice of treating them with respect and facilitating their growth in such a way that they can realise their hidden potential. So, instead of looking at them as helpless or ignorant beings who need to be chastised and controlled, spiritual treatment calls for accepting them as potential carriers of higher wisdom, pure values, fresh ideas and skills that need to be channelised in the proper direction. Such a growth process is driven by their inner self, gently guided by wisdom and love rather than a forced development compelled by insecurity, fear and false expectations. Remember! If adolescents are motivated to explore spirituality at their age they will be equipped with excellent powers to cope with any life situation and excel in their chosen roles, thereby living a quality life.

(Writer is a spiritual educator and popular columnist; views are personal)

Capitalising on 'China Plus One': Will India step up?



UTTAM GUPTA

As global trade dynamics shift under Donald Trump's policies, India stands to gain from the move by multinational companies to diversify supply chains beyond China

Releasing a report the 'Trade Watch', on December 25, 2024, NITI Aayog CEO BVR Subrahmanyam has suggested that trade policies under US President-elect Donald Trump could result in a potential economic boom for India, driven by significant trade diversion in global trade. He said 'Whatever Trump has announced so far, which is likely to come up... there are opportunities. We are the man at first slip. The ball is coming in our direction. Whether we hold the catch or drop it is for us to decide. There will be huge disruption, and if we prepare for it, there will be a massive boom due to trade diversion.'

This comes after Trump announced additional tariffs on imports from its biggest trading partners - 25 per cent on Canada and Mexico if they fail to check illegal immigration and drug trade. He also announced a general 10 per cent tariff by the US on all imports and a 60 per cent tariff on imports from China. Meanwhile, the US has also announced restrictions on the export of computer chip-making equipment, software, and high-bandwidth memory chips to China. Trump has also threatened to impose 100 per cent tariffs on BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) countries if they try to undermine the US dollar. The US is the biggest importer in the world with a mammoth import valued at US\$ 3200 billion during CY 2022. During that year, its import from China alone was US\$536.3 billion which works out to 16.7 percent of total goods imports.

US goods imports from Canada and Mexico were US\$436.6 billion and US\$454.8 billion or 13.6 per cent and 14.2 per cent respectively. In sharp contrast, US goods imports from India during 2022 were US\$85.5 billion or a meagre 2.6 per cent of its total goods import. Now, if Trump executes his threat of imposing a 60 per cent additional tariff on imports from China, this will lead to an exorbitant increase in the cost of the latter's goods to American consumers thereby rendering them uncompetitive vis-à-vis similar goods coming from other exporting countries such as India. This should help India capture a big slice of the US import basket currently served by China. This should be possible even if Trump imposes a 10 per cent additional tariff on all its imports including from India. As for Trump's threat to impose 100 per cent tariffs on BRICS countries (India is one of them) in the event of the latter putting into action their so-called 'de-dollarization' plan (De-dollarization is a process of moving away from the world's reliance on the U.S. dollar as the chief reserve currency), this is the-oretical.

At the 16th summit held on 22-24 October 2024 in Kazan, BRICS leaders, including Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese leader Xi Jinping, publicly voiced their commitment to jointly introduce an alternative payment system that wouldn't be dependent on the U.S. dollar. The feasibility of implementing this idea anytime soon is suspect. Second, the US is also hell-bent on taking measures that will undermine the capabilities of China to



AN OVERARCHING REASON BEHIND INDIA 'DROPPING THE CATCH DESPITE THE MAN AT FIRST SLIP AND THE BALL COMING IN OUR DIRECTION' IS A HIGH-COST DOMESTIC ENVIRONMENT WHICH MAKES OUR PRODUCTS UNCOMPETITIVE IN THE EXPORT AS WELL AS DOMESTIC MARKET

boost the production of its goods such as electronics (including smartphones), automobiles etc in which it has a comparative advantage. So, it has imposed restrictions on the export of computer chip-making equipment, software, and high-bandwidth memory chips to China.

As a result, China not have much surplus to send to the US (and other countries), and India will have more space to boost its export of electronics, automobiles etc. Third, European Union (EU) countries have also imposed tariffs on Chinese EVs (electric vehicles) and solar equipment. Moreover, the multinational companies (MNCs) headquartered in the US and EU countries are shifting their factories away from China, thanks to growing geopolitical uncertainties, the ongoing trade war between the United States and China, cyber-security, and rule-of-law concerns, rising labour costs in China etc. This opens up opportunities as these MNCs can relocate their production bases to India. All of this reinforces a case for 'China Plus One', a potent business strategy that involves diversifying manufacturing and sourcing away from China aimed at reducing the risk of over-reliance on China for manufacturing and sourcing.

Is India ready to capitalise?

None other than NITI Aayog's 'Trade Watch' report says that even as many Asian countries such as Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, and Malaysia have emerged as bigger beneficiaries of the 'China Plus One' strategy - enabled by factors such as cheaper labour, simplified tax laws, lower tariffs, signing Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) - lead-

ing to substantial surge in their exports especially in high-growth sectors, India has lagged. Although India has achieved production gains, they have not significantly contributed to domestic value addition, unlike its peer economies.

In India's high-tech sector, while exports surged by 350 per cent between 2017 and 2023, domestic value-added output fell by 18 per cent. In manufacturing, by contrast, during this period, even as domestic value-added grew at 26 per cent, it still trailed behind merchandise export growth of 44 per cent. In electronics, India's share in US imports has grown from 0.2 per cent in 2017 to 2.1 per cent in 2023, courtesy of, the government's push toward high-tech exports. However, competitors like Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Thailand dominate, with each holding a substantially higher market share in US electronics imports.

An overarching reason behind India 'dropping the catch despite the man at first slip and the ball coming in our direction' is a high-cost domestic environment (this is despite a host of incentives given under the Production Linked Incentive or PLI schemes to industries) which makes our products uncompetitive in the export as well as domestic market. It also explains why our industries demand high protective tariffs and government yields; for instance, it has on the table a proposal for a 25 per cent hike in steel import duties. It is also a major factor behind India's reluctance to join major multilateral trade agreements, such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and Comprehensive and

Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) etc which help the country to better integrate into the global economy and benefit from expanded trade opportunities by facilitating access to markets of their member countries duty-free or at close to zero tariffs. Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) contribute nearly 40 per cent of exports. But, India not being a part of such trade alliances, they are denied an opportunity to boost exports. At the same time, they suffer due to high protective tariffs on the import of basic materials such as steel. A 25 per cent hike in import duties on steel products - asked by the Ministry of Steel - will impart a deadly blow to the MSMEs.

There are four major reasons as to why costs in India are high. First, businesses in basic materials and feedstock such as copper, zinc, aluminium, oil and gas, chemicals, petrochemicals etc are natural monopolies enabling them to set high prices. Second, tax rates are pretty high particularly when it comes to petroleum products which are still taxed under the pre-GST regime. By increasing movement costs, these increase the cost of all goods across the board.

Third, power tariffs are exorbitant thanks to excessive State controls on power distribution companies. Finally, industries operate in highly interest-rate environments. India can catapult itself to the position of fully leveraging the 'China Plus One' strategy only if it effectively addresses the present high-cost syndrome.

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

De-dollarisation: A bold step toward economic equity or a path fraught with uncertainty

The global economy stands at a crossroads as the concept of 'de-dollarisation' gains momentum, sparking debates about the future of international trade and finance

The global economy is currently rife with discussions surrounding a potential 'de-dollarisation,' which pertains to the anticipated transition away from the supremacy of the US dollar in international trade and finance.

Advocates argue that it could stabilise economies, reduce inflation, and ultimately relieve financial pressure on everyday individuals. However, is this change truly the solution to the world's economic problems, or does it introduce a new set of challenges? De-dollarisation refers to the reduction of dependence on the US dollar in the realms of global trade, investments, and reserves. For many years, the dollar has held its position



RACHNA LAKHPATRI

of elements: an increasing yearning for financial independence, the unpredictability of US policies, and the necessity for a different system that is more resilient against sanctions and market instability. Several nations, particularly those within economic alliances like BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), have put forth the concept of establishing a new shared currency to facilitate trade and lessen their dependence on the dollar. Undoubtedly, a significant appeal of a unified currency lies in its potential to mitigate inflation. By minimising the volatility of exchange rates and reducing reliance on fluctuations in the dollar, it could offer a pathway to sta-

bilise prices for traded goods through a singular global currency unit. Countries that rely on importing oil or other essential items ought to engage in negotiations for fixed prices, free from the influence of market fluctuations driven by the volatility of the dollar rate. Inflation, frequently influenced by fluctuations in local currency, could, in principle, be mitigated within a cohesive framework. The reasoning is straightforward: when trade and pricing frameworks are synchronised with a single currency, fluctuations in the dollar will likely exert a diminished impact from external shocks. Having more stable prices for essential items would alleviate the financial strain on

families. A unified currency could simplify many aspects of daily life for the average person. Crossing border lines may appear quite effortless, as there will be no need for currency exchange. Global enterprises will thrive in an environment where stable financial conditions enable them to provide savings to their customers. Nevertheless, the transition to a unified currency faces several challenges. A cohesive monetary system requires exceptional coordination among countries with diverse economic priorities, growth rates, and fiscal strategies.



Creating confidence and setting up governance frameworks for the currency would present a significant challenge. Critics contend that a unified currency could unfairly benefit more robust economies, putting smaller or developing countries at risk. Without the ability to modify their currency values, nations may find it challenging to address specific economic crises effectively. In the immediate term, this may unsettle global financial systems, leading to instability as markets adjust. Although the dollar's strength might not be flawless, it serves as a stabilising force in a tumultuous global economy. The ideas of de-dollarisation and the potential rise of

a unified currency represent daring approaches to addressing enduring economic challenges. The outcome of lower inflation and an improved quality of life hinges on the ability of nations to collaborate effectively and create frameworks that prioritise fairness and stability. However, the journey towards this transformation is set to be long and complex. The discussions it has ignited suggest a more equitable economic future. Whether they evolve into genuine transformation is something only time will reveal—or if the world navigates towards fresh financial horizons is yet to be determined.

(The writer is a freelance writer; views are personal)

Dense fog and cold conditions grip Delhi, AQI Poor

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

New Delhi has had no relief from the cold wave amid the New Year zeal as the national capital continues to shiver on the last day of 2024, with the weather department predicting a 'cold day' ahead. After a steep decline in night temperatures, Delhi woke up once again to dense fog, showing no signs of clearing despite the approaching change in the calendar. The minimum temperature was recorded at 9.6 degrees Celsius, 2.6 notches above the normal, according to the India Meteorological Department. It was 10.3 degrees C on Monday. Mainly clear skies are later, while smog or shallow fog is likely to develop in the evening and night, it said. The maximum temperature is expected to settle at 15 degrees Celsius. It is said to be a 'cold day' when the minimum temperature is under 10 degrees Celsius and the highest or lowest temperature is at least 4.5 degrees less than what is considered normal for a given period. It is also called a 'cold day' when the minimum temperature in less than 4 degrees Celsius. The Met office has forecast similar cold day conditions in the next few days. Dense fog conditions will remain for the next couple of days but are expected to improve from January 3. The cold spell is expected to impact visibility and significantly lower daytime temperatures across Northwest India.

India ready to support its citizen in Yemen

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However, the option of paying blood money was kept open. Her release depended on getting the family of the victim, Talal Abdo Mehdi, and their tribal leader to forgive her. Her death sentence could have been set aside if the victim's family pardoned her and accepted blood money. The negotiations for the same were underway.

However, they were stalled after the payment to the lawyer appointed on behalf of Priya got delayed. The lawyer had demanded USD 40,000 in two instalments as pre-negotiation fees. He refused to proceed further unless the entire amount was given to him.

Priya's mother Prema Kumari went to Yemen in April 2024 and met her daughter at the prison there for the first time in 11 years. Since then, her mother has been in the country trying to secure her daughter's release.

Nimisha left for Yemen in 2008 and worked in a few hospitals there, before starting her own clinic in 2015, with Mehdi as her local partner, which is required under Yemeni law.

According to her family, differences arose between the two when she questioned him about some alleged embezzlement.

To reclaim her passport, which was supposedly in Mehdi's custody, she allegedly injected him with sedatives in an attempt to make him unconscious. However, an overdose resulted in his death. She was taken into custody while reportedly trying to flee Yemen.

Prayagraj's night sky to illuminate with 2,000 drones at Maha Kumbh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Cutting-edge technology will light up the night sky of Sangam during the upcoming Maha Kumbh, as a fleet of 2,000 drones will take off in the holy city of Prayagraj to depict the mythical 'Samudra Manthan' and the emergence of 'Amrit Kalash'. The Union Culture Ministry on Tuesday said that Maha Kumbh 2025 is set to be a "divine and digitally advanced event", reflecting the "seamless integration" of spirituality and technology. Held every 12 years, the Maha Kumbh will be organised from January 13 to February 26 to showcase India's rich cultural heritage and spiritual traditions.

As part of the efforts to celebrate tradition while embracing technology, 360-degree virtual reality stalls will be set up in the fair area, officials said.

"These stalls will show videos of major events such as 'peshwai' (grand procession of 'akhadas'), auspicious bathing days ('snaan'), 'Ganga aarti', and multiple special footage from the grand festival of faith and harmony," the ministry said in a statement. A major attraction will be a drone show in the night skies of the holy city.

"A fleet of 2,000 drones will narrate the legendary tales of 'Prayag Mahatmyam' and 'Samudra Manthan', creating a magical evening spectacle over the Sangam Nose," it said. The drone show will also depict the emergence of 'Amrit Kalash' (nectar pot), creating a "magical visual narrative in the evening sky", the statement said. The show will further

highlight the religious and spiritual significance of Prayagraj, offering a unique experience for pilgrims and locals, it added.

The ministry said under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and efforts of the Uttar Pradesh government, the Maha Kumbh will stand as "a beacon of faith, innovation and global cultural unity".

Expected to attract over 40 crore devotees from across the globe, the 45-day festival will showcase India's rich cultural heritage and spiritual traditions.

The ministry said large-scale deployment of "remote-controlled lifebuoys" has also been introduced to enhance the safety of the devotees. "These devices can rapidly reach any location and transport individuals to safety in case of emergencies, ensuring the well-being of the pilgrims," it said.

In a first, 'high-tech' lost and found registration centres are being established in association with the state police, the ministry said.

These centres aim to reunite lost pilgrims with their families through digital registration of missing individuals, public announcements, and updates across social media platforms, along with police assistance for unclaimed individuals after 12 hours, as per the ministry statement. Also, the deployment of 2,700 artificial intelligence-powered cameras will provide 'real-time monitoring', while facial recognition technology will be used at the entry points for enhanced safety, the ministry said earlier. "A team of 56 cyber warriors will monitor online threats. Cyber help desks are being set up in all police stations," it said.

IMA Opposes 'Mixopathy',

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

The Gujarat chapter of the Indian Medical Association (IMA) Tuesday said "mixopathy" poses "severe risks" to the health of the citizens, and requested lawmakers to consider the long-term implications of such decisions on the health of the people of Gujarat. "Mixopathy" denotes mixing of different medical systems like allopathy or

modern medicine with homeopathy and ayurveda for treatment of patients. This comes days after the state health department called for a meeting of senior government officials, as well as representatives of the Gujarat Medical Council, Gujarat Board of Ayurveda and Unani System of Medicine etc to discuss the issue of allowing doctors trained in Ayurveda to practise allopathy.

Congress to file cases against Delhi CM, says Sandeep Dikshit

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The preliminary estimate of Madhuban to Mukarba Chowk flyover was made at Rs 422 crore in June 2012. After that the Cabinet decision came and the tendering was done on March 22, 2013 for Rs 280 crore, Dikshit said during the Press conference. "That means the money was not saved by Kejriwal's government, the money was saved by Sheila's government. I agree that you can say that the government had saved money, but saying that Kejriwal had saved money is not a lie, then tell me which word can we use for this?" he asked.

Similarly, in June 2012, the estimate for Azadpur-Prembari flyover was Rs 247 crore and the amount for tender in 2013 was Rs 182 crore, Dikshit said. "I am sorry that I am using a very strong word for the former chief minister called 'pathological liar'," he said. Continuing his attack on

Kejriwal, Dikshit added, "Arvind Kejriwal showed 360 newspaper cuttings. He is the first person who gives newspaper cutting as evidence...The day when CM Atishi said that we are taking money from BJP, that day former PM Manmohan Singh passed away. That is why we could not do a Press conference to counter the allegations."

In education, they claimed that they have done a revolutionary work in 12th pass percentage. They used to say that students are coming to their schools in large numbers, Dikshit said. "When Sheila's government lost in Delhi, there were 16.40 lakh students in Delhi government schools. Today, there are 17 to 18 lakh children. If enrolment had increased at the pace of the Congress government, today there would have been 22 to 23 lakh children, which means there are four to five lakh students less in our government schools," he said.

Snowfall forecast for Kashmir as coldwave conditions grip North India



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Coldwave conditions intensified across Kashmir on Tuesday, with the Met office predicting fresh spells of light to moderate snowfall in the valley during the week, while large swathes of Uttar Pradesh witnessed maximum temperatures dipping by more than 5 degrees Celsius.

Parts of Rajasthan experienced intense chill as neighbouring Haryana, and Punjab continued to witness biting cold conditions. Gulmarg, a tourist resort town in north Kashmir, recorded a low of minus 11.5 degrees Celsius, the Met office said.

Pahalgam, the base camp for the annual Amarnath Yatra in south Kashmir, registered a minimum temperature of minus 8.4 degrees Celsius. In Srinagar, the mercury dipped to minus 3.5 degrees Celsius. Qazigund -- the

gateway town to Kashmir -- logged a minimum temperature of minus 7.5 degrees. In south Kashmir, Kokernag recorded a minimum temperature of minus 5.6 degrees Celsius. The Met office has forecast light snowfall on New Year's Day and another spell of moderate snowfall later in the week.

"A feeble western disturbance is likely to hit Kashmir on January 1-2. There is a possibility of light snow at scattered places. A moderate to strong western disturbance is likely to affect from January 3-6. There is a chance of snow at most places with peak activity on January 4-6," the Met said and added that there was possibility of heavy snow at a few places in the higher reaches during the second spell.

Kashmir is currently under the grip of 'Chillai-Kalan' -- the harshest period of winter -- which began on December 21.

An overcast sky marked the last day of the year in Delhi, with the national capital's maximum temperature settling 2.7 notches below normal at 17.7 degrees Celsius.

The minimum temperature had settled 2.6 notches above normal at 9.6 degrees Celsius, the Met office said. In Uttar Pradesh, the maximum temperature dipped by more than 5 degrees Celsius in at least 50 districts, the Met office in Lucknow said.

The intense cold conditions are expected to continue till Wednesday. The minimum temperature was recorded at 13 degrees Celsius. With overcast skies and the day temperature hovering near the 15 degrees Celsius mark, the temperature difference between day and night came down significantly.

The difference between day and night temperatures

typically hovers between 5 and 7 degrees Celsius.

Explaining the unusual weather pattern, Atul Kumar Singh -- a senior scientist at the Met office in Lucknow -- said, "Due to stability in the lower troposphere, radiational heating during the day and radiational cooling of the night have been blocked. This has led to a reduced temperature difference between day and night."

The ongoing cold conditions were exacerbated by cold northwestern winds sweeping in from the mountainous regions, leading to a marked drop in day temperatures. Cold conditions prevailed in parts of Rajasthan and some places in the state's western region experienced a cold to very cold day, a Met official said.

Sriganganagar and Lukanransar in Bikaner were the coldest places in the state with the minimum temperature being recorded at 4.6 degrees Celsius in each.

Narnaul was the coldest place in Haryana, with the minimum temperature settling two notches below normal at 4.5 degrees Celsius. Hisar also experienced a cold night. Bhiwani and Sirsa, too, reeled from intense cold.

In Punjab, Bathinda was the coldest place with a minimum temperature of 5 degrees Celsius. Sangrur experienced a cold night at 5.3 degrees Celsius while Faridkot recorded a low of 6 degrees.

In Uttarakhand, a large number of tourists arrived at picturesque locations to take advantage of the clear weather and bright sunshine after a spell of heavy snowfall to ring in the new year. In the east, Jharkhand is set to experience a drop in temperatures, with the mercury expected to dip by 3 to 5 degrees during the next two days, the Met office said. As the state gears up for the new year, cold day conditions are likely to persist, along with dense fog in some regions.

O P Chautala remembered

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana Governor Dattatreya, Chief Minister Nayab Saini, Union Minister and BJP chief J P Nadda, SAD leader Sukhbir Singh Badal and others on Tuesday paid tributes to INLD patriarch O P Chautala, who passed away

recently. At the "shradhanjali sabha" (condolence meeting) in Chaudhary Sahib Ram Stadium in the Chautala village, condolence messages to the Chautala family sent by President Droupadi Murmu, PM Narendra Modi and Punjab Governor Gulab Chand Kataria were also read out.

LG confront Atishi's temples demolition 'act'

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The Chief Minister has concluded saying, "Demolition of these structures would hurt the religious sentiments of these communities. I would like to request you to not to demolish any of these temples and places of worship in the list enclosed."

"If at all, LG has issued strict instructions to the Police to maintain extra vigil against forces who may indulge in deliberate vandalism for political benefits. His instructions are being strictly followed, as was witnessed during the just gone Christmas celebrations which did not see any ontoward incident," read

the statement issued by the Lieutenant Governor's office. Senior AAP leader and Cabinet Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj also accused the BJP saying the saffron party seeks votes in the name of Lord Ram, now become the enemy of Lord Ram himself. He recalled that last year, when the Greater Kailash Ramleela Committee tried to organize Ramleela, the DDA under the BJP-led Central Government made every effort to stop it. The police even halted the construction of the stage. Despite sending multiple letters to the Vice-Chairman of the DDA, Bharadwaj stated that he had to struggle immensely to ensure the Ramleela was organised.

Arms supply syndicate busted in Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Three people, including a BTech graduate, were arrested for their alleged involvement in supply of arms and ammunition in Delhi, police said on Tuesday.

The accused have been identified as Rajesh Choube (46) from Madhya Pradesh, Aviral Sharma (35) from Uttar Pradesh and Jitender Singh (42) from Rajasthan, they said. "On November 28, a tip off regarding a key member of

arms supply syndicate, Rajesh was received that he was coming near Sector-18, Metro Station, Rohini to deliver huge consignment of illegal fire arms," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Special Cell) Amit Kaushik said.

A trap was laid and Rajesh was arrested. Five semi-automatic pistols with 200 live cartridges were recovered from him, Kaushik said. During interrogation, Rajesh disclosed that he had procured illegal arms from local supplier

of MP and illegal ammunitions from one Aviral Sharma of Agra in UP. Rajesh was suppose to further supply these arms and ammunition in the areas of Delhi and UP.

"On November 30, on the instance of Rajesh, Aviral was arrested from Agra, UP and 50 live cartridges were recovered from him. During interrogation, Aviral disclosed that he also supplied the ammunition to Jitender in Rajasthan," another officer said.

Punjab informs SC that fasting farmer...

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Additionally, the government mobilised 7,000 personnel at the protest site, but on December 30, a call for Punjab bandh was called by other farmer organisations, hindering its efforts, he said. The bench recorded the submissions and posted the matter on January 2, 2025, for the compliance of its order on shifting of Dallewal to a hospital. "We are inclined to accept the request to afford some more time for compliance with the directions issued by the court," the bench

said. Punjab Chief Secretary and Director General of Police were directed to continue to appear in-person virtually during the hearing.

On December 28, the top court came down heavily on the Punjab Government for not moving Dallewal to a hospital even as it doubted the intention of the agitating farmers for resisting availability of medical aid to their septuagenarian leader. The Punjab Government said it faced huge resistance from the protesting farmers who had encircled Dallewal and prevented him from being

taken to a hospital.

Dallewal has been on an indefinite fast at the Khanauri border point between Punjab and Haryana since November 26 to press the Centre to accept the farmers' demands, including a legal guarantee of minimum support price for crops. The farmers under the banner of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha have been camping at Shambhu and Khanauri border points between Punjab and Haryana since February 13 after their march to Delhi was stopped by the security forces.

Pak opens Shaheed Bhagat Singh Gallery at Poonch to tourists

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The record which was put on display also included a request of Singh for providing the order of court dated August 27, 1930, and his petition dated May 31, 1929, for the interview of his father. It also contained a petition of his father, Sardar Kishan Singh, against the death sentence of his son and the certificate/execution of his death in Lahore district jail by the superintendent of jail dated March 23, 1931. It also includes a petition of Singh for allowing him daily

newspapers and books, and some other records related to the manifesto of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha Lahore by B C Vohra and several clippings of the daily VIBHARAT etc.

One document about the execution of the death sentence of Singh says: "I (superintendent of the jail) hereby certify that the sentence of death passed on Bhagat Singh has been duly executed and that the said Bhagat Singh was accordingly hanged by neck till he was dead at Lahore Jail on 9 pm Monday the 23rd day of

March 1931. The body was not taken down until life was ascertained by a medical officer to be extinct; and that no accident, error or other misadventure occurred."

The revolutionary significantly did not end each application with the customary 'yours truly' or 'obediently' and instead he chose the words "Yours etc. Etc." showing his resilience in the face of tyranny. The case files also contain documents showing how the British India police and agencies had busted the team of Singh comprising around

24 to 25 members from different parts of India and established their links to the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army and the Naujawan Bharat Sabha.

Bhagat Singh Memorial Foundation Chairman Advocate Imtiaz Rasheed Qureshi told PTI on Tuesday that since the Punjab government has opened the Bhagat Singh Gallery, it should also rename Shadman Chowk (where he was hanged) after him. "We will continue pressing the government for this," he added.

Manipur CM says sorry for the ethnic...

From page 1

The counter-insurgency operations in Manipur resulted in killing of 33 insurgents besides recovery of 49 weapons. Further, 80 cadres of insurgent outfits surrendered with 31 arms. Large-scale ethnic violence erupted between the Meitei and Kuki communities in Manipur on May 3, 2023. The violence resulted in numerous casualties, injuries, and incidents of arson. Though the issue of violence

primarily relates to maintenance of public order, which is a state subject, the central government has been consistently extending its support, as required by the state government. The annual report said the central government took a series of immediate and sustained actions to handle the situation. Immediate action was initiated by engaging with top officials of Manipur, progressively deploying additional companies of Central Armed Police Forces, Army and

Assam Rifles columns, deploying helicopters and drones, and implementing a unified command system.

During the visit of Union Home Minister Amit Shah from May 29 to June one, 2023, he had held more than 15 meetings with government officers, officers of security forces, political leaders and more than 100 members of civil society organisations. Further, as per the directions of the home minister, Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai monitored the situation by staying in

Manipur from May 25 to June 17, 2023.

Reacting to remarks made by Singh Communist Party of India (CPI) leader Annie Raja said the chief minister has no moral right to continue at the top post. RJD leader Manoj Jha said everyone has seen the visuals from ethnic strife-torn Manipur and Singh should check his "morality quotient". "Everyone saw those visuals... An audio clip was released recently, in which there were revelations about his conversation with the home minister..." he said.

South Korean court issues warrants to detain impeached President Yoon, search his office

AP ■ SEOUL

A South Korean court issued warrants on Tuesday to detain impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol and search his office and residence over his short-lived declaration of martial law. The country's anti-corruption agency said it is investigating whether his declaration amounted to rebellion. But experts still say there is little chance of detention or searches unless Yoon is formally removed from office. The Seoul Western District Court issued warrants to detain Yoon and to search the presidential office and residence in central Seoul, according to a statement from the Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials, which is leading a joint investigation with police and military authorities. Under South Korean law, the leader of a rebellion can face the death penalty or life imprisonment if convicted. Yoon has presidential immunity from most criminal prosecution, but the privilege does not extend to allegations of rebellion or treason. Yoon's powers have been sus-

ended since the opposition-controlled National Assembly voted to impeach him on December 14 over his imposition of martial law, which drew hundreds of troops and police officers into Seoul streets. Yoon has argued his decree was a legitimate act of governance, calling it a warning to the main liberal opposition Democratic Party, which he has called "a monster" and "anti-state forces" that has used its legislative majority to impeach top officials, undermine the government's budget, and which he claims sympathises with North Korea. The Constitutional Court is to determine whether to dismiss Yoon as president or reinstate him. Experts said Yoon is likely to ignore the warrants. He's ignored repeated requests by investigative authorities to appear for questioning, and the presidential security service has blocked attempts to search his office and residence citing a law that bans raids on sites with state secrets. A lawyer for Yoon rejected the anti-corruption agency's request for warrants on Monday, arguing it lacked legal authority to investigate rebel-

lion charges. The anti-corruption agency said it has no immediate plans on how to proceed with the warrants. "Unless Yoon voluntarily lets them detain him, there is no way to detain him," said Choi Jin, director of the Seoul-based Institute of Presidential Leadership. "Should investigators have hand-to-hand fights with the security service?" Choi said that investigators were still likely to visit Yoon's residence to show they are strictly and fairly carrying out their work. Park Sung-min, president of Seoul-based political consulting firm MIN Consulting, said the push for an arrest warrant is likely an attempt to pressure Yoon to cooperate with investigations. Former President Park Geun-hye, who was thrown out of office in 2017 following an impeachment over a corruption scandal, also refused to meet with prosecutors while in office. She underwent questioning by them and was arrested after the Constitutional Court removed her from office. Yoon's imposition of martial law lasted only six hours but



Supporters of impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol stage a rally near the presidential residence in Seoul, South Korea. The letters read 'Oppose Impeachment', and 'Arrest Lee Jae-myung'. AP/PTI

triggered huge political turmoil, halting high-level diplomacy and rattling financial markets.

Despite Yoon's deployment of troops and police, enough lawmakers managed to enter the

assembly chamber to overturn it unanimously. Yoon's defence minister, police

chief and several top military commanders have already been arrested over their roles in the

martial law enactment. Yoon has claimed he wasn't trying to stop the functioning of the assembly, saying that the troops were sent to maintain order, and also denied planning to arrest politicians. But comments by now-arrested commanders of military units sent to the assembly have contradicted this claim. Kwak Jong-keun, the commander of the Army Special Warfare Command, testified at the National Assembly that Yoon called on troops to "quickly knock down the door and drag out the lawmakers who are inside". Kwak said he did not carry out Yoon's orders. The country's political crisis deepened last Friday, when the Democratic Party and other small opposition parties voted to impeach acting President Han Duck-soo as well over wrangling over his refusal to fill in three justice seats at the Constitutional Court. Observers say adding more justices could affect the court's ruling on Yoon's impeachment. The deputy prime minister and finance minister, Choi Sang-mok, has become South Korea's new interim leader.

Elon Musk softens stand on H-1B visa programme, calls for 'major reforms'

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

After vowing to "go to war" to defend the H-1B visa programme, tech billionaire Elon Musk has softened his stand on the issue by calling for reforms in the "broken" system used to bring skilled foreign workers to the US. Musk, along with Indian-American tech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy, has been tapped by Trump to lead his Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). Last week, Musk argued that foreign workers were needed for tech companies like Musk's SpaceX and Tesla. "The reason I'm in America along with so many critical people who built SpaceX, Tesla and hundreds of other companies that made America strong is because of H-1B," Musk last

week wrote on X. Musk, however, appeared to retract his earlier statement in response to a post by an X user who said America needed to be a destination for the world's most "elite talent" but argued the current H-1B system was not the solution. "Easily fixed by raising the minimum salary significantly and adding a yearly cost for maintaining the H-1B, making it materially more expensive to hire from overseas than domestically. I've been very clear that the programme is broken and needs major reform," Musk on Sunday said in a post on X. The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise.

Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China. The tech industry has long called for more H-1B visas to attract highly skilled workers to the US. Musk, who was once on an H-1B visa and whose electric vehicle company Tesla has hired workers using the programme, defended the tech industry's need to hire foreign workers. "Anyone - of any race, creed or nationality - who came to America and worked like hell to contribute to this country will forever have my respect. America is the land of freedom and opportunity. Fight with every fibre of your being to keep it that way!" he wrote on X on December 28. Musk's statement also received

backing from president-elect Donald Trump whose first administration restricted the programme in 2020, arguing that it allows businesses to replace Americans with lower-paid foreign workers. However, Trump recently said: "I've always liked the visas, I have always been in favour of the visas. That's why we have them." Musk has been consistently posting on X in favour of the programme. "There is a permanent shortage of excellent engineering talent. It is the fundamental limiting factor in Silicon Valley," Musk wrote on December 25 on X. Several of Trump's supporters and immigration hardliners have been increasingly pushing for scrapping the H-1B visa programme amid debate over immigration.

Indian-origin 'unsung heroes' on King Charles' 2025 New Year Honours List

PTI ■ LONDON

Community leaders, campaigners, academics and medics are among over 30 Indian-origin professionals to be recognised in King Charles' 2025 New Year Honours List released in London in time for New Year's Eve. Ranil Malcolm Jayawardena, a Conservative member of Parliament of Sri Lanka and Indian heritage, has been conferred a Knighthood for political and public service along with recently resigned England men's football team manager Gareth Southgate, for services to the game. London Mayor Sadiq Khan and former West Midlands Mayor Andy Street are also among those receiving Knighthoods among more than 1,200 recipients on the 2025 honours list released on

Monday night across all sectors, with particular commendation to role models in sport, healthcare, academia and voluntary service. "Every day, ordinary people go out and do extraordinary things for their communities," UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer said. "They represent the very best of the UK and that core value of service which I put at the centre of everything this government does. The New Year Honours List celebrates more of these unsung heroes, and I thank them for their incredible contribution," he said. The list, released annually by the Cabinet Office in the name of the British monarch, includes Commanders of the Order of the British Empire (CBEs) for Satwant Kaur Deol for services to further education, Charles Pritam Singh

Dhanowa OBE for services to Competition Law, and surgeon Professor Sneha Khemka for services to healthcare, science and innovation and technology. Others of Indian heritage receiving CBEs include Leena Nair, Global Chief Executive Officer of Chanel, for services to the retail and consumer sector; Mayank Prakash, President of the British Computing Society, for services to the advancement of technology professionals; and Purnima Murthy Tanuku OBE, chief executive of the National Day Nurseries Association, for services to early years education. Among the 2025 Indian-origin Officers of the Order of the British Empire (OBEs) include cardiologist Professor Sanjay Arya for services to black and minority ethnic doctors and

healthcare in north-west England; Nandini Das, Professor of Early Modern Literature and Culture and Tutorial Fellow at Exeter College, University of Oxford, for services to interdisciplinary research in the humanities and to public engagement; Tarsem Singh Dhaliwal, CEO of Iceland Foods, for services to the Welsh economy, retail and charity; Jasmine Dotiwala for services to broadcasting, music, equality, diversity and inclusion; Monica Kohli, President of Women's International Shipping and Trading Association UK and Chair of the Indian Maritime Association UK, for services to promoting diversity in the maritime industry; and Soumya Majumdar from the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) for services to law and order.

Chinese hackers remotely accessed workstations, documents: US Treasury

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Chinese hackers remotely accessed several US Treasury Department workstations and unclassified documents after compromising a third-party software service provider, the agency said on Monday. The department did not provide details on how many workstations had been accessed or what sort of documents the hackers may have obtained, but it said in a letter to lawmakers revealing the breach that "at this time there is no evidence indicating the threat actor has continued access to Treasury information".

The hack was being investigated as a "major cybersecurity incident", it added. "Treasury takes very seriously all threats against our systems, and the data it holds," a department spokesperson said in a separate statement. "Over the last four years, Treasury has significantly bolstered its cyber defence, and we will continue to work with both private and public sector partners to protect our financial system from threat actors." In Beijing, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson gave China's standard response to hacking allegations.

"We have repeatedly stated our position on such groundless accusations that lack evidence," Mao Ning said at a daily briefing. "China consistently opposes all forms of hacking, and we are even more opposed to the dissemination of false information against China for political purposes." The incident comes as US officials are continuing to grapple with the fallout of a massive Chinese cyberespionage campaign known as Salt Typhoon that gave officials in Beijing access to private texts and phone conversations of an unknown number of Americans.

Bangladesh's interim govt to announce 'proclamation of July uprising'

PTI ■ DHAKA

The interim government in Bangladesh has announced that it will prepare a "proclamation of July uprising", a day after it distanced itself from a proposed declaration with an identical title by the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement that led to the ouster of then-prime minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League regime on August 5. Alam said the government took the initiative to prepare the proposed charter to "consolidate the people's unity, anti-fascist spirit and desire for state reform developed through the July uprising". The Anti-Discrimination Students Movement along with the National Citizens Committee, another grouping led by the students, two days ago in a surprise development said it would announce the procla-

Yunus' official Jamuna residence, Alam said the declaration would be based on the views of all participating students, political parties, and stakeholders, including the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement that led to the ouster of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League regime on August 5. Alam said the government took the initiative to prepare the proposed charter to "consolidate the people's unity, anti-fascist spirit and desire for state reform developed through the July uprising". The Anti-Discrimination Students Movement along with the National Citizens Committee, another grouping led by the students, two days ago in a surprise development said it would announce the procla-

mation of the July uprising on Tuesday afternoon at Dhaka's Central Shaheed Minar. However, the students' platform hurriedly called an emergency meeting around 1:30 a.m. on Tuesday and told the media that instead of the proclamation they would rather stage a "march for unity" at the same venue and time. "The Mujibist '72 constitution will be buried (in the proclamation) in the very place where the one-point declaration was made during the July uprising," the platform's convener Hasnat Abdullah told a press conference on December 29. Abdullah at that time said that "Indian aggression was initiated through the principles of the 1972 constitution (and) the proclamation will make it clear how the Mujibist constitution

destroyed the aspirations of the people and exactly how we want to replace it". The platform leader said the proclamation was expected to declare "irrelevant" the deposed premier's "Nazi Awami League" in Bangladesh as well. "We believe the way our revolution was embraced by all anti-fascists, this proclamation will also contain everyone's hopes and aspirations," said Sarjis Alam, anti-discrimination students' movement leader and National Citizens' Committee chief organiser. The 1972 constitution was framed a year after the emergence of independent Bangladesh by representatives elected in the 1970 elections in line with their "mandate" as "constitute assembly" members with Awami League under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman gain-

ing an absolute majority. The party won 160 of the 162 general seats and all seven women's seats in then-East Pakistan. However, Pakistan's then-military junta under General Yahya Khan eventually launched a sudden army crackdown leading to the Liberation War. The interim government visibly distanced itself from the "proclamation" with Yunus' press secretary saying "the government has nothing to do with it" and "wants to see it (proclamation) as private initiative". Awami League has not been seen in the public sphere since the August 5 ouster of the regime as many of its leaders have been arrested or are on the run at home and abroad, limiting their activities on social media platforms occasionally.

Cities welcome New Year in celebrations tinged with local traditions

AP ■ WELLINGTON

Cities around the world are readying to ring in the New Year with celebrations highlighting local cultures and traditions, after a year roiled by ongoing conflict and political instability. Countries in the South Pacific Ocean will be the first to welcome 2025, with midnight in New Zealand striking 18 hours before the ball drop in Times Square in New York. In New Zealand's largest city, Auckland, thousands were expected to throng the downtown or climb the city's ring of volcanic peaks for a fireworks vantage point — and a light display recognizing Auckland's Indigenous tribes. It follows a year marked by protests over Maori rights in the nation of 5 million. Two hours later in Australia, more than 1 million people are expected at Sydney Harbor for the traditional fireworks. British pop star Robbie Williams will lead a singalong and Indigenous ceremonies and performances will acknowledge the land's first people. Asia gets ready for the Year of the

Snake: Much of Japan has shut down ahead of the nation's biggest holiday, as temples and homes underwent a thorough cleaning, including swatting floor mats called "tatami" with big sticks. The upcoming Year of the Snake in the Asian zodiac is heralded as one of rebirth — alluding to the reptile's shedding skin. Stores in Japan, which observes the zodiac cycle from January 1, have been selling tiny figures of smiling snakes and other snake-themed products. Other places in Asia will start marking the Year of the Snake later, with the Lunar New Year. In South Korea, celebrations were cut back or cancelled as the country observes a period of national mourning following the Sunday crash of a Jeju Air flight at Muan that killed 179 people. **West's rivals exchange goodwill:** Chinese state media covered an exchange of New Year's greetings between leader Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin in a reminder of growing closeness between two leaders who face tensions with the west. Xi told Putin that their countries will "always move forward hand in hand", the official Xinhua News

Agency said Tuesday. China has maintained ties and a robust trade with Russia since the latter's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, helping to offset Western sanctions and attempts to isolate Putin. **Midnight Mass, with bubbles:** Rome's traditional New Year's Eve festivities have an additional draw: the start of Pope Francis' Holy Year, the once every quarter-century celebration projected to bring some 32 million pilgrims to the Eternal City in 2025. On Tuesday, Francis will celebrate a vespers at St. Peter's Basilica, followed by Mass on Wednesday, when he is expected to once again appeal for peace amid wars raging in Ukraine and the Middle East. Meanwhile, in the United States, the Cathedral of Saint Paul in Minnesota will host an 11 p.m. Mass followed by a champagne reception with toasts. January 1 is a day of obligation for Catholics, marking the Solemnity of Mary, and many



churches will hold vigil Masses on Tuesday afternoon and evening. **Paris recaptures the Olympic spirit:** Paris will cap a momentous 2024 with its traditional festive countdown and fireworks extravaganza on the famed Champs-Élysées. The Summer Olympics and Paralympic Games hosted in the French capital from July to September transformed the city into a site of joy, fraternity and astonishing sporting achievements, and marked another major mile-

stone in its recovery from deadly Islamist extremist attacks in 2015. **Britons will brave wintry weather:** London is due to ring in the New Year with a pyrotechnic display along the River Thames and a parade through the city centre on Wednesday featuring 10,000 performers. The fireworks will explode against the backdrop of the London Eye, the massive Ferris wheel across the river from Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament. With a storm bringing bitter weather to other parts of the United Kingdom, however, festivities in Edinburgh, Scotland — including the Hogmanay Street party, garden concert and castle pyrotechnics show — were already cancelled. **Rio to see 2 million revellers:** Rio de Janeiro will throw Brazil's main New Year's Eve bash on Copacabana Beach, with 10 ferries offshore bearing 12 straight min-

utes of fireworks. Thousands of tourists in six cruise ships will witness the show up close. Rio's City Hall was closely guarding its plans for a display of lights and sounds. More than 2 million people are expected at the Copacabana, hoping to squeeze in to concerts by superstar Brazilian artists such as pop singer Anitta and Grammy-award winner Caetano Veloso. **American traditions old and new:** In New York City, the organization managing Times Square has tested its famous ball drop, and inspected 2025 numerals, lights and thousands of crystals, as part of a tradition going back to 1907. This year's celebration will include musical performances by TLC, Jonas Brothers, Rita Ora, and Sophie Ellis-Bextor. The party, covering multiple blocks around the city's main tourism and theatre hub, is expected to draw large crowds despite rain and chilly weather. Meanwhile, Las Vegas will bid farewell to 2024 with old — and some new — traditions. Its annual eight-minute pyrotechnic show will be on in the Las Vegas Strip, with 340,000 people anticipated as

fireworks are launched from the rooftops of nine casinos. Nearby, the massive Sphere venue will display for the first time countdowns to midnight in different time zones. **Country music, football and a midnight race:** In Pasadena, enthusiastic Rose Parade spectators were to camp out on the cold streets and ring in the New Year hoping for prime spots for the iconic Southern California tradition. The parade precedes the Rose Bowl football game between the Ohio State Buckeyes and the Oregon Ducks on January 1. Thousands are to participate in a midnight 5K race following the parade route. Some 200,000 people will flock to a party in Nashville, Tennessee, featuring a five-hour show by some of country music's biggest stars. At midnight — an hour after New York's — a 16-foot tall music note weighing 400 pounds will drop as fireworks light the sky. Celebrations will echo around the globe as the New Year arrives in different time zones, with American Samoa among the last to welcome 2025 a full 24 hours after New Zealand.

Rupee falls 13 paise to all-time closing low of 85.65 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee depreciated 13 paise to close at fresh record low of 85.65 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, ending the year with a sharp 3 per cent loss on significant foreign fund outflows and a strong greenback in global markets. Forex traders said the rupee has been under continued pressure amid the Federal Reserve's cautious stance on rate cuts and the "Trump factor" driving up the dollar index (DXY) and US 10-year bond yields. Additionally, slowing domestic macroeconomic growth, widening trade deficit and persistent foreign fund outflows have further fuelled the rupee's depreciation. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at

85.54 and touched the lowest level of 85.66 against the greenback during intra-day trade. The unit ended the session at 85.65 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a fall of 13 paise over its previous close. On Monday, the rupee dropped 4 paise to 85.52 against the US dollar. The domestic unit has depreciated against the greenback by almost 3 per cent from 83.16 on December 29, 2023, to 85.65 on December 31, 2024. The local currency breached the crucial 84-level on October 10, surpassed 85-dollar mark on December 19 and even touched the lifetime low of 85.80 intraday on December 27, recording the steepest single-day fall in nearly two years. According to Anuj



Choudhary - Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, the rupee is expected to trade with a negative bias on elevated crude oil prices, overall strength in the US dollar and month-end dollar demand from importers. Moreover, persistent selling pressure by foreign funds added further strain on the currency. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded Rs 1,893.16 crore in the capital markets on net basis on Monday, according to exchange data. In 2024, foreign investors significantly scaled back their investments in Indian equities, with net inflows amounting to a little over Rs 5,000 crore, as elevated domestic valuations, coupled with geopolitical uncertainties prompted investors to adopt

a more cautious stance. In 2023, Rs 1.71 lakh crore net investment was made in the domestic equity market. "However, any intervention by the RBI may support the rupee at lower levels. Volumes may remain thin due to the New Year holiday. USD/INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 85.40 to 85.85," Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan - said. India's external debt rose to USD 711.8 billion as of September this year, up 4.3 per cent over June 2024, as per the data released by the Finance Ministry. At the end of September 2023, the external debt stood at USD 637.1 billion. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading lower

by 0.11 per cent at 108.01. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, surged 0.57 per cent to USD 74.41 per barrel in futures trade. On the domestic equity market front, the 30-share benchmark index Sensex closed 109.12 points, or 0.14 per cent lower, at 78,139.01 points. The Nifty settled on a flat note at 23,644.80 points. On the domestic macroeconomic front, India's current account deficit (CAD) moderated marginally to USD 11.2 billion or 1.2 per cent of GDP year-on-year in the July-September quarter of 2024-25, according to Reserve Bank data. The CAD, an indicator of the country's external payment scenario, was USD 11.3 billion or 1.3 per cent of GDP during the second quarter of 2023-24.

Reliance spends USD 13 bn on acquisitions in five years

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries Ltd has spent USD 13 billion on acquisitions in the past five years across new energy, telecom, retail and media business to script a pivot away from core oil and petrochemicals business to clean energy and consumer facing verticals. Last week, Reliance bought oncology platform Karkinos Healthcare for Rs 375 crore, adding another stack to its diagnostic and digital healthcare ecosystem, Morgan Stanley said in a report. "Over the past five years, RIL has announced USD 13 billion in acquisitions with 14 per cent in new energy, 48 per cent in technology, media and telecommunications (TMT), 9 per cent in retail, and increasingly more in healthcare," it said. Of this, USD 6 billion was in acquisition of companies and assets in media and education business and USD 2.6 billion in telecom and internet ver-



ticals. It spent USD 1.7 billion on acquisitions in new energy and USD 1.14 billion in retail, according to Morgan Stanley. RIL's biggest acquisition in the last five years has been buyout of local cable TV and internet service providers Hathway Cable and Datacom Ltd for USD 981 million. It spent USD 771 million on buying Norwegian-headquartered solar panel maker REC Solar Holdings and another USD 767 million on buying search and database firm JustDial, the report said.

Last week, it acquired a 100 per cent stake in Karkinos Healthcare, increasing its exposure to the diagnostic and healthcare ecosystem following previous investments like HAGI, Netmeds and Strand Life Science. Karkinos provides technology driven, innovative solutions for early detection, diagnosis and management of cancer, according to Morgan Stanley. It acts like a care partner during a patient's cancer treatment. Other investors in the com-

pany have included Tata Group, Rakuten, Mayo Clinic, and Hero Enterprise. "RIL aims to leverage its technological expertise and vast distribution networks to create more integrated healthcare system-digital health platforms, telemedicine services and advanced healthcare delivery models," the brokerage said. Karkinos was incorporated in India on July 24, 2020 and is in the business of providing technology-driven, innovative solutions for the early detection, diagnosis, and management of cancer. It had a turnover of about Rs 22 crore in the 2022-23 fiscal year. Karkinos has cancelled the existing outstanding 30,075 equity shares held by the erstwhile shareholders of the company. Its previous prominent investors included Ewart Investments Ltd (100 per cent subsidiary of Tata Sons), Reliance Digital Health Ltd (a subsidiary of Reliance Industries), Mayo Clinic (US), Sundar Raman (Director at

Reliance Foundation Youth Sports and former COO of Indian Premier League since 2008), and Ravi Kant (ex-MD of Tata Motors). The company is focused on providing end-to-end services relating to early detection and effective treatment of cancer at substantially lower than prevailing rates, while still generating healthy profitability. In order to meet this vision, Karkinos started partnering with hospitals to provide oncology services (testing, radiation therapy, etc.). The company has partnered with around 60 hospitals till December 2023. It is through a subsidiary setting up a 150-bed multispecialty cancer hospital at Imphal, Manipur. Going forward, its source of income was said to be via Advanced Cancer Care Diagnostics and Research (ACDDR), Distributed Cancer Care Network (DCCN), tie-ups with corporates for early diagnosis of cancer, and cancer care hospital.

Sensex declines 109 pts in final session, ends 2024 with over 8 pc gains

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended lower in the final session of 2024 on Tuesday amid persistent foreign fund outflows and weak trends in the global markets. Falling for the second straight day, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex declined 109.12 points or 0.14 per cent to settle at 78,139.01. Intra-day, it tanked 687.34 points or 0.87 per cent to 77,560.79. The NSE Nifty dipped marginally by 0.10 points to settle at 23,644.80. In the entire 2024, the Sensex jumped 5,898.75 points or 8.16 per cent, and the Nifty surged 1,913.4 points or 8.80 per cent. The BSE benchmark Sensex hit its record peak of 85,978.25 on September 27 this year, and the NSE Nifty also reached the lifetime high of 26,277.35 on the same day. From the 30 blue-chip pack, Tech Mahindra, Zomato, Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys,



ICICI Bank, Bajaj Finance, Hindustan Unilever and HCL Technologies were the major laggards on Tuesday. Kotak Mahindra Bank, ITC, UltraTech Cement and Tata Motors were among the gainers. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 1,893.16 crore on Monday, according to exchange data. In Asian markets, and Shanghai settled lower while Hong Kong ended in the pos-

itive territory. Markets were closed in Tokyo and Seoul for New Year holidays. European markets were trading mostly higher. US markets ended lower on Monday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.46 per cent to USD 74.34 a barrel. The 30-share BSE benchmark tumbled 450.94 points or 0.57 per cent to settle at 78,248.13 on Monday. The Nifty declined 168.50 points or 0.71 per cent to 23,644.90.

After rough ride in 2024, Indian startups look for a promising new year

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian startup ecosystem experienced a roller-coaster ride in 2024, characterised by a slight-yet-concerning decline in funding activity and a shift in investor sentiment, alongside a silver lining with several startups achieving unicorn status. Despite facing global economic challenges, India's startups showcased remarkable resilience, adeptly navigating changing market conditions, while continuing to attract investments. According to data from Tracxn, Indian startups raised a total of USD 30.4 billion in funding throughout 2024, a 6.5 per cent decline from the USD 32.5 billion secured in 2023. Despite this dip, the Indian startup ecosystem demonstrated resilience, with several companies achieving unicorn status this year. Noteworthy entrants to the unicorn club include Rapido, Ather, Perfios, Porter, and Money View, high-

lighting ongoing innovation and investment interest in the sector. The overall funding trend reflects a cautious-yet-optimistic approach from investors, as they navigate a more selective funding environment, while still recognising the potential of high-growth startups in India. A slight shift towards early-stage investments was evident during the year, with seed and Series A rounds gaining traction, as investors sought to back innovative ideas with long-term potential. Businesses that could demonstrate robust underlying unit economics found greater favour this year, Dushyant Singh, Managing Partner at Playbook Partners, noted. Gig economy, retail, and enterprise applications stood out as top-performing sectors, according to Tracxn. Quick commerce emerged as a high-growth sector, with 40 active companies, including unicorns Zepto, Blinkit, and

Swiggy Instamart, and promising newcomers Dunzo, Swish, and Farmako. In July, the government announced the abolishment of the angel tax on investments in startups to provide a more conducive environment for growth. "By eliminating this tax, the government has provided a much-needed boost to investors and entrepreneurs, enabling greater liquidity and more flexible funding options for startups. However, fewer funding rounds, high operational costs, and infrastructure challenges remain ongoing factors that need attention," said Jeenendra Bhandari, Chairman, JITO Incubation and Innovation Foundation (JIIF). There was an encouraging rise in women entrepreneurs and founders from Tier 2 and 3 towns. Ninad Karpe from 100X.VC said the entrepreneurial culture has transcended its traditional boundaries. "The entrepreneurial culture has transcended its tra-



ditional boundaries, seeping into colleges, schools, and even Tier 2 and 3 towns. Founders from these regions are bringing fresh perspectives, solving hyperlocal problems, and creating opportunities that were previously untapped. "There's a noticeable rise in women entrepreneurs, signalling a positive shift in inclusivity and diversity within the startup ecosystem," he said. According to official data, India has more than 73,000 startups with at least one

woman director that have been recognised under the Startup India Initiative. Despite the positive trends, challenges persist. Global economic uncertainties have a direct impact on investor sentiment and funding availability. "While the number of deals has seen a quarterly increase of 10-20 per cent... Deal values have declined significantly. This reflects a cautious investment climate, with most funding rounds being either follow-

ups by existing investors or bridge rounds aimed at extending the runway rather than driving growth. The focus has shifted from valuation-driven funding to sustainability and profitability," FAAD Capital CEO Aditya Arora said. The growth in venture capital this year was mainly driven by increase in mid and late-stage investment, Singh seconded. Startups continue to grapple with rising operational costs, which can strain their financial sustainability. Several Indian startups have gained fame and achieved unicorn status despite not being profitable. Many startups still face challenges related to inadequate physical infrastructure, particularly in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities. This can hugely affect logistics, supply chain management, and overall operational efficiency. Moreover, navigating compliance requirements can be cumbersome for new businesses, diverting resources away from innovation and growth.

A fitting saying for the current situation of the Indian startup ecosystem could be: "In the midst of adversity, hope is the seed from which resilience grows." Despite a rough patch in recent years, the Indian startup landscape has shown remarkable buoyancy. The increasing trend of Indians returning from abroad to establish businesses is also expected to invigorate the ecosystem with global expertise, Bhandari believes. Cautious optimism in 2024 is expected to continue into 2025, broader market recovery may still be two years away, with significant improvements anticipated by 2026, Arora said. "In the interim, the ecosystem is expected to witness an increase in SME IPOs, unlocking real value for investors and startups alike," he said. The rise of artificial intelligence, machine learning, and blockchain technologies is expected to attract significant investment. Startups leveraging

these technologies will likely be at the forefront of funding conversations. Deloitte's Chirag Agrawal said AI is enabling efficient operations and supporting data-driven decision-making. AI-focused startups are attracting significant investments, particularly in high-impact areas such as healthcare, finance, and sustainability, he said. "For 2025, India's entrepreneurial ecosystem is poised for continued growth, driven by technological advancements, government reforms, and a favourable macroeconomic environment. "Emerging trends include significant investments in Deep Tech, Electric Vehicles, Clean Tech, Defence Tech, and Space Tech. These sectors are expected to attract substantial funding, particularly in AI, sustainable technologies, and space commercialization, positioning India as a global leader in these high-potential areas," he said.

Gold set to extend record run; may hit Rs 90,000 in 2025 on global cues

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold, a safe-haven bet, is likely to continue its record-smashing journey in the New Year, rising to Rs 85,000 per 10 grams and even Rs 90,000 level in domestic markets if geopolitical tensions and global economic uncertainties continue. Experts believe that precious metals remain strong performers in 2025 as well, buoyed by geopolitical tensions, central bank purchases, and a pivot towards lower interest rates by major central banks. The outlook for gold in 2025 remains positive, though the pace of growth may moderate compared to 2024, LKP Securities VP Research Analyst - Commodity and Currency, Jateen Trivedi told PTI. "Domestic gold prices are expected to reach Rs 85,000 a modest target, with a best-case scenario of Rs 90,000 and silver expected to deliver bit higher gains towards Rs 1.1 lakh on modest and even hit Rs 1.25 lakh, if geopolitical tensions persist or escalate," he said. He noted that interest rate

cycles are also pivotal as a global shift toward lower interest rates would inject liquidity into markets and weaken the US Dollar, bolstering gold prices. However, the US Federal Reserve's cautious approach to rate cuts may temper the pace of price increases. Additionally, sustained gold purchases by central banks, driven by diversification strategies and concerns over currency stability will provide strong support to bullion, Trivedi added. Several factors have shaped the demand demand and supply



dynamics of gold in 2024, including a turbulent geopolitical landscape. The ongoing Russia-Ukraine war and tensions in West Asia have spurred safe-haven demand for bullion, thus impacting its prices this year. "Gold and silver markets have been directly impacted by a turbulent geopolitical environment. These geopolitical crises have typically caused an immediate 2-3 per cent spike in prices, reaffirming investors' preference for precious metals as a shield against uncertainty," Trivedi said.

However, Comtrendz Research co-founder and CEO Gnanasekar Thiagarajan told PTI that gold prices are struggling to keep up the momentum as the geopolitical uncertainty and economic uncertainty premium have started fading away. "Market participants are now taking into consideration US President-elect Donald Trump's tariff era, economic policies and their potential future impact on the Fed's mandate to bring inflation down to 2 per cent. Higher inflationary expectations could undermine the appeal for bullion." Furthermore, we would not be surprised to see the Fed opt for a cut from May onwards, as it could allow for a clearer picture to be formed on the new administration's actual economic policies rather than comments made potentially to gain negotiation leverage with foreign counterparts," he stated. The outlook is bearish for gold in the first half of 2025, with the possibility of testing USD 2,455 (MCX: 73,000-73,500), he said.

The rupee is expected to depreciate further, which could arrest the fall in local prices relative to international prices in the coming year, he added. In the domestic markets, the government's decision in July this year to cut gold import duty by 6 per cent led to a sharp 7 per cent correction in gold prices, equivalent to Rs 5,000 per 10 grams. The price drop spurred physical demand for gold during the festive and wedding seasons. The reduction not only made gold more affordable but also boosted increased buying, supporting robust consumption by the jewellers and consumers. "Gold jewellery consumption grew by 17 per cent in 2024, primarily driven by volatility in gold prices, along with festive and marriage-related demand. Additionally, the sharp 900 basis points reduction in import duty announced in the Union Budget of July 2024 spurred demand for jewellery, bars, and coins." Rahul Kalantri, Vice President of Commodities at Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

IN BRIEF

RECPDCL HANDOVERS SPV TO POWER GRID CORPORATION



Gurugram: REC Power Development and Consultancy Limited (RECPDCL), a wholly owned subsidiary of REC Limited, the Maharashtra CPSU under the aegis of Ministry of Power, has handed over a project specific SPV (Special Purpose Vehicle), viz, Rajasthan IV 4A Power Transmission Limited to Power Grid Corporation of India Limited on 30th December, 2024 at Gurugram. Power Grid Corporation of India Limited emerged as the Transmission Service Provider (TSP) through Tariff-Based Competitive Bidding (TBCB) process conducted by RECPDCL, the Bid Process Coordinator, for development of the transmission project on Build, Own, Operate & Transfer (BOOT) basis. The transmission scheme is planned for evacuation of 3.5 GW of RE power from Rajasthan Renewable Energy Zone, which covers establishment of 765/400 kV, 2 X 1500 MVA S/S near Ghior (Uttar Pradesh), Augmentation of Barmer-1 Pooling Station, 283.05 Kms of 765 kV line and 43.28 Kms of 400 kV line along with associated works. The estimated cost of the project is Rs. 5378.03 Crores.

Indian Grandmaster R Vaishali wins World blitz finals qualifier

PTI ■ NEW YORK

Indian Grandmaster R Vaishali surprised herself with a stellar performance to enter the quarterfinals of the World Blitz Championship here, even as recently-crowned rapid champion Koneru Humpy made an early exit. Following Koneru Humpy's stellar performance in Rapid, which earned her the gold medal and a prize of USD 60,000, it was Vaishali's turn to impress her fans. She triumphed in the women's section, scoring 9.5 points out of a possible 11 with three draws. "I'm very happy with today's performance. Tomorrow will be a big day. Honestly, it (performance) was completely unexpected. I was not expecting the result like how it went today. Tomorrow, I have to be ready and prepare well and then see," she said.

eliminated due to the worst tiebreaker, finishing ninth. In the Open section, 10 players were tied for first place, including world number one Magnus Carlsen. The Norwegian scored when needed and drew six of his 13 games, finishing among the co-leaders at the end of the qualifiers. Russian Ian Nepomniachtchi won the qualifier with 9.5 points, benefiting from the best tiebreak, while Fabiano Caruana of the United States finished second, ahead of Carlsen, who was placed third. Surprisingly, none of the Indians made the top eight, despite some early promising performances. Arjun Erigaisi played brilliantly at the start, securing victories in the first five rounds but faded away to finish with a sub-par seven points. R Praggnanandhaa was the best-placed Indian, with 8.5 points, but a last-round loss to Russian Daniil Dubov cost him a spot in the quarterfinals. In the women's quarterfinal, Vaishali will face Chinese Grandmaster Zhu Jiner.



Vaishali's back-to-back victories against GMs Nana Dzagidze of Georgia and Valentina Gunina of

Russia in rounds 7-8 provided the necessary boost for the Indian player to top the event with ease.

The 23-year-old Indian played a dramatic match against Gunina, where she found herself under

extreme time pressure and played 23 moves with hardly any time to think. "You have nothing to think, you keep playing your moves. That was a very bad time management in that game (by me). She (opponent) was ahead on the clock and on the board, she was a full pawn up but I kept playing," said Vaishali, who virtually had seven seconds for each of her 23 moves. "Towards the end, I offered a draw with the rook-knight 3 versus 3. I think she wanted to play but her clock fell and that's how I won the game." Vaishali said there were many players stronger than her in Blitz and that she was just lucky to have led the field by one full point. "I don't think I'm a great blitz player, honestly. There are many more strong players here. I think, today, I was lucky in many games and it just worked out." Talking about the knockout round, Vaishali said: "I haven't thought about it at all. The last few days I've been sick, not gone out much," she said, adding that she would any day

prefer classical games to Rapid chess. "I prefer classical any day... Rapid is fun to play but lots of emotions. Like, so many games you are playing in a day and it's hard to deal with sometimes. I think that's the major difference (between classical and Rapid)." **Indian standings:** Open: R Praggnanandhaa (8.5) - 23; Raunak Sadhwani (8) 46; Arjun Erigaisi (7) 64; Aravindh Chithambaram (7) 68; V Pranav (7) 67; Women: R Vaishali (9.5) 1; K Humpy (8) 9; Divya Deshmukh (7) 18; Vantika Agarwal (7) 19; D Harika (7) 22. Qualifiers: Open: 1-8; Ian Nepomniachtchi, Volodar Murzin (Both Fide); Fabiano Caruana, Hans Niemann Moke, Wesley So (all USA); Magnus Carlsen (Nor); Duda Jan-Krysztof (Pol); Alireza Firouzja (Fra). Women 1-8: R Vaishali (Ind); Lei Tingjie, Wenjun Ju, Zhu Jiner (all Chn); Kateryna Lagno, Valentina Gunina (Both Fide); Carissa Yip (USA) Bibisara Assaubayeva (Kaz).

Former US Open Champion Emma Raducanu withdraws from Auckland tennis classic

AP ■ AUCKLAND

Former U.S. Open champion Emma Raducanu has withdrawn from the Auckland tennis classic, saying a back injury she has been nursing in recent weeks had not improved as much as she hoped. The 22-year-old British player was seeded sixth for the tournament and was due to play her opening match of the new season on Tuesday against Robin Montgomery of the United States. "I've tried my best to be ready. I love Auckland and the fans here. But unfortunately I've picked up a back niggle and I won't be ready in time," Raducanu said. Second-seeded Elise Mertens of Belgium also withdrew on Tuesday from the tournament which is a tune-up for the Australian Open beginning Jan. 12 in Melbourne. "I am sorry not to play my



singles due to an injury," Mertens said. "I wish the tournament all the best and hope to be back next year." In a pre-tournament news conference on Monday Raducanu expressed optimism for the new season. She finished her 2024 season on a high, winning all three of her singles for Britain at the Billy Jean King Cup.

"So that's like a good stepping stone after three surgeries the year before," Raducanu said. "And I think this year I'm just ready to push on and build on and I've really kind of taken measures and steps to do that with my team and how I'm operating and how I'm feeling about things. So, I'm looking forward to this year." Raducanu's career has been

regularly hampered by injuries and she recently hired fitness coach Yutaka Nakamura to join her team. Nakamura accompanied her to Auckland. The 2021 U.S. Open champion returned to tennis last year after undergoing surgery on both wrists and an ankle. But she was sidelined for several weeks late in the season by a foot injury. Raducanu fell out of the top 300 during her injury struggles but fought her way back to 56th through 2024. The Auckland event would have marked the first time in almost two years she has been seeded in a tournament. "I haven't been seeded in a while," Raducanu said. "It doesn't really make a difference though. I feel like everyone and the depth of the women's game right now is so strong that literally anyone can win any tournament."

Gauff, Fritz qualify the US for the United Cup mixed teams tennis quarterfinals

AP ■ PERTH

The top-seeded pair of Coco Gauff and U.S. Open finalist Taylor Fritz of the United States are into the United Cup mixed teams tennis quarterfinals. Fritz beat Borna Coric 6-3, 6-2 Tuesday as the American team needed to win only one match to top Group A. For good measure, Gauff beat Donna Vekic 6-4, 6-2 in the later women's singles. The world No. 3 lost to Vekic at the Paris Olympics but Bencic was no match for Gauff on Tuesday. "Really happy with how I played today," Gauff said. "She's a great player. The Olympics loss hurt so I definitely was thinking about it just as motivation to do better and I'm happy to send my team through." The U.S. Beat Canada in its opening match. The Perth quarterfinals were



set for Wednesday, with the U.S. Taking on China, which qualified as the best runner-up, and group winners Kazakhstan and Germany playing each other. In Sydney, Italy also moved into the quarterfinals Tuesday with a 3-0 win over France at Ken Rosewall Arena. Flavio Cobolli claimed a 6-3, 6-7 (8), 6-2 upset singles win over

France's Ugo Humbert. Jasmine Paolini beat Chloe Paquet 6-0, 6-2 to give Italy its winning margin before also winning the mixed doubles. Winners of the past two Davis Cups and runners-up two years ago to the U.S. In the inaugural edition of the season-opening mixed teams' event, Italy won Group D without world No.



IOA chief PT Usha recognises golf body headed by Harish Reddy

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Olympic Association has given recognition to the Indian Golf Union (IGU) led by Harish Kumar Reddy while declaring the other body, headed by Brijinder Singh, void. A letter signed by IOA president PT Usha issued on Monday stated that the National Olympic Committee had "reviewed the facts" and "examined the procedural adherence" before recognising the body headed by Reddy.

Slovakia beats Kazakhstan 5-4 in overtime at the world junior hockey championship

AP ■ OTTAWA

Maxim Strbak scored 2:55 into overtime to lead Slovakia to a 5-4 win over Kazakhstan at the world junior hockey championship. Slovakia held a 4-2 lead with less than five minutes remaining in regulation and Kazakh forward Asanali Sarkenov was assessed a 5-minute major and a game misconduct for cross-checking Slovak forward Frantisek Dej. Kazakhstan scored twice while short-handed, sending the game into overtime. Davlat Nurkenov scored at 16:37 of the third period and Kirill Lyapunov tied it with just 29 seconds left. Dalibor Dvorsky and Juraj Pekarik each scored twice for Slovakia, which twice held a three-goal lead. Goaltender Samuel Urban allowed four goals on 17 shots. Sarkenov and Artur Gross also scored for Kazakhstan. Vladimir Nikitin, a prospect



with the Ottawa Senators, made 37 saves, including four in OT, for Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan earned its first point in the tournament after opening with two lopsided losses, moving ahead of last-place Switzerland in Group B. The teams meet Tuesday with a spot in the quarterfinals on the line on the final day of preliminary round action. Slovakia finished the preliminary round with five

points on a regulation win, an overtime win and two losses. The Slovaks were guaranteed to finish third in Group B and advance to the quarterfinals. In Group A, Latvia secured a berth in the quarterfinal round by beating Germany 4-3 in overtime. Eriks Mateiko had two goals for Latvia, including the winner at 3:23 of OT. Bruno Osmanis and Oliveris Murnieks also scored.

Verona wins 3-2 at 10-man Bologna in Serie A

AP ■ ROME

Benjamin Dominguez scored a brace for Bologna but a red card for Tommaso Pobega and a late own-goal by Santiago Castro sent the host team crashing to a 3-2 defeat against Verona in Serie A. Dominguez scored in the 20th and 58th minutes, either side of a Verona double from Amir Sarr and Casper Tengstedt. But Pobega's red card, shown for striking an opponent in an off-the-ball incident early in the second half, hampered the home side and with three minutes left on the clock, a free kick from Ondrej Duda hit Castro to wrong-foot his own goalkeeper and give Verona all three points. The result was a blow to Bologna's hopes of securing a European place and leaves it in seventh place, four points behind Juventus. Verona moved four points clear of the relegation zone. Como beats Lecce 2-0 Nico Paz missed a first-half penalty earlier Monday but made amends in the second period



with the goal that sent Como on its way to a 2-0 win over Lecce in Serie A. The 20-year-old Argentine international saw his weak spot kick saved by the legs of Wladimiro Falcone after half an hour but he was on target in the 50th minute when he side-footed home from just outside the box. Patrick Cutrone, who hit the bar early in the game, got a second goal with 10 minutes remaining when he seized on a rebound in the box and slotted home. It was Como's first league win over Lecce since 1994 and lifts it into 15th place, two points and one spot above its opponent.

Mhatre becomes youngest to score 150 in List A cricket

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Mumbai's Ayush Mhatre set a new world record for the youngest player to score 150+ in List A cricket during the Vijay Hazare Trophy match against Nagaland here, bettering compatriot Yashasvi Jaiswal's effort. At 17 years and 168 days, Mhatre broke the previous record set by India batter Jaiswal, who was 17 years and 291 days when he achieved the feat while playing for Mumbai against Jharkhand in 2019. Mhatre, who made his debut for domestic giants Mumbai earlier this season, clobbered 11 sixes and 15 fours to make 181 off only 117 balls while powering his side to an imposing 403 for seven in their 50 overs. Mhatre, who hails from the Virar suburb in Mumbai, has been a regular fixture for the domestic heavyweights across formats ever since he broke into the squad earlier this season.



He was a part of the Irani Cup-winning Mumbai side which defeated Rest of India to win the trophy after a gap of 27 years in October. On his Ranji Trophy debut, Mhatre scored a fine 71-ball 52 but Mumbai lost the season opener to Baroda in an away game. With the defending champions looking to bounce back after the loss in the first Ranji game, Mhatre led the charge with a brilliant 176 off 232 balls, which was studied with 22 fours and four sixes against Maharashtra. Mumbai won the game by nine wickets. He had a couple of quiet outings against Tripura and

Odisha but slammed his second first-class ton — 116 off 149 balls with 12 fours and three sixes — against Services and went on to represent India in the U-19 Asia Cup. The right-handed batter carried his form by scoring fifties (54 and 67 not out) against Japan and UAE, but fell for a single digit score in the tournament's final which India lost to Bangladesh. Having missed Mumbai's Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy title triumph, Mhatre returned to the premier domestic 50-overs competition with a 78 in a high-scoring contest against Karnataka.

Dismal Manchester United loses again at home as Ipswich upsets Chelsea in Premier League

AP ■ LONDON

Alexander Isak scored for the sixth straight Premier League game as Newcastle beat Manchester United 2-0 at Old Trafford to condemn Ruben Amorim's side to its worst home run in the top tier since the 1970s. Relegation-threatened Ipswich beat Chelsea 2-0 to win at home for the first time this season, and Aston Villa and Brighton drew 2-2. Newcastle's commanding display marked the first time since February 1979 that Man United has lost three home league games in a row. It was also the first time since 1962 that United has lost five league matches in the same calendar month. Isak started the misery for home fans with his eighth goal in six matches. The Sweden striker put Newcastle ahead with a header

after four minutes and Joelinton doubled its lead 15 minutes later when he rose above Lisandro Martinez to head in a second. Isak had another effort disallowed after half an hour and Sandro Tonali hit the woodwork seconds later as Newcastle threatened to run riot. Amorim withdrew Joshua Zirkzee for Kobbie Mainoo before halftime but United looked toothless — and clueless — in what was a dismal display. "We suffered a goal and then it was hard to come back," Amorim said. "They were the better team, plain and simple." The defeat was the fifth in eight league games since Amorim joined from Sporting Lisbon in November and left United in 14th place, seven points above the relegation zone. Newcastle is fifth and starting to entertain the possibility of a top-

four finish. "There is still a long way to go but the team is improving," Joelinton said. "Time will tell how good we are but we are enjoying football right now. We have to be humble and keep our feet on the ground." Ipswich savors home win Chelsea started the day with the best away record in the league after leader Liverpool but it was trailing at Portman Road after just 12 minutes thanks to a mistake from goalkeeper Filip Jorgensen. The Scandinavian replaced Robert Sanchez in the Chelsea goal but he was adjudged to have fouled Liam Delap in the box and Delap got up to convert the penalty with aplomb. Chelsea pushed forward in search of an equalizer but it was Ipswich that doubled its lead early in the second half. A poor pass from Axel Disasi allowed Delap to stretch the



Chelsea defense and his pass set up Omari Hutchinson to score against his former club. It was the first time this season that Chelsea has lost two games in

a row. It remained in fourth place after missing a chance to go above Arsenal and Nottingham Forest into second. Ipswich moved up to 18th place

in the 20-team division. It was the first home win in the Premier League for promoted Ipswich since 2002 and coach Kieran McKenna praised his side. "It was everything it needed to be," McKenna said. "We defended, outstanding organization throughout the game." There has been hope in the performances in general, we have been competing in almost every game. If you do that, you always have a chance." Brighton scores late to salvage 2-2 draw at Villa Aston Villa was unbeaten in its last eight games at Villa Park but went behind after just 12 minutes against a lively Brighton side. With the Villa defense all at sea, Simon Adingra gathered a loose ball and curled a right-footed shot past Emiliano Martinez. Villa came roaring back and got

an equalizer in the 36th through birthday boy Ollie Watkins. The 29-year-old Watkins, who returned to the side to replace the suspended Jhon Duran, converted a penalty after Morgan Rogers was adjudged to have been fouled. It was Rogers who put Villa in front early in the second half and once again Watkins was involved. His cute chip released Rogers, who chested the ball down and scored his sixth goal of the season. However, Tariq Lamptey fired home with eight minutes left to give Brighton a share of the points. The result leaves Villa in ninth and Brighton in 10th. "We've been in that position a few times this season and we've failed to see it out," a disappointed Watkins told the BBC's Match of the Day program.

Indian cricket has depth to fill Rohit, Virat's void: Lehmann

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Indian cricket has produced a generational superstar in Yashasvi Jaiswal and will remain in good health even when Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma decide to call time on their careers, feels former Australia head coach and two-time World Cup winner Darren Lehmann. The 54-year-old, who played 27 Tests and 117 ODIs during his decade-long career, is also captivated by Jasprit Bumrah's skills, claiming to have never seen any player have more impact in a single series. Talking about impending retirements of Rohit and Kohli following their poor show in the ongoing series where India trail 1-2, Lehmann was empathetic and practical about the transition in Indian cricket. "Look whenever they decide to give it away and whatever happens in next few days they have been great players for India

over a long period of time," Lehmann, a member of 1999 and 2003 ODI World Cup-winning teams told PTI. "Now actually we see younger players starting to step up for India and play well at next level. There is so much depth in Indian cricket I won't worry too much," Lehmann was pretty matter of fact. "Whenever these two guys decide to retire, there are so many talented youngsters that Indian cricket will be in good stead." Having watched Jaiswal emerge as the flagbearer of Indian batting in the series, Lehmann made a bold prediction about the southpaw, who has scores of 161, 82 and 84 in this series. "Oh, superstar. One of the best I have seen," Lehmann said quickly, before the question was finished. "He (Jaiswal) and Harry Brook are two next generation players. They are the ones that people will sit back and say they are good players. He played very well in



Melbourne and was outstanding in Perth. He has come up leaps and bounds on this tour," the beefy left-hander of yesteryears said. But Lehmann reserved his highest praise for Bumrah, equating him with all-time greats such as Wasim Akram and Glenn McGrath. "I presume he (Bumrah) is the next captain when Rohit finishes. He did a really good job in Perth. He is the best bowler I have ever seen live. "I have seen Wasim Akram, Glenn McGrath and all but I have not seen a bowler have impact like him in a single series like Jasprit Bumrah has since Mitchell Johnson in 2013-14 Ashes win. "This is very similar as Bumrah already has 30 wickets. He has been outstanding to watch. He will do well when he gets a chance to lead India." Talking about transition, Lehmann noted that Australia's batting could be a concern, rather than the bowling, even though

Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood, Scott Boland, and Michael Neser are all in their early to mid-30s. "I am not so worried about bowling as lot of good kids are coming up. Lance Morris, Xavier Bartlett from Brisbane Heats, so there are plenty of them. Spinners are okay but it is the batting that is being tested at the moment," said Lehmann. "There will be some changes with greats retiring but fast bowling will be good enough. How long Cummins and Starc survive time will tell, but hopefully, they will get to till next Ashes." Lehmann has had a decent reputation as a coach but when asked if he would consider coaching the Indian national team, the answer was negative. "It would have been an honour to work with Indian national team but I am done with international cricket. I just want the young guys to get better," Lehmann signed off.



Travis Head explains 'finger on ice' celebration after dismissing Pant

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Australia batter Travis Head has explained his unusual celebration after dismissing Rishabh Pant in the Boxing Day Test, stating it signifies "finger on the ice," a quirky gesture that he first showed during the tour of Sri Lanka. After batting through an entire session, Yashasvi Jaiswal and Rishabh Pant appeared poised to guide India to a draw on the final day of the Boxing Day Test. However, Head turned the game on its head by dismissing Pant, which triggered a dramatic Indian collapse and paved the way for a 184-run Australian victory, giving the hosts a 2-1 lead in the five-match series. Pant mis-timed a pull shot and was caught at long-on, after which Head celebrated the moment with his distinctive gesture of folding the fingers of his left hand into a circle and dipping the forefinger of his right hand into it.



"Finger on the ice. I started in Sri Lanka. I put my finger on the ice and be ready to go for the next one," Head told "Triple M Radio" after the Melbourne Test. "I didn't expect to be bowling. I thought Galle would be my next bowling. I'll go put it down in a little cup of ice, be ready to go up there next," he added, referring to Australia's upcoming tour of the island nation. Head's celebration quickly gained attention and went

viral on social media. After the match, Australian captain Pat Cummins was asked about it and he offered a lighthearted explanation. "I can explain it. It's his finger so hot he's got to put in a cup of ice. Yeah that's what it is," Cummins told reporters. "So, that's normally the running joke. It was in the Gabba or somewhere he got a wicket as well and just straight to the fridge, grabs a bucket of ice, puts his finger in and just walks in front of Lyno

(Nathan Lyon)...Just like that (he) thinks it's very funny. "So that's what it would have been, nothing else." However, Head's celebration didn't sit well with former India cricketer Navjot Singh Sidhu, who demanded "stringent action" against the Australian player, calling it "obnoxious". "Travis head's obnoxious behaviour during the course of the Melbourne test doesn't auger well for the gentleman's game...Sets the worst possible example when there are kids, women, young & old watching the game. "...This caustic conduct did not insult an individual but a nation of 1.5 billion Indians...Stringent punishment that would serve as a deterrent for the future generations needs to be slapped on him so that no one dares follow suit!!" Sidhu posted on X. The two teams will play the pivotal final Test at the Sydney Cricket Ground, starting January 3.

Deepti jumps to fifth spot in ICC ODI rankings

PTI ■ DUBAI

India off-spinner Deepti Sharma climbed a spot to enter the top 5 in the latest ICC women's ODI ranking for bowlers following her match-winning performances in the recently-concluded series against the West Indies at home. Deepti, who is fifth now, has 665 rating points and is marginally behind fourth-placed South Africa's Marizanne Kapp (677 rating points). The 27-year-old made headlines, taking eight wickets in two matches, including 6/31 in the last game as India completed a clean sweep in the three-match series in Vadodra. Among batters, Jemimah Rodrigues (537 rating points) is closing in on a top-20 as she has jumped four spots to 22nd thanks to scores of 29 and 52 during the series. The big-hitting Richa Ghosh (13 not out and 23 not out) has moved seven spots to 41st (448 rating points), with



Chinelle Henry's half-century in the third ODI leading to a 21-spot leap to 65th (349 rating points). However, charismatic India opener Smriti Mandhana (720 rating points), who scored two half-centuries in the series, has dropped one place to third and trails South Africa's Laura Wolvaardt (773) and Chamari Athapaththu (733). Skipper Harmanpreet Kaur has dropped three places to 13th. Hayley Matthews' seventh ODI century in Vadodra has helped the West Indies opener climb six places to seventh in the ICC Women's Batting Rankings.

Warner wants Australia's seniors to follow Konstas' mindset against India

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Lavishing praise on young Sam Konstas, former opener David Warner has urged Australia's senior players to adopt a similar aggressive approach when facing Indian pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah, who has been a dominant force with the ball in the ongoing series. The 19-year-old Konstas played some stunning scoops and laps off Bumrah en route to a 65-ball 60 on his Test debut during the fourth Test at Melbourne, which the Aussies won by 184 runs on Monday. "It was very special. People are going to criticise him as well. That's the nature of the beast, that's the way he is going to play," Warner told AAP. "When someone like Bumrah is bowling to you, you have to try and execute somehow. They put a third-man in and fine leg to him and bowled him through the gate (in the second innings). "He will look back on that and go 'what a great experience in the Boxing Day Test'. He now gets to come here for New Year's Test." Konstas had scored 107 off 97 balls against India for the Prime Minister's XI. He had also scored an unbeaten 73 at the MCG against India A, besides making two centuries in the Sheffield Shield and a record-breaking 50 on debut for the Sydney Thunder in the Big Bash League. "What he did in the Prime Minister's XI shows he has that talent. But it also shows

he is brave." "Him being brave at the top of the order, you've got guys who have played 50 Tests, they could have been brave as well, they could have played different shots, they could have moved out of their crease and batted different." Warner added that while players like Steve Smith had experimented with various approaches, it shouldn't take a newcomer's boldness to shift the momentum. "Smudge (Steve Smith) tried a million different things. But it shouldn't take someone to come out there and be brave to get that momentum shifting. You have experience at the top of the order, experience in that whole line up," Warner said. "Travis Head took the game away from them in Adelaide with that magnificent hundred. It shouldn't take that guy just to come and do that. It's the way the Australians played but other people can be braver as well." **Bumrah is a genius** Bumrah on Sunday became the second fastest Indian along with Ravindra Jadeja to complete 200 Test wickets and the first bowler ever to reach that milestone with a sub-20 average during the fourth day's play of the fourth Test. The India speedster has taken 30 wickets at an average of just 12.83 this series, including nine wickets in Melbourne. "You're also hoping Bumrah gets it off that handkerchief, he's a genius. He is averaging under 20. His record is incredible," Warner said.

Wayne Rooney fired as Plymouth coach

AP ■ LONDON

Wayne Rooney was fired as Plymouth Argyle coach on Tuesday after just seven months in charge of the struggling Championship team. The 39-year-old former England and Manchester United striker was hired in May and departs with Plymouth last in the English second tier with four wins in 23 games this season. His final game was a 2-0 loss to Oxford United on Sunday, which extended Argyle's winless run to nine games. "Plymouth Argyle can confirm that the club and head coach Wayne Rooney have mutually agreed to part ways with immediate effect," the club said in a statement. "We would like to thank



Wayne and his team for all their efforts and wish them well for the future." Rooney took charge at Plymouth following an 83-day tenure at Birmingham, which was relegated from the Championship after last season. He's also been the coach at MLS team DC United and Derby County. "I would like to take this opportunity to thank the board of Plymouth," Rooney said in the club statement.

McDonald backs under-fire Marsh, optimistic about Starc's availability for Sydney Test

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Australia head coach Andrew McDonald conceded that Mitchell Marsh has fallen short of expectations with the bat against India but remained optimistic about Mitchell Starc's availability for the pivotal fifth Test in Sydney. Starc's fitness remains the primary worry for the hosts after the pacer battled through sore ribs from day three of the Boxing Day Test but still managed to bowl effectively, including claiming the prized wicket of Virat Kohli on the final day. "Any time you get through the game, it's always a good indicator that you've a chance at the next game," McDonald told reporters after the hosts picked up memorable victory at the MCG to take a 2-1 lead in the series. "It didn't stop him (Starc). Clearly there was a little bit of discomfort early on in spells, but once he got warm it seemed as though he was pretty free. "We'll see how everyone recovers. Bowling last, it was a pretty attritional game, something that we're not used to in the last few years. "Clearly Starc's carrying something of some description. We'll assess that. "But other than that, it looks as though we got through pretty unscathed, but [with a] short turnaround recovery is important, and we'll assess what the team looks like in Sydney based upon the surface, as we always do." Australia will regain the Border-Gavaskar trophy for the first time since 2014-15 if they win or draw the Sydney Test. However, if India win the New Year's Test, they will retain the trophy, winning the series for a record-extending fifth-straight time. Should Starc be unavailable for the series decider at his home ground, McDonald expressed confidence in Jhye Richardson or Sean Abbott stepping in to fill the void. "Very confident. Richardson's here for a reason. So if we weren't confident, he wouldn't be here. He's had a heavy week with us in the nets. All indications are he'd be capable of bowling 40-plus overs if he was called upon. "Sean Abbott's there as well. We feel like, [the] SCG is his home ground, so he will be serviceable if called upon as well. It'll be about assessing our frontline quicks and then making decisions from there." Starc's fitness issues, compounded by his heavy workload alongside skipper Pat

Cummins, have also drawn attention to the limited role of Mitch Marsh as a fifth bowler. Across four Tests, Australia's fifth bowling option Marsh has bowled only 33 overs, a statistic that underscores his underutilization. Marsh's contributions with the bat have been similarly underwhelming, with just 73 runs at an average of 10.42 across four Tests (6, 47, 9, 5, 2, 4, 0). These lacklustre returns have sparked criticism and calls for his exclusion. However, McDonald defended the all-rounder.

"He's in a good [head] space. Would you like better performances? There's no doubt about that. Over four Test matches, he hasn't been able to deliver at the level he would like and we would like." "He's up and about though. We just won a Test match. No, there's no concern. And I think people have probably been reading too much into that. "We haven't required him with the ball as often as what we would have thought. He bowled again today. There are no injury concerns there.

PCB retains Aaqib Javed on selection committee despite interim head coach role

AP ■ KARACHI

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has decided not to remove former Test pacer Aaqib Javed from the national selection committee, despite him accepting the position of interim head coach for both the white and red-ball national squads. According to sources within the PCB, since Aaqib's role as head coach is temporary, he will remain a part of the selection committee. However, one insider noted that Aaqib's influence as a selector had diminished, especially after he assumed the role of red-ball head coach following Jason Gillespie's resignation before the South Africa Test series. Since then, other selectors have gained more authority in decision-making.

"Aaqib's role as selector has been minimal in recent times with the team playing its test series in South Africa. As the other selectors, Azhar Ali, Asad Shafiq, Aleem Dar, Hasan Cheema have been more authoritative and had their say on Shaheen Shah Afridi being sidelined for the two tests in SA after the white ball series," he said. Earlier this year, the PCB had appointed South Africa's Gary Kirsten and Australia's Jason Gillespie as head coaches for the white and red-ball teams. Both were granted selection committee membership and given the final say in team selections. "But after Pakistan fared poorly in the World T20 Cup followed by the two nil whitewash by Bangladesh in the test series at home, the PCB decided to bring revamp the selection committee by

adding Aaqib, Azhar and Aleem to the mix and also stripped Kirsten and Gillespie of considerable powers they enjoyed including being members of the selection committee and final say in team selections," the insider said. When Aaqib was appointed interim head coach for both white and red-ball formats, there was initial confusion among the other selectors regarding his authority. The board later clarified that Aaqib would remain a national selector while taking on the interim coaching role. "The PCB has every intention of appointing one or separate coaches for the white and red ball formats by the time the Champions Trophy is completed," another insider said. However, he also said that the chances of the PCB calling upon foreign coaches again are slim.

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