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INSIDE

MONEY 10
DUTY CUT ON SMARTPHONE PARTS TO HIT ELECTRONICS ECOSYSTEM: GTRI

LUCKNOW, WEDNESDAY JANUARY 8, 2025; PAGES 12 ₹3

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PUBLISHED FROM: DELHI | LUCKNOW | BHOPAL | BHUBANESWAR | RANCHI | RAIPUR | CHANDIGARH | DEHRADUN | HYDERABAD | VIJAYWADA

Mid-week polls in Delhi on Feb 5

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

With an announcement of the 70 assembly seats in Delhi in a single phase on February 5 and the votes will be counted on February 8 by the Election Commission (EC), the stage is set for a fierce triangular contest between the incumbent Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the Congress. The battle lines are drawn between Prime Minister Narendra Modi's developmental model versus the 'freebies' model touted by the AAP chief and former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who is eyeing a hat-trick, having swept the 2015 and 2020 elections with 67 and 62 seats, respectively. The AAP faces anti-incumbency, corruption allegations and an aggressive BJP in its bid to assume power for a third successive term. The Congress will be keen to regain the national Capital. Although the Congress and the AAP contested the 2024 Lok Sabha elections together as part of the INDIA bloc, they will be competing separately in the upcoming Assembly polls. Announcing the dates for the Assembly polls in Delhi, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar said "It is a single-phase election... We have deliberately kept polling on a Wednesday so more people come out to vote... like we did in Maharashtra. The entire election process will be completed by February 10." With the EC's announcement of the election schedule, the



Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar with Election Commissioners Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu during a press conference for the announcement of the schedule for the Delhi Assembly elections. Photo: Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

Model Code of Conduct (MCC) is now in effect and will remain so until the conclusion of the polls. The last date to file nominations is January 17 and the scrutiny of nominations will be done by January 18. Candidates will be able to withdraw their nominations till January 20. Of the 70 seats in Delhi, 58 are general and 12 reserved. According to the electoral roll, Delhi has 1.55 crore voters -- 83.49 lakh men, 71.74 lakh women and 1.261 transgender persons. There are 25.89 lakh young voters, 2.08 lakh first-time voters, and 830 above the age of 100, Kumar said. More than 13,000 polling stations will be set up in Delhi, he said. Kumar has urged candidates and political party leaders to refrain from making remarks against women and involving children during poll campaigns. He was asked

EC CAUTIONS CABINET ON DELHI BUDGET PROVISIONS

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission will write to the cabinet secretary, informing that no Delhi-specific provision can be made in the Union Budget that can disturb the level-playing field, CEC Rajiv Kumar said on Tuesday. Polling for the 70-member Delhi Assembly will be held on February 5 and the votes counted on February 8. Responding to a query about the the Union Budget, scheduled days ahead of the polls, Kumar said, "We will write to the cabinet secretary that no Delhi-specific provision can be made in the Union Budget that can disturb the level-playing field."

about the recent comment made by BJP leader Ramesh Bidhuri against Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. In 2020, the elections were announced on January 6, polling was held on February 8, and votes were counted on February 11. The 70-member Assembly's term concludes on February 23, necessitating elections before that to form a new House. Except for the Lok Sabha polls last year when AAP and Congress joined hands and together got an impressive vote share of 43.1%, the two parties-despite having a similar vote bank-have always contested separately. However, while AAP's vote share, since its maiden election in 2013, was constantly on the higher side, the number of people voting for Congress decreased significantly in the last decade. **Continued on page 8**

India boosts surveillance for HMPV

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amid the detection of cases of human metapneumovirus (HMPV) infection in Karnataka, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, the Centre has advised States to step up surveillance for respiratory illnesses including ILI and SARI to tackle any exigency, and create awareness about the prevention of transmission of the pathogen which is fast spreading in China. Union Health Secretary Punya Salila Srivastava on Monday chaired a virtual meeting with states and union territories to take stock of respiratory illnesses and HMPV cases in the country and public health measures for their management, a health ministry statement said. However, the Centre has not issued any advisory yet. The Union Health Secretary said that there is no cause of concern for the public as HMPV has been present



globally since 2001, the statement said, adding that States have been asked to strengthen and review the ILI/SARI surveillance. "The States have been advised to enhance information, education and communication (IEC) and awareness among people regarding the prevention of transmission of the virus with simple measures such as washing hands often with soap and water; not touching eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands; avoiding close

contact with people exhibiting symptoms of the disease; and covering mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing," said the statement. HMPV is a globally recognised respiratory virus. It is a viral pathogen that causes respiratory infections in people of all age groups. During the meeting, it was noted that the IDSP data does not indicate any unusual rise in influenza-like illness (ILI) and severe acute respiratory illnesses (SARI) cases anywhere in the country. All the detected patients don't have any foreign travel history, suggesting that the virus is indigenous. This is also corroborated by the ICMR sentinel surveillance data, it said. Srivastava reiterated that an increase in respiratory illnesses is usually seen during the winter months and that the country is well prepared for any potential surge in such cases, the statement said. **Continued on page 8**

6.8-magnitude quake in Tibet kills 95 people with tremors felt in Nepal

PTI ■ BEIJING

A 6.8-magnitude earthquake struck near one of Tibet's holiest cities on Tuesday, killing at least 95 people and injuring 130 others with tremors also shaking buildings and forcing people to run to the streets in neighbouring Nepal. According to regional disaster relief headquarters, the quake jolted Dingri County in Xigaze in Tibet Autonomous Region in China at 9:05 am Tuesday (Beijing Time). The US Geological Service, however, put the quake's magnitude at 7.1. At least 95 people have been confirmed dead and 130 others injured as of 3 p.m. Tuesday (local time), state-run Xinhua news agency reported. Chinese President Xi Jinping has ordered all-out rescue efforts to carry out relief and rescue operations in the affected areas. Xi ordered utmost efforts to treat the injured and urged efforts to prevent secondary



Rescue workers search for survivors in the aftermath of an earthquake in Changsuo Township of Dingri in Xigaze, southwestern China's Tibet Autonomous Region. PTI

disasters, properly resettle affected residents, and handle the aftermath work effectively. Following the quake, China Earthquake Administration launched a level-II emergency service response and sent a work team to the site to assist with disaster relief efforts. **Continued on page 8**

WEATHER

AQI	LUCKNOW
MAX	13.5°C(+6.9)
MIN	11.5°C(+3.9)

SC orders quick appointments in CIC



PWD withdraws Atishi's bungalow allotment

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In a twist to the ongoing row over Delhi chief minister's official residence at 6, Flag Staff Road at Civil Lines, the Public Works Department (PWD) has withdrawn its offer to allot the bungalow to Chief Minister Atishi, as she did not take "physical possession" of the house despite multiple requests from the department and issuance of "authority slip" last October. Countering her claim that she was evicted from her official residence for the second time in three months, PWD's sources have said that the question of eviction doesn't arise because she never took possession of the bungalow. The PWD has now offered two choices of accommodation to Atishi -



Bungalow 2 at 8 Raj Niwas and Bungalow 115 at Ansari Road Daryaganj - and asked her to submit her choice within eight days. "A night before the announcement of the election date, the BJP-led government at the Centre has thrown me out of the chief minister's residence for the second time in two months. I was sent a letter stating that the allotment had been cancelled. The residence has been snatched from the elected chief minister of an elected government. They did the same thing three months ago, when I became chief minister. My belongings and those of my family were thrown out of the house and on the road," the chief minister said in Hindi. In a letter dated January 6, the PWD letter indicates that

to take possession of the house within 1 week and she did not do so in 3 months. The rules clearly stipulate that," said officials adding an official residence 17 AB Mathura Road is already allotted to her and she has again been given an offer of three other lavish bungalows including bungalow number 2 at 8 Raj Niwas Road and bungalow number 115 at Ansari Road, Daryaganj. In a notice dated January 6, 2025, Delhi government's Public Works Department (PWD) said the bungalow at 6, Flag Staff Road is also not a designated house for Delhi CM as it belongs to "General Pool" as per official records. The CM has been offered allotment of Bungalow No 2 at 8 Raj Niwas Lane, Civil Lines and Bungalow No 115 Ansari Road Daryaganj from "General Pool". After former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal vacated the Civil Lines bungalow on October 4, 2024, Atishi had shifted to the house on October 6. However, she was asked to vacate the premises on October 9 by the officials of PWD, a department she heads. She vacated the bungalow the same day. Maintaining that an official "handover" of the property from Kejriwal to the department is yet to take place, PWD officials had then said the house has been sealed. **Continued on page 8**



BSF refutes claims of BGB control over border area

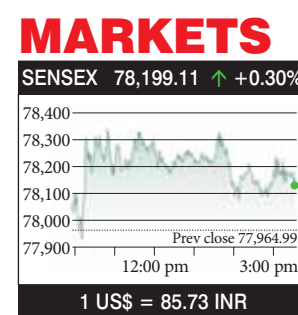
PTI ■ PETRAPOLE

The BSF on Tuesday said that fencing work at the border between India and Bangladesh in Malda district was going on in a peaceful manner. BSF South Bengal DIG Nilotpal Kumar Pandey said the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) had raised an objection over the matter. He said that a reply has been given to the BGB by the BSF authorities. "Everything is going on in a peaceful manner," Pandey told reporters in Petrapole in North 24 Parganas district. Asked about reports in the Bangladeshi press claiming that the BGB has taken control of the 5-km border region situated along the Kodala river in Mohespur upazilla in Jhenaidah, the BSF officer said these reports were totally baseless. **Continued on page 8**

India's GDP growth to be slowest since Pandemic

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India's economic growth rate is estimated to slip to a four-year low of 6.4 per cent in 2024-25, mainly on account of poor showing by the manufacturing and services sector, according to government data released on Tuesday. The gross domestic product (GDP) rate of 6.4 per cent will be the lowest since the Covid year (2020-21) when the country witnessed a negative growth of 5.8 per cent. It was 9.7 per cent in 2021-22; 7 per cent in 2022-23; and 8.2 per cent in the last fiscal ended March 2024. The first advance estimates of National Income for 2024-25 released by the National Statistics Office (NSO) is lower than the 6.6 per cent projected by the Reserve Bank in December 2024. It is also a tad lower than the finance ministry's initial projection of 6.5-7 per cent. The advance estimates will be used in preparation for the Union Budget to be presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Lok Sabha on February 1. The manufacturing sector output is expected to decelerate to 5.3 per cent from a high of 9.9 per cent recorded in the previous fiscal, NSO



said in the first advance estimates of National Income for 2024-25. The services sector, comprising trade, hotels, transport and communications, is estimated to expand at 5.8 per cent against 6.4 per cent in 2023-24. On the other hand, the farm sector is estimated to record a growth of 3.8 per cent in the current fiscal, up from 1.4 per cent in 2023-24. "Real GDP has been estimated to grow by 6.4 per cent in FY 2024-25 as compared to the growth rate of 8.2 per cent in Provisional Estimate (PE) of GDP for FY 2023-24," NSO said. **Continued on page 8**

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Expressing displeasure, the Supreme Court on Tuesday directed Government to immediately fill up the vacancies in the Central Information Commission and State Information Commissions. Court also made observations on posting only retired bureaucrats as Information Commissioners, while the law suggests for posting of people from different walks of life. Asking for an expeditious selection of information commissioners in the CIC, a bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kottiswar Singh told Centre, "These posts need to be filled at the earliest otherwise what is the use of having the institution, if we don't have people working?" The bench criticised the appointments being made only from a particular category of candidates in the CIC and SICs, and mulled taking a judicial note on the presence of bureaucrats, and not people from all walks of life, in these Commissions. "We can take judicial notice of fact that entire Commissions are loaded with only one category of people. Why should only bureaucrats be appointed and why not people from different walks of life are appointed. We don't want to say more but this needs to be looked into, Justice Surya Kant said. **Continued on page 8**

'Rajasthan Maru Udaan' women's empowerment rolls out statewide

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAIPUR

An initiative for women's empowerment with a 360-degree broad-based approach that was launched in Barmer in November will now be extended to cover the entirety of Rajasthan. 'Maru Udaan' was started by Barmer collector Tina Dabi for empowering women. The initiative will be rolled out across the state on Thursday. The 'Rajasthan Maru Udaan' initiative will cover a range of activities and sessions such as on mental and physical health, skills training, personal finance



management, entrepreneurship from home, self-defence, cybercrime and driving courses. It will include training workshops for millet cookies, environment conservation, and water and waste management. Health camps in vulnerable pockets will also be held. The activities will be organised at the district and the Panchayat Samiti level. "Keeping in mind the

programme's utility and effectiveness, it will be implemented in all districts from January 9 under the name 'Rajasthan Maru Udaan', Neetu Rajeshwar, the women empowerment department commissioner, said in an order. The medical and health, industries, police, transport, agriculture and horticulture, and the education departments will participate in the programme. The expenditure for programmes and activities to be organised under 'Rajasthan Maru Udaan' can be used from the budget of the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Yojana.

Punjab village rewards liquor, DJ-free, weddings with cash

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHANDIGARH/NEW DELHI

In a unique initiative which may set an example for others both in rural and urban India, a panchayat in Punjab's Bathinda district has announced an incentive of Rs 21,000 to families who won't serve liquor or play DJ music at wedding ceremonies. The decision was taken to encourage villagers not to indulge in wasteful expenditure on marriage functions and curb liquor abuse. Ballo village Sarpanch Amarjit Kaur said that it is generally seen that quarrels erupt at functions where alcohol is served and loud music is played. Moreover, the loud music also disturbs the studies of students. "We want to encourage people not to indulge in wasteful expenditure during wedding functions," she said. The sarpanch said the panchayat has



passed a resolution under which if a family does not serve liquor or play DJ music at wedding functions, it will be given Rs 21,000. Ballo village has a population of around 5,000 people. Kaur further said the panchayat has sought from the government to set up

a stadium in the village so the youth can be encouraged to take part in sports activities. "There should be a stadium in the village so that different games can be organised," said the Sarpanch. The panchayat has also proposed to set up a biogas plant in the

village. Free seeds will be given to farmers who opt for organic farming, she said. Wedding season becomes a mess for the city like national Capital Delhi where liquors, loud music, crackers have become a fashion and people are ostentatious about it. "Not only loud music and crackers but the city goes under complete mess due to choking traffic situation. Wish marriage could be held in a civilised manner but Delhi is more horrible during the weddings season. This is worse for the senior citizens and elderly people as the marriage processions (baraat) never deem fit to care about neighbourhood issue. I have been facing this every wedding season and worse during winters when Delhi air is bad. Hope RWAs and social organizations take a cue from small town like Bhatinda," said Abhay Banerjee, a resident of Khanpurin south Delhi area.

HMPV scare: Health dept awaits Centre guidelines

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Health department is currently awaiting guidelines from the Central government regarding the HMPV (Human Metapneumovirus), which has been causing concern among some people. A senior official clarified that routine surveillance for respiratory illnesses is already being carried out, and further actions will be taken once the official guidelines from the Central government are received. The official emphasised that HMPV is not a new virus but a routine one that has been circulating since 2001. Cases of HMPV are reported every year as part of the standard monitoring of respiratory viruses, and it is not considered fatal or alarming. There is no need for excessive concern as the virus typically results in mild respiratory issues, and it is routinely tested as part of the general surveillance for influenza-like illness (ILI). Dr Ishwar Gilada, a medical expert, also downplayed the panic surrounding HMPV, explaining that it is a seasonal

virus that exists in various regions and typically causes mild symptoms like a cold. A recent study in Gorakhpur in 2024 showed that around 4% of children tested positive for HMPV, but the virus did not lead to any severe outcomes, he noted. He also mentioned that testing for HMPV is expensive and not routinely conducted, as it is not necessary for such a non-fatal virus. Dr Gilada further noted that individuals with weakened immune systems—such as children, the elderly, or those with chronic conditions like bronchitis or diabetes—should take precautions, but this is applicable for all respiratory viruses. He reassured the public that there is no need for panic, as HMPV does not require hospitalisation and has no specific treatment or vaccination, with subsequent infections typically being milder. Meanwhile, Dr Surya Kant, head of the department of respiratory medicine, KGMU, reassured the public that despite the scare, there is no reason for fear. “While the scars of the COVID-19 pandemic are still

fresh, HMPV is not a new threat. HMPV, a respiratory virus first discovered in 2001, causes symptoms similar to a common cold or COVID-19, such as cough, fever, nasal congestion, and difficulty breathing. In severe cases, it can lead to bronchitis or pneumonia. The virus primarily affects children under 14, the elderly, and pregnant women, with cases concentrated in China's Guangdong province and northern areas, resembling the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic,” he explained. Dr Surya Kant said there is no specific vaccine or antiviral treatment for HMPV, but symptoms typically resolve within 2-5 days with rest and fever-reducing medications. Severe cases may require oxygen support. He stressed the importance of vigilance, especially for those with weakened immunity or pre-existing health conditions. He urged the public to avoid spreading unverified information and advised preventive measures like wearing masks, frequent handwashing, and maintaining distance from infected individuals.

Petrol pump salesman abused, threatened

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Unidentified youths riding an SUV allegedly threatened a petrol pump salesman with a knife, demanding free fuel, in the PGI police station area. The accused, later identified as Mohit Ranjan, the son of a policeman, has been arrested by the police. The incident occurred around 10 pm on January 2 in Sector-6A, Vrindavan Yojana. According to Rajesh Kumar, the pump manager and complainant, the accused arrived in a Scorpio accompanied by a friend, Ashok Singh. Mohit Ranjan allegedly demanded free diesel from the salesman on duty. When the salesman refused, the duo began hurling abuses and making threats from inside the car. Inspector, PGI police station, Ravishankar Tripathi confirmed the arrest, stating that the accused became aggressive when other pump staff intervened. Mohit reportedly parked his vehicle in front of the office, stepped out, and continued to abuse the staff. At one point, he allegedly threatened to slit the salesman's throat with a knife. The complainant also alleged that the duo had caused trouble

at the petrol station on previous occasions, harassing staff and creating inconvenience for customers. Video footage of the incident has been provided to the police as evidence. Meanwhile, thieves stole oil and copper from a heavy transformer placed on a private plot near Bindra Plastic Factory on Kakori Road, under the jurisdiction of Samda police outpost in Kakori. On Tuesday morning, the thieves stole a 250 KVA transformer from a private site under the FCI power substation. The culprits cut the phase of the transformer, located near Mahendra City, and threw it down. After opening it, they made off with around 200 litres of transformer oil and 50 kg of copper. They left the transformer structure behind and fled. The theft was discovered at 7:30 am when consumers reported a power outage, and a lineman, who investigated the issue, confirmed the theft. Junior engineer Nitin Kumar filed a theft complaint. Prashant Giri, subdivision officer of FCI substation, confirmed that the transformer was located near Rehmankhera feeder. Following the incident, power was restored using a trolley transformer.

Narrow escape for two in road mishap

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Two individuals narrowly escaped injury when a speeding BMW, driven by a man allegedly talking on his mobile phone, rammed into their cars on the Gomti river bridge in Gomti Nagar on the morning of January 4. The victims, identified as Vimlendra Mohan Mishra from Ayodhya and Mukesh Kumar from Unnao, were driving from Ambedkar Park to Hazratganj, heading towards the 1090 intersection. While crossing the middle of the Gomti river bridge around 10:20 am, a white BMW car, coming at high speed from the opposite direction, swerved onto their side of the road and collided with both of their vehicles. The BMW first hit Vimlendra's car, causing heavy damage to its right side. Mukesh's car was then pushed forward, crashing into Vimlendra's car and blocking the left side door of Vimlendra's vehicle. The impact caused Vimlendra to become trapped in his car, and the police had to break the window to help him out. The driver of the BMW, later identified as Ratnesh Kumar Dubey, provided his mobile number when questioned. However, he fled the scene shortly after the collision.

Forest officials minimise human interference in attempt to rescue tiger



PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Forest department has adjusted its strategy in an effort to trap the tiger in Rehmankhera, which has been causing concern after it strayed from Lakhimpur Kheri into the area. On Tuesday, the department minimised human interference to allow the tiger to return to the carcass of the bait it had killed, which would provide an opportunity to tranquillise it. District Forest Officer (DFO), Awadh, Sitanshu Pandey said that the department had set up a watch on the carcass near the 'machans' (raised platforms), with one veterinarian stationed there to monitor the tiger's return. Two other veterinarians were combing the area using elephants, and the locations of the camera traps were adjusted to cover a larger area based on the latest information about

the tiger's movements. The Forest department is using a bait weighing around 80-90 kg, of which the tiger has consumed 3-4 kg. The team is awaiting the tiger's return so they can dart and tranquillise it. Starting the next day, they plan to use a recorded tigress' call to attract the animal's attention. The department believes the tiger may have been frightened off by the presence of elephants during the search, so they are minimising human interference in the area to create a calm environment for the tiger to return. Pandey noted that the tiger's presence has affected 11 nearby villages, and the police have already held meetings with village leaders to ensure safety measures are in place for the residents. Meanwhile, two additional teams continue tracking the tiger's movements within the forest.

New lease of life for patient with acute liver failure

Doctors at King George's Medical University (KGMU) saved the life of a 30-year-old male patient suffering from acute liver failure. The patient, who hails from Amethi, had been admitted to a private hospital in Lucknow for 1.5 months before being referred to KGMU due to severe complications. Dr Zia Arshad, in-charge of KGMU's Trauma Ventilatory Unit (TVU), explained that the patient was dealing with multiple life-threatening issues including hepatic failure, altered consciousness, meningococcal meningitis (brain swelling), thrombocytopenia (low

platelets), and septic shock, which had led to low blood pressure. The private hospital had given up on his treatment due to the complexity of his condition, recommending KGMU as the last hope. Upon arrival at KGMU, the patient's condition was critical, and he was admitted to the ICU for intensive care. After thorough evaluation, effective treatment was administered, and the patient's condition has steadily improved. The patient is now off the ventilator, his liver function is improving, and his condition is stable.

Educationist alleges ₹1.6cr fraud by woman

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Dr SP Singh, an educationist and manager of a chain of private schools, has accused a woman of defrauding him of Rs 1.6 crore in a land sale transaction meant for his school. The woman in question, Bhumika Kakkar, is the owner of a plot of land adjacent to Singh's school in Anand Nagar, Lucknow, since 1985, and has educated thousands of students over the years. The school currently operates across three separate buildings in the

area. Singh explained that a plot of land adjoining the primary branch of the school, measuring 289.219 square metres, was owned by Bhumika Kakkar and her uncle, Vinod Kumar Kakkar. Both individuals proposed to sell the land, and the deal was eventually finalised. On July 25, 2023, Singh made two payments: Rs 1.2 crore was transferred via RTGS to Bhumika Kakkar's account, while the same amount was sent to Vinod Kumar Kakkar. Both land transfers were officially registered on July 26, 2023. Singh further claimed that Bhumika Kakkar registered her portion of the land on July 26, 2023, after receiving an additional payment of Rs 40

lakh through RTGS. The remaining share was registered by Shilpi Kakkar, the second daughter of the late Harish Kakkar, on August 3, 2023, after receiving Rs 40 lakh via RTGS on August 4, 2023. According to Singh, possession of both plots and the shops sold by Shilpi Kakkar was granted, but Bhumika Kakkar had given an affidavit seeking additional time—1 to 1.5 months—to vacate two shops located on the land. Later, Singh alleged that Bhumika Kakkar refused to vacate the shops, thereby committing fraud. Furthermore, Singh claimed that Bhumika Kakkar had failed to pay the property tax for the land, amounting to Rs 240,370,

which led to the plot being sealed by municipal corporation officials. The seal was only lifted after the school paid the outstanding tax. Singh also alleged that Bhumika Kakkar had concealed this fact prior to the registration of the land transfer. He accused Bhumika Kakkar of illegally continuing to collect rent from two shops, one used for selling meat and the other for liquor, even though the property had already been sold to the school. Additionally, Singh alleged that Bhumika Kakkar had taken a loan against the land and shops before selling them. As a result of these claims, the police have registered a case under relevant sections of the IPC.

Cultural cell set up at UPSIFC

The Language Literature and Folk Art Cultural Cell has been established at the Uttar Pradesh State Institute of Forensic Science (UPSIFC) in Lucknow, with the goal of organising programmes and discussions on various languages, literature, art, culture, and philosophy. Institute's Additional Director Rajiv Malhotra highlighted that the objective of the cultural cell is to foster awareness and interest among students in Indian cultural, literary arts, and philosophy, in line with Indian tradition. The cell will also ensure the success of these programmes, both within the country and internationally, by participating in them or by inviting individuals associated with art and literature.

Malhotra further explained that the initiatives in literature and cultural art will not only elevate the prestige of the institute but will also offer students ample opportunities to engage with literature, art, and culture at national and international levels. Malhotra also shared that the institute will organise events on Indian culture, literature, art, and philosophy on a national and international scale. These events will involve students from various educational institutions across the country, providing them with a platform to explore literature, art, and culture. Public relations officer of the institute, Santosh Kumar Tiwari, has been appointed as the in-charge of the cell.



सूचना

में ADITYA PRATAP SINGH S/o Rajneesh Singh मेरे पासपोर्ट में मेरा नाम वृद्धि कर ADITYA PRATAP SINGH अंकित है जो कि गलत है मविष्य में मुझे सभी स्थानों पर Aditya Pratap Singh के नाम से जाना पहचाना जाए, आदित्य प्रताप सिंह पुत्र रजनीश सिंह निवासी 51/17, नयागंज मा कृपा कॉम्प्लेक्स कानपुर नगर

NOTICE

In my Army service record Army No-15481721F Rank SEP, my daughter's name Nayala Khatun and date of birth 20-04-2007 is wrongly recorded. Correct name is Umra Khan and date of birth is 15-02-2007, correct name and date of birth should be recorded in the records, Harish Khan S/o Hasiv Khan, Vill-Chitra koni, Post-Sihani, tehz-Zamania, Distt- Ghazipur, U.P.

NOTICE

I Saroj W/O Devi Kishor and M/O of No-15427216L Rank -Hav(NA), Name - Vinai Kushawaha Resident of : Vill- Hajipur , Post- Bharoo, Dist- Kanpur Nagar (UP) Have changed my Name from Saroj to Saroj Kumari. in future, I'll be know as Saroj Kumari.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from SHAFIKA to Shafiqia Rahmani Siddiqui, Shafiqia Rahmani Siddiqui S/o Habibur Rahman Siddiqui R/o Banglow No.16, Tagore Road Cantt Kanpur Nagar 208004

NOTICE

Important Public Notice
It is hereby informed to the general public that the original copy of the sale deed of Neha Jain, wife of Vinay Kumar, resident of 498-A Jai Ambey Niwas, Civil Lines, Sitapur, relating to land Khusra No. 682 and 683, situated in Village Badkherwa, Pargana Hargaon, District Sitapur, which was registered on 28th February 2013, has been lost. Despite extensive efforts to locate it, the original document could not be found.

'Teerthraj' all set to welcome pilgrims

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Teerthraj Prayagraj, the king of pilgrimages, is ready to welcome the world for Maha Kumbh. As devotees enter Mahakumbh Nagar, they will be greeted by the 14 Ratnas from the Samudra Manthan, officials said here. Further along, the striking 'Damru' of Shiv Shambhu, along with the majestic 'Kachhapa', 'Samudra Manthan', and 'Nandi gates', will enhance the spiritual atmosphere. In total, 30 mythological arch gates are being erected in Mahakumbh Nagar, offering devotees an immersive 'Devlok' experience. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath envisions this year's Maha Kumbh as the most majestic and spiritually elevating celebration yet. Special arrangements are being made to welcome devotees from around the world. Preparations are underway to create a surreal spiritual atmosphere, making visitors feel as though they have entered a divine realm, officials said.

To achieve this, 30 uniquely crafted arches, inspired by mythological themes, have been constructed. Talented artisans from various parts of Uttar Pradesh have worked tirelessly to bring these majestic structures to life. Upon entering Mahakumbh Nagar, devotees will witness a stunning display of mythological events. The 14 gems from the Samudra Manthan, including Airavat, Kamdhenu Cow, Kaustubh Mani, Kalpavriksha, Rambha Apsara, Mahalakshmi, Moon, Sharang Bow, Conch, Dhyanvanti, and Amrit, will welcome the pilgrims in the form of well-adorned gates. A major attraction will be the colossal Nandi gate and a giant Damru of Bhole Bhandari, measuring an impressive 100 feet in length and over 50 feet in height, officials added. A large team of artisans is currently giving finishing touches to this masterpiece. Additionally, 30 other specially crafted arch gates, including the Samudra Manthan and Kachhapa gates, continue to reflect rich mythological symbolism, adding to the divine aura of the event. CM Yogi aims to present the Maha Kumbh as a global spiritual marvel, setting an exam-



Swachhata Rath Yatra launched in Prayagraj to promote cleanliness and raise public awareness, drawing significant community participation

ple for the entire world. As preparations advance for this mega event, the entire area of Mahakumbh Nagar has started resonating with the sounds of positive energy and Vedic chants, enhancing the spiritual atmosphere. Such is the glory of this sacred space that visitors, upon arriving, find themselves immersed in its profound positivity and spiritual vibrancy, officials said. **SWACHHATA RATH YATRA** The Swachhata Rath Yatra was launched in Prayagraj to promote cleanliness and raise public awareness, drawing significant community participation. The Swachhata Rath Yatra was launched to ensure Prayagraj reflects a spirit of cleanliness for the devotees and tourists attending Maha Kumbh. With the Mahakumbh Nagar route passing through the city, the initiative aims to maintain a pristine environment for the millions of visitors expected during this grand event, officials said. The rally was flagged off from Chowk Kotwali by Mayor Umesh Chand Ganesh

Kesharwani. Speaking on the occasion, the mayor said that the Swachhata Rath Yatra aligns with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's commitment to a clean Maha Kumbh. He described the event as a 'Jan Jagran Yatra' aimed at making Prayagraj clean, healthy, and disciplined. Citizens were urged to avoid littering, use dustbins, and refrain from using single-use plastic. The event received support from the local population, with many actively participating. The Swachhata Rath Yatra, organised by the Municipal Corporation of Prayagraj, commenced from Kotwali Chowk. A grand chariot was decorated with a statue of Mother Ganga, sculptures of sadhus symbolising the Maha Kumbh, and adorned with trees and plants. The Yatra traversed various routes across the city before concluding at the Ram Bhawan intersection. Street party artists carrying dustbins of different colours performed alongside the chariot, spreading awareness about

proper waste segregation by using separate dustbins for wet and dry waste. Adding to the message, a cleanliness-themed music band performed throughout the Yatra, further amplifying the call for maintaining a clean Prayagraj during the Maha Kumbh. A large number of Safai Mitras (sanitation workers) and municipal corporation staff also actively participated, emphasising the importance of their role in keeping the city clean. **DETAILED TRAFFIC PLAN** To ensure smooth travel for devotees and tourists during Maha Kumbh, the traffic police have devised a detailed plan, emphasising seamless management across seven key routes to Prayagraj for major bathing festivals and regular days. The traffic plan outlines seven main routes leading to the Maha Kumbh Mela and Commissionerate area from various directions. These include the Jaunpur, Varanasi, Mirzapur, Rewa/Banda, Kanpur, Lucknow, and Pratapgarh routes, officials said. According to an estimate, 21

per cent of traffic is expected from the Jaunpur route and 18 per cent from the Rewa/Banda route. Similarly, 16 per cent are expected to reach via the Varanasi route, whereas 14 per cent and 12 per cent are expected to arrive through the Kanpur and Mirzapur routes, respectively. Additionally, 10 per cent of people are expected to come from Lucknow and 9 per cent from Pratapgarh. With over 40 crore pilgrims expected, the traffic plan includes designated parking for large and small vehicles and pedestrian-friendly measures. One-way routes will be enforced in the fair area, and the SSP, Kumbh Mela, will implement real-time diversions in case of excessive crowds. These arrangements aim to facilitate seamless access for devotees, ensuring an uninterrupted and spiritually fulfilling experience during the holy event, officials added.

GREEN MAHA KUMBH Prayagraj city will host 'Green Maha Kumbh' on January 31, bringing together more than 1,000 environmental and water conservation workers from across the country. This event is part of the Gyan Maha Kumbh - 2081 series, organised by Shiksha Sanskriti Utthan Nyas, with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath serving as its chief patron. As part of the Green Maha Kumbh, a national-level discussion will focus on issues related to nature, the environment, water, and cleanliness. Experts will share their insights and experiences on maintaining the balance of the five elements of nature and addressing the challenges they face. Additionally, discussions will explore ways to raise awareness among Maha Kumbh visitors about environmental protection and cleanliness, as well as the campaigns being undertaken to promote these efforts. Environmental activist Ram Babu Tiwari shared that preparations for Green Maha Kumbh are in full swing. "Environmental and nature conservation activists and experts from across the country will participate. There will also be in-depth discussions on how to engage devotees attending the Maha Kumbh in the environmental protection and cleanliness campaigns," he said.

FORM No. URC 2
Advertisement giving notice about registration under Part I of Chapter XXI(Pursuant to section 374(b) of the Companies Act, 2013 and Rule 4(1) of the Companies (Authorised to Registrar) Rules, 2014)

- Notice is hereby given that in pursuance of sub section (2) of Section 366 of the Companies Act, 2013, an application has been made to the Registrar of Companies, Uttar Pradesh at (Kanpur) that Rawat Associates (Partnership Firm) may be registered under Part I of Chapter XXI of the Companies Act, 2013, as a company Limited by shares Named as SKYMAX INFRAPOWER LIMITED.
- The principal objects of the proposed company are as follows:
 - To convert/acquire the running business of Partnership concern, under the name and style of M/s RAWAT ASSOCIATES, having Registered office at 701, MIG, Avas Vikas Colony, D M Road, Bulandshahr, Uttar Pradesh- 203001 with all its assets and liabilities on as is where is basis with effect from the date of incorporation of this Company or at any such later date which may be decided by the Board after the incorporation of the Company.
 - To carry on the business of contractors, sub-contractors, quasi contractors and to undertake contracts and subcontracts relating to construction, modification, repairing, alteration, construction, removal, redecoration, redesigning, enlarging, improving and designing of civil work, building for whatever use, roads, approach roads, streets, circles, squares, parks, gardens, statues, parking places, bridges, dams, watercourses and reservoirs, tunnels, earthworks, sewers, tanks, drains, sewage, lighthouses, towers, transmission towers, pipelines, underground cables, railway tracks, railway sidings, runways shipyards, stockyards, culverts, channels whether on a turnkey basis or on labour contracts or otherwise.
 - To carry on the business as builders, property developers, Engineering Contractors, Civil, mechanical and labour contractors, building and erection engineers, consultants, dealers in, importers, exporters and manufacturers of prefabricated and precast houses, materials, tools, implements, machinery and metal ware in connection therewith or incidental thereto and also to alter, demolish, removal or carry out repairs on such favorable terms and deemed fit and to carry on the business of designers, Real Estate owners, layout promoters and also act as real estate brokers, realtors and agents and other service providers and to carry on any other business that is customarily, usually and conveniently carried on there within or outside India and to purchase, acquire, take on lease or in exchange or in any other lawful manner any area, land, buildings, structures and to turn the same into account, develop the same, dispose of or maintain the same and give away for rentals
 - To carry on the business of contractors, sub-contractors, quasi contractors and to undertake contracts and subcontracts relating to construction, modification, repairing, alteration, construction, removal, redecoration, redesigning, enlarging, improving and designing of civil work, building for whatever use, roads, approach roads, streets, circles, squares, parks, gardens, statues, parking places, bridges, dams, watercourses and reservoirs, tunnels, earthworks, sewers, tanks, drains, sewage, lighthouses, towers, transmission towers, pipelines, underground cables, railway tracks, railway sidings, runways shipyards, stockyards, culverts, channels whether on a turnkey basis or on labour contracts or otherwise.
 - To carry on the business of establishing and/or promoting support services whether information technology-enabled or otherwise including but not limited to placement services, enterprise content and data services, web services, transports, Back office operations, manpower supply, maintenance of information systems and act as consultants for the aforementioned services and businesses.
- A copy of the draft memorandum and articles of association of the proposed company may be inspected at the office at 701, MIG, Avas Vikas Colony, D M Road, Bulandshahr, Uttar Pradesh- 203001
- Notice is hereby given that any person objecting to this application may communicate their objection in writing to the Registrar of Firm/ Society, Meerut, Uttar Pradesh within twenty-one days from date of publication of this notice, with a copy to the Firm at its registered office.

Names of Applicants
1. Arjun Rawat, 2. Poonam Rawat, 3. Karan Pratap Rawat
Dated: 06 day of January, 2025

Bitter chill persists, CM calls for robust arrangements

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday directed the officials to ensure robust health arrangements across the state to safeguard public health during the ongoing cold wave, the Uttar Pradesh government said in a statement.

Addressing a high-level meeting on Tuesday, the chief minister emphasised the need for special precautions to protect the vulnerable groups, including the elderly, children and pre-existing conditions, as cold-related ailments such as cough, fever and respiratory issues are expected to rise. Reviewing the healthcare arrangements for the Maha Kumbh Mela pilgrims, he stressed the need for proper medical facilities in all sectors, including readily available ambulance services.

Adityanath also directed the Health department teams to conduct regular visits to Prayagraj to monitor the condition of pilgrims and provide necessary medical assistance promptly.

"Everyone should receive appropriate care when dealing with seasonal ailments or severe conditions," he said. The chief minister's directions assume importance in the backdrop of a few cases of HMPV (human metapneumovirus) detected in some states.

Adityanath instructed that all



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath chairing a meeting on Tuesday

government hospitals must deliver efficient medical services, including timely testing and an adequate supply of medicines, ensuring no inconvenience to the public. The residents of Uttar Pradesh continued to endure bitterly cold conditions on Tuesday, with no relief in sight. The Met department forecast similar weather for the next two days, expecting improvement after January 11.

Senior scientist, Met office, Mohammed Danish explained that the absence of sunlight was due to dense fog, which blocked the sun's rays. In Lucknow, the maximum temperature recorded was 13.6 degree Celsius, while the minimum was 11.5 degree Celsius. Fatehgarh was the coldest temperature in the state at 6.8 degree Celsius. The icy winds added to the

chill, with continued foggy and windy conditions expected to persist for the next two days. In response to the severe cold, residents were seen bundled up in heavy woolen clothing, while many resorted to heaters, blowers, and bonfires to stay warm. The chilly weather is also expected to bring about an increase in cold-related ailments, including cough, fever, and respiratory issues.

UP government to bear 'community contribution'

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The state government has announced a significant relief measure for the villagers of Uttar Pradesh under the Jal Jeevan Mission, waiving the 10% community contribution for the 'Har Ghar Nal' scheme. The state government has decided to waive the community contribution for the Har Ghar Nal scheme, sparing the rural population from any financial burden, a senior officer said here.

Earlier, the scheme required villagers to contribute 10% of the capital cost for providing tap water connections to every household. However, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has emphasised that this expense should not burden the common people, reaffirming the government's commitment to public welfare, he added.

Notably, a total of 40,951 schemes worth Rs 1.52 lakh crore have been approved under the Jal Jeevan Mission in Uttar Pradesh, with the Centre and state sharing Rs 71,714.68 crore each, the officer pointed out. The government has relieved villagers of the Rs 9,092.42 crore community con-

tribution by allocating Rs 2,000 crore in the current financial year's budget, benefiting 2.33 crore families. The Jal Jeevan Mission aims to provide clean drinking water to the rural population of Uttar Pradesh. Initially, the community contribution involved collecting 5% of the capital cost in villages with a higher SC/ST population and 10% in other villages. However, the government, considering access to clean drink-

a maintenance charge under the Har Ghar Nal scheme. The Jal Jeevan Mission in the Bundelkhand region has so far covered 97% of families or 1.40 lakh families in Mahoba, Jhansi: 99.15% (2,49,100 families); Lalitpur: 99.46% (2,05,865 families); Chitrakoot: 99.83% (1,63,698 families); Banda: 99.34% (2,67,198 families); Jalaun: 95.87% (2,03,309 families); and Hamirpur: 99.32% (1,85,261 families).

JAL JEEVAN MISSION

ing water a basic public welfare responsibility, has decided to exempt the rural population from this contribution, officials said. Currently, the community contribution is being covered by the state governments of Haryana, Bihar, Odisha, and West Bengal. In Rajasthan, the chief minister has announced that the state government will bear the cost, while in Madhya Pradesh, the matter is still under consideration.

While the Yogi government has waived the community contribution, villagers will be required to pay a nominal Rs 50 to their gram panchayat as

In the Vindhya Region, progress in tap water access is as follows: Mirzapur: 98.34% (3,49,292 families) and Sonbhadra: 80.83% (2,53,938 families). Anurag Shrivastava, Additional Chief Secretary, Namami Gange and Water Supply, said: "The UP government has ensured that rural residents face no financial burden for basic amenities like clean drinking water. A Rs 2,000 crore budget provision for 2024-25 reinforces its commitment to providing safe drinking water to every household."

M-YUVA Yojana empowering youth

Lucknow (PNS): The Yogi government's M-YUVA Yojana is empowering the youth of Uttar Pradesh to become self-reliant while driving economic growth. Uttar Pradesh Industrial Consultants Limited (UPICON) plays a pivotal role in this initiative, fostering entrepreneurship and supporting small businesses across the state, officials said here.

Through the M-YUVA scheme, UPICON has introduced several measures to nurture entrepreneurial talent. Experienced chartered accountants and financial experts have been appointed in every district to provide end-to-end guidance for budding entrepreneurs. A total of 17 experienced chartered accountants and financial experts have been appointed at the divisional level, officials said.

In 15 divisions, these experts are already offering guidance to entrepreneurs at every stage of their business. These professionals assist in feasibility studies, market analysis, and preparing detailed project reports, creating clear pathways to success. The scheme also facilitates financial assistance by coordinating with leading banks, offering a strong foundation for small businesses and startups. In this regard, retired bankers are being deployed in every district of the state to assist new entrepreneurs by establishing coordination between the beneficiary and the bank for financial assistance.

So far, bankers have been deployed in 50 districts. The scheme serves as a major foundation for small business ventures and startups. In addition to funding, young entrepreneurs receive practical and technical support to execute their business plans.

Alok Kumar, Principal Secretary and Chairman of the MSME Promotion department, emphasises focusing on innovative areas such as e-commerce, green technology, and digital services.

By-election to Milkipur on Feb 5

Lucknow (PNS): The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Tuesday announced the schedule for the by-election to Milkipur assembly constituency in Uttar Pradesh's Ayodhya district. Voting will take place on February 5, with the results set to be declared on February 10. "The Commission has decided to hold by-elections to fill vacancies in the following Assembly constituencies along with general election to the legislative Assembly of NCT of Delhi, 2025," the ECI statement said.

The Milkipur assembly seat fell vacant following the resignation of Awadhesh Prasad, who was elected MLA from the constituency during the 2022 Uttar Pradesh assembly elections. In 2024, Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav fielded Prasad as the Lok Sabha candidate from Faizabad (Ayodhya), where he defeated BJP's Lallu Singh.

After securing his victory in the Lok Sabha polls, Prasad resigned from Milkipur, necessitating this by-election. Earlier, by-elections to nine assembly seats were held in Uttar Pradesh, where the BJP secured victories on seven seats, while the SP won on two—Kahal and Sisamau. One of the most surprising outcomes was the BJP's victory in the Muslim-dominated Kundarki assembly seat, traditionally considered a stronghold of the Samajwadi Party. BJP candidate Ramveer Singh emerged victorious, breaking years of dominance by the opposition.

The Election Commission delayed the election for the Milkipur seat due to a writ petition filed by former MLA Gorakhnath Baba in the Allahabad High Court. The petition challenged Awadhesh Prasad's victory in the 2022 elections. However, the case has now been withdrawn, paving the way for the by-election.

Sambhal violence was govt conspiracy: Akhilesh Yadav

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Tuesday launched a scathing attack on the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), alleging that the Sambhal violence was a government conspiracy. He claimed that the Sambhal incident was not a communal riot but a planned act by the district administration, leading to the death of five people. Addressing a press conference here, Akhilesh Yadav accused the BJP of inciting violence in Sambhal, where innocent people were allegedly tortured. "When the SP delegation attempted to visit Sambhal, it was stopped by the authorities. What was the government trying to hide?" he questioned, adding that the incident was a deliberate attempt to disrupt communal harmony. Yadav alleged that, as a cover-up exercise, innocent people were being framed in fake cases.

"The entire incident was planned by the government and executed through the district officials. What was the tearing hurry for conducting the survey, even as the Places of Worship Act 1991 prohibits such a survey?" he said. "The survey was conducted as part of a well-planned conspiracy, leading to violence," he added.

He further criticised the BJP for its alleged lack of concern for human life, stating: "Life holds no value for them. This is a heartless party, devoid of sympathy. Justice and public grievances have no place in this government."

Leader of the Opposition in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly, Mata Prasad Pandey, also presented a report on the Sambhal violence, alleging that tensions were deliberately escalated over a mosque survey. He accused the BJP of orchestrating the incident, stating that the survey team included BJP members



and that the police used disproportionate force. "Instead of using tear gas, they opened fire, attempting to disrupt the communal harmony of the state," he said. Pandey questioned the need for the survey, pointing to the Places of Worship Act, which prohibits such actions. "This entire incident was part of a government conspiracy," he claimed. The violence in Sambhal had erupted on November 24 when a team of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) visited the Shahi Jama Masjid for the survey. The SP chief also targeted the BJP on issues of corruption and injustice, particularly against the PDA (backward, Dalit, and minority communities). "Even BJP members are accusing each other of corruption. There is internal conflict within their politics in Delhi and Lucknow," he claimed. Commenting on electoral malpractice, he alleged that the administration played a role in manipulating elections. Referring to the by-elections for nine UP assembly seats, he said, "People were not allowed to vote freely, with police officers stationed at places to stop peo-

ple from going to polling booths. The media should visit Milkipur to witness first-hand how elections are conducted under this government." Alluding to the presence of saints and sages at the Kumbh, Yadav indirectly criticised Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. "I pray to the saints to take a companion with them when they leave. Many individuals are involved in activities they should not be, which impacts both their work and others," he remarked. He also raised concerns about the alleged negligence of the government regarding an MLA's claim about cow slaughter. "The BJP MLA says 50,000 cows are being slaughtered. If true, what is the Sanatani chief minister doing? If the MLA is wrong, why hasn't the government addressed this?" he questioned. He also accused the government of allowing the demolition of an ASI-protected building in Agra. "The building was demolished by someone close to officials, seeking to expand their business," Yadav alleged, criticising the administration for its inaction.

BSP will go solo in Delhi polls: Maya

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati on Tuesday said that instead of being swayed by tempting promises, people should use their vote wisely and choose only the candidates of her party, who are dedicated to public interest and welfare. The BSP supremo wrote on social media, "The general election for the Delhi Assembly will be held in one phase on 5 February 2025. The announcement made by the Election Commission in this regard is welcome. BSP is fighting this election on its own strength, with full preparation and confidence. It is expected that the party will perform better in this election."

Mayawati further wrote in her post, "Elections are the backbone of democracy, and BSP, a party of the poor and the oppressed, which stays away from muscle power and money power, expects that the Commission will ensure free and fair elections by protecting them from being contaminated by the misuse of government machinery, as well as communalism and other divisive propaganda."

The former UP chief minister wrote on social media, "I appeal to the voters not to be swayed by any party's tempting promises, but to use their votes wisely and vote only for the candidates of the BSP, dedicated to public interest and wel-

fare. This is my appeal. Public and national interest are safe only with us." There are 70 assembly seats in Delhi, out of which 58 are of the general category, while 12 seats are reserved for Scheduled Castes. Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar said in a press conference that there are a total of 1.55 crore registered voters in Delhi, of whom 83.49 lakh are men and 71.74 lakh are women. He added that the number of young voters (aged 20 to 21 years) is 28.89 lakh, with 2.08 lakh youth eligible to vote for the first time. Polling in Delhi will take place on February 5 and results will be declared on February 8.

11 IAS officers shifted in administrative reshuffle

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In an administrative reshuffle, the Uttar Pradesh government on Tuesday transferred 11 IAS officers. Ashok Kumar-II, who was serving as the Principal Secretary (Sports and Youth Welfare) has been relieved of his charge. He has been replaced by Manish Chauhan. Principal Secretary (Stamp and Registration) Leena Johri has also been relieved of her duties. She has been replaced by Amit Gupta, who has also been made Inspector General of the department. Dr Rupesh Kumar has been divested of the charge of IG of

Stamps and Registration department. Dr Muthu Kumar Swami B has been posted as Secretary of the Finance department. K Vijendra Pandian has been given additional charge as Divisional Commissioner of Kanpur, while Bal Krishna Tripathi will be the Divisional Commissioner of Vindhyanchal. Vivek has been posted as Divisional Commissioner of Azamgarh, and Ajit Kumar has been appointed Commissioner of Chitrakoot Division. Narendra Prasad Pandey has been posted as Secretary of the Planning, Economic, and Statistics Division.

Part of marriage hall belonging to SP leader bulldozed

Kannauj (PTI): Part of a marriage hall belonging to a Samajwadi Party leader that had encroached a road was bulldozed on Tuesday, officials said. A heavy police force including municipal workers was present along with Sadar Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) Ram Kesh during the operation.

According to the SDM, SP leader Cash Khan had constructed a part of the marriage hall in Balapir Mohalla by illegally occupying the road during the party's government. The road was closed by putting a lintel on the road and installing a gate.

The SDM reached the spot in the morning with a heavy police force and ordered demolition of the alleged illegal construction with a JCB machine. Following this, the municipal workers started breaking the wall. The SDM said notices were given to the SP leader by the Public Works Department (PWD) and the local municipality but he did not remove the encroachment. The Archaeological Department and the Master Plan Office had also sent notices several times regarding the illegal construction. On November 14, the

administration issued a demolition notice to the SP leader and gave three days to remove the encroachment. But Khan took a stay order from a local court, due to which the demolition action stopped. After the expiry of the stay order, the administration demolished the illegal construction on Tuesday, the SDM said. Meanwhile in Bareilly, a team of Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) on Tuesday arrested the in-charge of a police outpost red-handed while allegedly accepting a bribe of Rs 50,000, an official said. The complainant, Zeeshan Malik, told the police that a case was registered against his brothers and an uncle. Inspector Deep Chand, in charge of Bhudia Colony Police Outpost, had demanded a bribe of Rs 50,000 in exchange for saving him from arrest and settling the case. Based on his complaint, a case was registered against Chand in Devarnia Police Station, Inspector in-charge of the Anti-Corruption Organisation team Jitendra Singh said. After a preliminary investigation, the team sent the complainant with the money and caught the inspector red-handed.

Man held for clicking photos from camera in sunglasses at Ram temple complex

Ayodhya (PTI): A young man was apprehended in the Ram Janmabhoomi complex in Ayodhya for carrying camera-equipped sunglasses and clicking photos, officials said on Tuesday. The accused was violating the ban on photography and videography in the temple for security reasons, the officials said. The man, identified as Jani Jaikumar from Vadodara in Gujarat, managed to pass through multiple checkpoints on the Ram Janmabhoomi path and reached near the Singhdwar of the temple complex on Monday, they said. He was spotted taking photos with the camera-equipped glasses, which caught the attention of security personnel when the camera light flashed, they added. "The youth was immediately taken into custody after the suspicious device was discovered. The glasses, equipped with cameras on both sides and a button for capturing images, are valued at approximately Rs 50,000," SP (Security) Bahramchari Dubey said. Dubey further said Anurag Bajpai, an SSF jawan who detained the man, will be rewarded for his vigilance. "The security watcher's quick action ensured no further security breach occurred," he added.

Elderly man killed by three sons over property dispute

Sultanpur (PTI): A 65-year-old man was allegedly killed by his three sons over a property dispute in Hanif Nagar here on Tuesday, police said. According to the police, when Abdul Hameed returned from his morning walk, three of his sons—Munna, Dabbal and Babu—attacked the man with sharp edged objects outside his home. The men fled after the attack. Neighbours and passersby gathered at the spot and rushed Hameed to a hospital where he was declared dead, they said. Mohammad Khurshid, the cousin of the accused men, alleged that Munna, Dabbal and Babu killed their father, the police said. Khurshid told police there was a dispute between the father and sons regarding the partition of land. Hameed had recently sold some land and the three brothers wanted their share. Hameed used to live with his other son Pappu, the police said. Circle Officer Prashant Kumar Singh said a case has been registered and a probe is underway. The body has been sent for post-mortem. The accused men are absconding, they will be nabbed soon, he said.

HDFC BANK Legal Cell: HDFC Bank Ltd 2nd Floor Vardaan Khand, Gormi Nagar Extn, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, 226010. POSSESSION NOTICE APPENDIX IV [RULE 8(1)]

Whereas, the undersigned being the authorized officer of the HDFC Bank Ltd. 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 demand notices, and calling upon to pay the amount within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice. Details are given as under-

Customer Name 1. M/s Manoj Die & Tools Through Its Proprietor Mr. Manoj Verma (Since Deceased) (Borrower) 2. Mr. Manoj Verma S/o Shobhnath Verma (Since Deceased) Through His Legal Heir's (Co-Borrower) 3. Mrs. Mamta Verma W/o Late Manoj Verma (Co-Borrower & Mortgagee) 4. Ms. Shivangi Verma D/o Late Shri Manoj Verma (Co-Borrower)	13(2) Notice Date : 29-05-2024 Notice Amt.: Rs. 47,80,931/- Possession Date : 04-01-2025 Location : Azamgarh
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Description of the Immovable Property (Property 1) : H.No.- 320, Admeasuring Area 56.65 Sq. Mtr., Situated At Mohalla, Sitaram (aiwala), Tappa Attasi, Pargana- Nizamabad, Tehsil- Sadar, District Azamgarh (property Owned By Mrs. Mamta Verma). Bounded As Under: - East : House Of Mohd. Faruq, North: House Of Lilawati West: Lane South : House Of Akhbar Ahmad

Description of the Immovable Property (Property 2) : H.No.- 319, Admeasuring Area 17 Kadi / 750 Sq. Ft., Situated At Mohalla, Sitaram City, Pargana- Nizamabad, Tehsil- Sadar, District-azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh (property Owned By Mrs. Mamta Verma.). Bounded As Under: -East : House Of Lilawati, North : Lane West: Lane South : House Of Lilawati

The borrower(s) having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower(s) and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein above in exercise of powers conferred on him under sub-section (4) of section 13 of Act read with rule 8 of the said Rules, on above mentioned dates. The borrowers in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to charge of the HDFC Bank Ltd. for an amount of notices mentioned above and interest thereon together with expenses and charges etc. less amount paid, if any. 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.

Place :- Azamgarh DATE :- 04.01.2025
Authorised Officer, HDFC Bank Ltd.

लखनऊ विकास प्राधिकरण
(ISO 14001 : 2004, ISO 9001-2008 प्रमाणित संस्था)
प्राधिकरण भवन, विपिन खण्ड, गोमती नगर, लखनऊ (उ.प्र.)। पीबीएक्स : 1800 1800 5000, वेबसाइट : www.lwdonline.com.in

सार्वजनिक सूचना

सर्वसाधारण को सूचित किया जाता है कि प्राधिकरण की आवासीय/व्यवसायिक/रेंट/नजूल/इन्क्यूबेट ट्रेड योजनाओं के निम्नलिखित आवेदकों द्वारा उनके नाम के सामने अंकित सम्पत्ति का हस्तान्तरण/ नामांतरण किये जाने हेतु प्राधिकरण में प्रार्थना-पत्र प्रस्तुत किया गया है :-

क्र.सं.	मूल आवेदी का नाम	भवन/मूखण्ड/प्लेट संख्या	योजना का नाम	मनुष्य का दिनांक	मूल आवेदी के उत्तराधिकारी अथवा आवेदक का नाम	उत्तराधिकारी के पत्र में अनापत्ति कर्ताओं के नाम	मूल आवेदी (मृतक) से आवेदक के सम्बन्ध
1	स्व. मधु अग्रवाल	प्लेट संख्या- RT/002B	रतन लोक अपार्टमेंट रतन खण्ड, शारदा नगर योजना	19.03.2024	1. श्री हेमन्त अग्रवाल 2. श्रीमती सोनिया अग्रवाल	-	पुत्र पुत्रवधू
2	स्व. श्रीमती कुलमती	सम्पत्ति मूखण्ड संख्या- E-11M सेक्टर-एम	अलीगंज योजना	16.01.2004	1. श्रीमती उषा जोहरी-पुत्रवधू 2. श्री शिवेंद्र प्रताप सिंह	1. श्री अमित कुमार-पुत्र 2. श्री प्रीति जोहरी-पुत्री	पुत्रवधू
3	श्री नानोद नाथ सिंह	मूखण्ड संख्या- बी-5/24	विनय खण्ड गोमती नगर योजना	25.08.2012	श्री राजेश सिंह श्री अजय सिंह श्री कुनिल सिंह	वसीयत के आधार पर	पुत्र पुत्र पुत्री
4	श्रीमती विद्यावती सिंह	मूखण्ड संख्या- (मृतक)-बी-28	सेक्टर-सी अलीगंज योजना, लखनऊ	25.07.2021	1. श्री शैलेश प्रताप सिंह 2. श्री शिवेंद्र प्रताप सिंह	-	पुत्र पुत्र
5	श्री रामे श्याम सक्सेना	भवन संख्या- एमएचए-143	सेक्टर-डी, अलीगंज योजना, लखनऊ	15.04.2021	1. श्री मुकेश सक्सेना श्री अजय सक्सेना 3. श्री राजेश सक्सेना	श्रीमती मीना सक्सेना	पुत्र पुत्र पुत्र

उपर्युक्त नामान्तरण के आवेदन के सम्बन्ध में यदि किसी भी व्यक्ति को कोई आपत्ति हो तो वह साक्ष्य सहित प्रकाशन तिथि से 30 दिनों के अन्दर अधोहस्ताक्षरकर्ता के कार्यालय में प्राप्त करा दे। निर्धारित तिथि तक कोई आपत्ति प्राप्त न होने पर प्राधिकरण अम्प्लेक्स में कॉलम-6 पर लिखित व्यक्ति का नाम दर्ज कर लिया जाएगा तथा उसके बाद किसी आपत्ति पर विचार नहीं किया जाएगा।

सचिव

CM to visit Maha Kumbh area tomorrow

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath will visit the Maha Kumbh area in Prayagraj on January 9. He will stay here for about six hours, hold a review meeting with the officials regarding preparations for the event which begins on January 13 and will also meet the office-bearers of all the akharas. The CM will also inspect the works related to Maha Kumbh. He will also inaugurate six corridors here, including the Mankameshwar Temple Corridor located on the banks of Yamuna, Maa Alophankari Corridor, Nagvasuki Temple Corridor, Padma Mahadev Corridor and Takshak Tirtha Corridor. On receiving the information about the arrival of the CM, the officials have further intensified the preparations. Director of Information, Prayagraj Office,

Indramani Pandey, said the CM will land directly from Lucknow on the helipad built at DPS School located in Naiin Arai. From there, he will go to the tent city by car and the temporary circuit house built here, after which he will also go to the akharas and meet the saints. He will reach Sangam Nose and perform puja here. After this, he will go to the VIP Ghat near the fort from where he will also see the work of the water police by motor boat. After that he will inaugurate the Media Centre located at Parade and also hold a media briefing. He will reach Sector 6 to inaugurate the Uttar Pradesh Pavilion. FIRE IN STORE ROOM: A fire broke out in the store room of Digambar Ani Akhara in Sector 20 of Maha Kumbh Mela on Tuesday. With the help of three fire tenders, the fire was brought under control in about half an hour. Due to the

arrangement of fire service in every sector, the fire could be controlled immediately. TRAINS RUNNING LATE: Due to dense fog in the entire NCR region and surrounding areas the country's first semi-high speed train Varanasi-New Delhi Vande Bharat Express reached Prayagraj late by nine hours on Tuesday. Fog has slowed down the speed of this train. For the last several days, Vande Bharat has been reaching Prayagraj hours late. Meanwhile, Alliance Air's Delhi flight was also cancelled on Tuesday due to inclement weather conditions. The arrival time of 22436 Vande Bharat coming from New Delhi is 12.08 pm in Prayagraj, but due to fog, it was rescheduled from New Delhi itself. Vande Bharat left from New Delhi at 3.10 pm instead of 6 am. Due to this, the train reached Prayagraj Junction

nine hours late. On the other hand, Prayagraj Express reached late for the fifth consecutive day. This train reached the Prayagraj Junction at 11.50 am instead of 7 am. Similarly, Anand Vihar-Prayagraj Humsafar Express reached the Prayagraj Junction at 3.05 pm with a delay of 3.05 hours. Apart from this, many other trains of Delhi route also reached Prayagraj Junction with a delay of hours. Among the trains reaching late at Prayagraj Junction included 12418 Prayagraj Express, 12428 Rewa Express, 12802 Purushottam Express, 15657 Brahmaputra Mail, 14118 Kalindi Express, Vande Bharat Express, 11108 Bundelkhand Express, 22435 Vande Bharat Express etc. According to the PRO of Prayagraj Division of NCR, Amit Singh due to dense fog in the NCR regions, majority of the trains specially running on Delhi route are getting delayed.

Porbandar chopper crash: Pilot's mortal remains reach Kanpur, last rites today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The mortal remains of the Coast Guard pilot Sudhir Yadav, who died in a helicopter crash in Porbandar (Gujarat) on Sunday, reached his house in Chakeri here on Tuesday morning. His colleagues from the Porbandar Coast Guard unit have also reached here.

The last rites will be performed at Bithoor Ghat on Wednesday. Earlier on Monday afternoon, his wife Avrati, reached Rampuram, Shyam Nagar house and burst into tears. Father Nawab Singh was too grief-stricken to speak and mother was also deeply affected by the loss. A native of Harkishanpur, Sheoli (Kanpur Dehat), Sudhir Yadav, younger



Mortal remains of Coast Guard pilot Sudhir Yadav arrived at his Shyam Nagar house on Tuesday morning.

son of Nawab Singh Yadav, was a pilot in Indian Coast Guard (ICG). In the helicopter crash in Porbandar on Sunday, three

people, including Sudhir, had died. Sudhir Yadav's elder brother Dharmendra said after keeping

the body at Shyam Nagar, Chakeri house for two hours for last respects it will be sent to the mortuary of 7 Air Force Hospital, Kanpur. On Wednesday morning, the body will be taken to his ancestral Harkishanpur village of Sheoli (Kanpur Dehat) where people will be able to pay their last respects. The last rites will be performed at the Bithoor ghat with state honour. Meanwhile, Cantonment assembly legislator Mohammad Hasan Rumi, former MLA Raghunandan Singh Bhadauria, Samajwadi Party (SP) district president Fazel Mehmood and SP leader Fateh Bahadur Singh Gill also reached his house in Shyam Nagar and consoled the grieving family members.

DDMA issues advisory for Maha Kumbh pilgrims, Kalpvasis

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) has issued an advisory for pilgrims in view of Maha Kumbh to be organised in Prayagraj from January 14 to February 26. During the Maha Kumbh Mela period, crores of devotees will gather in Prayagraj. During it the fair area which is spread over 4,000 hectares on the banks of the Ganga and Yamuna rivers, is sensitive to stampede, fire, drowning, health related problems etc. In view of Maha Kumbh, an advisory has been prepared by the DDMA for pilgrims and Kalpvasis. According to it devotees and bathers have been asked to download the Maha Kumbh Mela-2025 mobile app and get information about the fair before reaching Prayagraj. They have also been suggested to ensure accommodation before the journey and keep warm and woollen clothes and food items according to the changing weather. For advance weather information, the website of the Meteorological

Department (IMD) should be checked. For early warning of disaster, download and check the Sachet mobile app. People above 60 years of age or with pre-existing diseases must get their health checked before travelling and travel only after consulting their doctors. People with pre-existing diseases should keep their doctors' prescriptions and contact numbers and the medicines prescribed by the doctor with them. People suffering from heart disease, respiratory disease, diabetes, high blood pressure etc should take special precautions while traveling. If one is an Ayushman card holder, they should keep it with them so that in case of emergency they can get free treatment under the Ayushman scheme in government and private hospitals. According to the advisory, one may have to walk to reach the Sangam area for bathing and darshan in the fair area. For this drinking water/ORS solution should be kept to maintain the level of water in the body. Pregnant women should take special precautions in view of the pos-

sibility of excessive crowd in the fair area. Besides, children, elderly and pregnant women should not be allowed to travel alone. Going into deep water should be avoided. Slippers and shoes are recommended for walking. One should not walk in muddy places. In case of headache, dizziness, nervousness, fast heartbeat, vomiting, blueness of hands, feet and lips, fatigue, breathlessness, cough or any other symptoms, one should immediately contact the nearest health centre established in the fair. The devotees have also been advised that those suffering from diabetes, heart disease, respiratory disease should take their medicines regularly on time. They should wash hands with soap before eating and after using the toilet. Besides they should take special care in the use of food items during the stay and avoid using contaminated food items in the open. They should not smoke and consume intoxicants. Although spraying and smoke is done to prevent mosquitoes in the fair area, still mosquito repellent should be kept.

Prof Jain completes tenure as BHU V-C, hands over charge

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

On completion of his tenure as Vice-Chancellor (V-C), Prof Sudhir Kumar Jain handed over the charge to Rector Prof Sanjay Kumar in Banaras Hindu University (BHU) here on Tuesday. Prof Jain conveyed his best wishes to the acting V-C/Rector. Prof Jain said working as V-C in BHU was an opportunity for him to learn a lot. Earlier, addressing the ceremony organised at the V-C's residence on the occasion of completion of his tenure in the university, Prof Jain said joining the university was a completely new experience for him. He said the immense support and affection received from the members of the university family gave him the energy and strength to work for the development of BHU, for which he will always be grateful. He said the BHU and its members have immense potential and possibilities, if needed, it should be encouraged and provided new opportunities. Prof Jain said the university has given him many wonderful memories and experiences, which have also enhanced his personality. He said the aim of the university is to pave the way



On completing his tenure as BHU V-C Prof SK Jain handing over charge to Rector Prof Sanjay Kumar in Varanasi on Tuesday.

for the all-round development and progress of the students and he tried to play his role with this spirit. Prof Jain underlined the need to create new opportunities to fulfil the aspirations of the students, empower the teachers and provide resources for the development of the members of the university. He called upon the BHU members to do their work diligently with positive energy and hope and ensure that their work is in the direction of the progress of the institution. "We may not see the results of our work

in the short term, but it is reflected in the form of progress of our institution in the long term", he said. Addressing the programme, Rector Prof Sanjay Kumar said Prof Jain provided exemplary leadership to the university, the results of which will benefit the university for a long time. Registrar Prof Arun Kumar Singh said identifying talents has been the specialty of the V-C. He said Prof Jain is a person with extraordinary thinking and this is also reflected in his working style. Arts Faculty Dean Prof Maya

Shankar Pandey said during Prof Jain's tenure, work was done in those areas which no one ever paid attention to. He said Prof Jain's contribution in taking academic excellence to a new level in the university is very important. Former Science Faculty Dean Prof SM Singh said the implementation of many developmental initiatives related to students started from the Science Institute, whose positive results are visible. This was possible only as a result of the V-C's foresight. Prof-in-charge of Rajiv Gandhi South Campus (RGSC) located at Barkachha, Prof VK Mishra described Prof Jain's tenure as unique. He said many works have been done in the last three years for the development of the southern campus and upgradation of facilities there, which has further improved the atmosphere of the campus. Director of Institute of Medical Sciences (IMS), Prof SN Sankhwar thanked the V-C for the initiatives taken by him to make the facilities and arrangements of the university student-friendly and to provide them a better campus life. He said V-C's continuous guidance and full support was received for the

development of the IMS. Director of the Institute of Agricultural Sciences and Coordinator of the International Centre Prof SVS Raju said many efforts were made in the last three years to create a favourable environment for research and teaching in the university and to expand the facilities. He said under the leadership of the V-C, sports culture was encouraged in the university and enrolment of international students reached a historic level. In the programme, Principal of Mahila Mahavidyalaya Prof Rita Singh, Dean of Education Faculty Prof Anjali Bajpai, senior professor in the Faculty of Arts, Prof Mukul Raj Mehta, also expressed their views and described the V-C's commitment to the development of the university as unmatched. An album of three ceremonies organised for five convocations during the tenure of Prof Jain was presented to the V-C. Many members of the university felicitated Prof Jain by presenting him a bouquet. Directors of the institutes, faculty deans, senior officers, teachers and employees were present.

25-yr-old youth hangs self

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A 25-year-old youth allegedly committed suicide by hanging himself in Bhitargaon under Sadh police station area on Monday night. On getting information police along with forensic team rushed to the spot and sent the body for autopsy after investigation. However, the reason for his committing suicide could not be ascertained. Ganesh of Tewariपुर village, Sadh, was a labourer. Being a bachelor, he used to live with his family members and hanged himself on Monday night. Station House Officer (SHO) KP Singh said the body had been sent for an autopsy. On the basis of autopsy report, further action will be initiated in the matter. However, the reason for his committing suicide could not be ascertained, he said. In another incident a man committed suicide by hanging himself in his house in Rampur Gajra under Sheoli Kotwali police area of Kanpur Dehat late on Monday night. Police sent the body for autopsy after a probe. Gaurav Tewari alias Guddan (34) of Rampur Gajra was employed in a biscuit fac-

tory in Sachendi. Being addicted to alcohol he often had altercation with family members. Few days ago, his wife Riya Devi had gone to her parents' house in Fattepur Roshnai. On Monday night he hanged himself from the ceiling hook. On being informed Riya returned from her parents house and fell unconscious. Sheoli Kotwali in charge Harmit Singh said during primary investigation, family discord has come to the fore as the cause of the incident. MAN HIT BY TRAIN, DIES: An elderly man died after being hit by a speeding train in Narval police station area on Tuesday morning. The incident took place when he was going to graze the goats. Police sent the body for an autopsy after identification and carried a out in probe the matter. Reports said that Bhikhu Lal (70) of Karbigwa, Narval, was hit by the speeding train as a result of which he was killed on the spot. People informed the kin and police which rushed to the spot and sent the body for autopsy. Station Officer (SO) Rajesh Singh said on the basis of complaint, further legal formalities will be completed in the matter.

DM hears public complaints, stresses on timely resolution

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

District Magistrate (DM) S Rajalingam heard the complaints of the people during the Janata Darbar (public hearing) in his chamber at the Collectorate here on Tuesday. After listening to the grievances of the people, the DM spoke to the officers of department concerned and instructed them to ensure quality disposal of complaints as per the wishes of the government. He said whatever problems are coming during the public hearing, their quality disposal should be done on time. Earlier, presiding over a meeting related to road safety, the DM directed the police and transport departments to generate sensitivity towards road safety in those who violate traffic rules by giving them flowers instead of challenging them. The meeting was held under the 'National Road Safety Month' being observed from January 1 to 31. The DM directed that the penalty imposed against the challan must be deposited. Instructions were given to suspend driving license (DL) of drivers of vehicles with more than one challan and to take action for cancellation of DL and registration of drivers of vehicles with excessive challans. Instructions were given that all departments between January 6 and 10



DM listening to the problem of a complainant in Varanasi on Tuesday.

will run a road safety public awareness campaign and such hoardings should be put up in blocks, tehsils, police stations and municipal bodies, which can make the public aware about road safety. In view of Maha Kumbh, a meeting was held with the officials of Auto Rickshaw/E-Rickshaw Union and the fare list for the main tourist places from the main crossings of the district was discussed. The additional municipal commissioner was directed to ensure that the fare list boards are pasted on the main crossings of the district and also outside the auto/e-rickshaws. Instructions were given to immediately ensure closure of illegal median cuts on the highways. The DM directed the officers to ensure corrective action on the black spots identified in the district.

In view of the fog, he directed the officers concerned to ensure that radium strips are installed on the national as well as state highways within a week. Also, fitness of any vehicle without reflector should not be issued and people should also be made aware in this regard. Instructions were given to make indicators/breakers in front of schools located on the national highway and Public Works Department (PWD) roads, the DM added. Additional District Magistrate (City) Alok Kumar Verma, Additional Municipal Commissioner Savita Yadav, Divisional Transport Officer (Enforcement) Manoj Verma, Assistant Deputy Commissioner of Police (Traffic) Anjali Kumar Rai, Assistant Divisional Transport Officer (Administration) Sarvesh Kumar Chaturvedi, Assistant Divisional Transport Officer (Enforcement) Shyam Lal and Sudhanshu Ranjan, Deputy Chief Medical Officer Dr R Prasad, passenger tax officers Mithilesh Kumar Singh, Rajkumar and Akhilesh Pandey, assistant inspector of schools, assistant regional manager, assistant engineer of PWD, Executive Engineer of NHAI and union office-bearers were present. Thereafter, the district magistrate flagged off the 'road safety' promotional vehicle from near Nehru Park in Cantonment area.

Eminent statisticians honoured

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The International Conference on Recent Developments in the Techniques of Bayesian Paradigm, hosted by the Department of Statistics, Banaras Hindu University (BHU) witnessed a remarkable day of intellectual exchange and celebration here on Monday. The event's highlight was the conferral of the Lifetime Achievement Award on two eminent statisticians, Prof Satyanshu K Upadhyay, (Dean, Institute of Science, BHU) and Prof Dipak K Dey (Distinguished Professor of Statistics, University of Connecticut, USA). Their trailblazing contributions to Bayesian statistics have inspired a generation of researchers worldwide. The conference was organised by Indian Bayesian Society in collaboration with the International Advisory Committee. The conference commenced with a ceremonial garlanding of Mahamana Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya's bust, lighting of the lamp and the singing of Kulgeet. The inaugural session featured addresses by Prof Dipak K Dey and Prof SK Upadhyay, alongside a welcome by Prof Gyan Prakash Singh and an introduction to the conference theme by Dr Akanksha Gupta. The Best Paper Presentation Award session spotlighted emerging research by young scholars. The day

concluded with a vibrant cultural evening featuring dance, vocal and instrumental performances by Aditya Music Academy, followed by a special dinner celebrating collaboration and innovation in Bayesian statistics. Earlier, the concluding day of the workshop on advanced Bayesian methods brought together renowned statisticians and researchers for a series of enlightening sessions. The sessions began with Prof Kiranmoy Das presenting on Markov Chain Monte Carlo Methods in Bayesian Modeling with R. This was followed by Prof Jaeyong Lee's insightful talk on Introduction to Hamiltonian Monte Carlo-I. The morning chair, Dr Dhiman Bhadra, oversaw engaging discussions. Post a tea break, Prof Igor Pruenster delved into the Dirichlet Process and Species Sampling, while Prof Lee continued with Hamiltonian Monte Carlo-II. Afternoon sessions saw Prof Pruenster explore Models Beyond the Dirichlet Process, and Athar Ali Khan concluded with Bayesian Data Analysis Using R and Stan. Chaired by Dr Priyam Das, the workshop culminated with a validation session, leaving participants enriched with cutting-edge statistical tools. The workshop concluded with a valedictory session where participants were awarded certificates of completion. They departed motivated and well-equipped with advanced tools and techniques in Bayesian analysis.

Study paves way for developing resilient crop varieties

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

In a significant advancement for modern agriculture, Dr Prashant Singh and his research team have published a landmark study in the prestigious peer-reviewed journal Physiological and Molecular Plant Pathology (PMPP). The study showcases how drought priming (a technique involving controlled water stress) enhances wheat's resistance to spot blotch, a devastating disease caused by the fungus Bipolaris sorokhiniana. This innovative approach offers a sustainable solution to some of agriculture's most pressing challenges. Drought priming operates as an on-demand defense strategy, enabling plants to optimize resources by preparing for future stress while minimizing unnecessary metabolic costs. Notably, Dr Singh's team discovered that the protective

benefits of drought priming can be passed to subsequent generations, making this technique particularly valuable for long-term crop protection. Progeny of drought-primed wheat exhibited enhanced defenses, including elevated antioxidant activity and increased production of defense enzymes, which were selectively activated during pathogen attacks without impairing normal growth. Focusing on wheat (Triticum aestivum), the research demonstrated that drought-induced priming not only boosts resistance to Bipolaris sorokhiniana, the pathogen responsible for spot blotch disease, but also transmits this resilience to the next generation (G1). This ground-breaking discovery highlights the potential of inter-generational priming as a transformative tool for sustainable agriculture. "Our findings establish drought-induced

intergenerational priming as a sustainable and chemical-free strategy to protect crops against diseases," Dr Singh explained, adding, "This approach could revolutionise disease management in agriculture, particularly in the face of global climate challenges." The study paves the way for developing resilient crop varieties capable of thriving under changing environmental conditions. By addressing critical gaps in understanding the metabolic adjustments and regulatory mechanisms underpinning drought priming, this research lays a robust foundation for future innovations in agricultural sustainability. This remarkable achievement underscores the pivotal role of cutting-edge research in shaping the future of agriculture while reflecting Dr Singh and his team's dedication to tackling global food security challenges.

Nilisha Rastogi gets Rising Star Award

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Dr Nilisha Rastogi working as DHR Young Scientist in the Molecular Biology Unit under the mentorship of Prof Sunit K Singh, has been conferred the Rising Star Award -2024 by the International Union of Crystallography (IUCr) at 18th Asian Crystallographic Association Conference (AsCA - 2024), held in Kuala Lumpur recently. The award is given to emerging leaders in the field of crystallography in Asia and Oceania. The award ceremony was held at Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre (KLCC), Malaysia. The award lecture was entitled 'Structural and biophysical properties of therapeutically important proteins Rv1509 and



Rv2231A of Mycobacterium tuberculosis' which highlighted the structural and functional properties of these two therapeutically important and newly known signature sequence proteins from Mycobacterium tuberculosis providing an insight towards diagnostic and therapeutic capabilities targeting these proteins.

GSVMC set to establish shopping facility

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The GSVM Medical College (GSVMC) is all set to establish a comprehensive shopping facility within its campus premises. The administration has finalised a location and received government approval for constructing a modern shopping complex to serve its community. Principal Prof Sanjay Kala confirmed that the new development will occupy the space currently housing the PWD's warehouse. The warehouse is in process of being cleared for this purpose. He said the development aims to provide convenience to resident doctors, medical practitioners and paramedical students by eliminating their venture outside the campus for daily requirements. The planned complex will house various retail establishments, including showrooms, dining facilities and jewellery outlets. The modern shopping

centre will feature approximately 20 shops offering branded apparel, food courts, restaurants, jewellery boutiques and home decor items. The development plans include a landscaped lawn area. Besides, the facility will stock academic books covering all disciplines, he said. ROAD RESTORATION: While Kanpur Metro is working diligently to launch passenger services on the underground stretch from Microbertganj to Kanpur Central, significant progress is also being made on the above ground road construction. On the city's Mall Road, where most barricades were removed before Diwali, road restoration is advancing rapidly. As one of the busiest areas in Kanpur, special care is being taken to minimise disruptions and ensure smooth traffic flow during construction. The stretch from near the Lal Imli intersection on Mall Road to the front of BNSD Inter College has been fully constructed. With the barri-

acades removed, traffic is now moving more freely. Additionally, the GSB (granular sub base) layer has been completed on the road near Chunniganj intersection and after compaction with a roller, preparations are underway to lay the DBM (dense bituminous macadam) layer. The process of removing barricades and restoring roads has been ongoing since last year. Restoration work has already been completed on roads near Naveen Market, Bada Chauraha and Nayaganj station. Recently, barricades were also removed from the Narohna intersection, and the road here has been levelled with a GSB layer. The final stages of construction are expected to be completed soon. Once these roads are fully restored, they will greatly ease traffic congestion. In recent months, similar work has been carried out on Hamirpur Road along the Baradevi-Naubasta section, alleviating traffic jams by removing barricades.

Home Minister Amit Shah launches Bharatpol portal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday said it was time Indian investigation agencies use modern technology and techniques to nab fugitives as he launched the 'Bharatpol' portal to facilitate faster international assistance for agencies. Speaking at the launch of 'Bharatpol' at the Bharat Mandapam here, the minister underlined that the real-time interface was the most important feature of the portal developed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). It will allow central and state agencies to easily connect with the Interpol and speed up their investigations, he said. "It is time that we use modern technology and techniques to nab and bring to justice the fugitives who absconded from India after committing a crime," Shah said. "We have to



keep an eye on global challenges and update our internal systems. Bharatpol is a step in that direction," he said. He said the new portal will allow central and state probe agencies to share and obtain information on their cases from the 195 member nations of the Interpol. The three new criminal laws brought by the Modi government last year will ensure that trials against fugitives and absconders are

conducted in a better manner. "I would urge the CBI to take the responsibility of training the states for capacity building regarding Bharatpol and also for the three new criminal laws. We need to institutionalise these systems along with the knowledge of various kinds of Interpol notices and their procedures," he said. The CBI and the National Central Bureau of India are responsible for Interpol-related affairs.

SC to examine issues over age bar for surrogate mothers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday agreed to examine on February 11 issues over the age bar for surrogate mothers and others under the laws. A bench comprising Justices B V Nagarathna and Satish Chandra Sharma, which heard about 15 petitions challenging certain provisions of the Surrogacy Regulation Act and the Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Act, 2021, asked the Centre to file its written submissions in the case.

Additional solicitor general Aishwarya Bhati, representing the Centre, said she would file the written submissions and the government would abide by the apex court's directions. The court underscored the need to pass an interim order in the case. The 2021 surrogacy laws set age limits for intended parents and surrogate mothers. According to the law, the intended mother must be between 23 and 50 years of age, and the intended father must



be between 26 and 55 years of age. Further, the surrogate mother must be married and between 25 and 35 years of age, having a biological child, and only act as a surrogate once in her lifetime. The laws also provide conditions to regulate surrogacy. The top court had outlined the importance of safeguarding the interests of surrogate moth-

ers, observing the need for a robust system to prevent exploitation, especially given commercial surrogacy was prohibited in India. "There can be a database, so that the same lady is not exploited. A system must be there. Nobody is saying it's a bad idea, but at the same time, it can be badly used," the bench had said. The court also discussed alternative

mechanisms for compensating surrogate mothers and suggested a designated authority, instead of intending couples, for disbursing payments. "You don't have to pay directly to the lady. The department pays. You will have to deposit," the bench proposed. Bhati said the laws currently permitted only altruistic surrogacy, in line with the objective of ban-

ning commercial surrogacy, and assured the court of the government's willingness to consider suggestions. While altruistic surrogacy was commendable, the lack of adequate compensation mechanisms for surrogate mothers posed significant challenges, petitioners said. One of the petitioners said the existing provisions only covered medical expenses and insurance and was inadequate. Dr Arun Muthuvel, a Chennai-based infertility specialist, is the lead petitioner and has challenged the constitutional validity of the twin laws. His plea said the laws were "discriminatory, exclusionary, and arbitrary in nature" which denied agency and autonomy in the discourse on reproductive justice, providing a state-sanctioned notion of the ideal family and restricting reproductive rights. Other petitions raised similar concerns, such as the exclusion of unmarried women from the ambit of the surrogacy law and the restriction on oocyte donations under the ART Act.

CEC defends recent amendment to election rules restricting CCTV footage of polling booths from public inspection

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar on Tuesday defended the recent amendment to election rules restricting CCTV footage of polling booths from public inspection, saying it is meant to protect voters' privacy and prevent use of data for creating fake narratives. Based on Election Commission's recommendation, the government had last month tweaked an election rule to prevent public inspection of certain electronic documents such as CCTV camera footage of polling stations to prevent misuse. In his first remarks on tweak of Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, Kumar said only sharing of CCTV footage from inside and outside polling booths has been restricted. Addressing a press conference here to announce the schedule for Delhi Assembly polls, he

said such data or footage was banned for public inspection through EC's instructions in 2024. He said certain other documents which are allowed under Rule 93 of the Conduct of Election Rules will continue to be available. Some documents which are already restricted from sharing are forms filled by poll officials about the name of the voter and the identity shown by them before voting. Kumar said rules were amended to "protect the identity of the voters as well as their profiling". He said if the footage is made public, the identity of those who voted and those who did not, would be revealed and was violative of privacy norms. If footage of 10.5 lakh polling stations where suppose polling takes place for 10 hours is given out, it would mean data of one crore hours. "A person will need 3,600 years to go through the recordings if watched for eight hours daily," he said.



"Why does he want it? Let us ask this question from the person who wants it," Kumar said. He said the poll authority has examples to prove that the data would be used for machine learning and using AI to create narratives. The CEC said even fact checkers would not be able to find out whether the AI-generated videos of polling stations are fake or genuine. He said things which are to be restricted are yet to be defined

or prescribed in the rules. The Union law ministry had amended Rule 93(2)(a) of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, to restrict the type of "papers" or documents open to public inspection. According to Rule 93, all "papers" related to elections shall be open to public inspection. The amendment inserts "as specified in these rules" after "papers". The law ministry and EC officials separately explained that

a court case was the "trigger" behind the amendment. While documents such as nomination forms, appointment of election agents, results and election account statements are mentioned in the Conduct of Election Rules, electronic documents such as CCTV camera footage, webcasting footage and video recording of candidates during the Model Code of Conduct period are not covered. "CCTV coverage, webcasting of polling stations are not carried out under Conduct of Election Rules but are the result of steps taken by the EC to ensure a level playing field," a former EC official explained. An EC functionary said, "There have been instances where such electronic records were sought, citing the rules. The amendment ensures that only papers mentioned in the rules are available for public inspection and any other document which has no reference in the rules is not

allowed for public inspection." Candidates already have access to all documents and papers, and nothing has been amended in the rules in this regard, the functionary added. The Punjab and Haryana High Court, in the recent Mahmood Pracha vs EC case, had directed sharing all documents related to the Haryana Assembly elections, including treating CCTV camera footage as permissible under Rule 93(2), with Pracha. The rule mentioned election papers. The election papers and documents do not specifically refer to electronic records, the EC functionaries said. In order to remove this ambiguity, the rule has been amended to safeguard the misuse of CCTV camera footage of polling stations, another EC official explained. A law ministry official said all election papers and documents were otherwise available for public inspection.

Difficult to define 'freebie': CEC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

It is very difficult to define what a "freebie" is and the Election Commission's "hands are tied" on the issue as it is subjudice, CEC Rajiv Kumar said on Tuesday. He also said it was "high time" that "accepted and legal answers" were found. Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Kumar was addressing a press conference to announce the schedule for the assembly polls in Delhi. Asked about political parties announcing freebies during election campaigns, he said the matter was subjudice and referred to a court judgment that had held freebies were not "disallowed". "What is freebie for me may be an entitlement for someone else... It is very difficult to define what a freebie is," Kumar said.



"Our proforma is on our website, this is high time it is accepted and legal answers are found but our hands are tied at the moment because the matter is subjudice," he added. Kumar further said that while such announcements were made, people should also be aware of the state's fiscal health. "It is necessary to see what is the fiscal health of a state... What is the debt-to-GDP ratio? How much will you borrow on that promise? How much is the financial cost of this promise?" he said.

All political parties urged to maintain decorum during elections, EC to ensure free and fair polls

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar on Tuesday urged political parties to maintain decorum during elections and said the Election Commission would conduct checks to ensure free and fair polls. Kumar was addressing a press conference to announce the schedule for the assembly polls in Delhi, further announced that India will soon create a new record of one billion-plus voters. "We will check everyone for ensuring money-free elections. During recent polls, there was a hue and cry that some helicopters were checked. People even come down to threatening polling officers but we control ourselves because it

disturbs the level playing field," Kumar said. "The star campaigners and those in political campaigns are duty-bound to ensure that etiquette is followed... We will be very harsh. Star campaigners should not act in a way that discourages common voters," he said. District magistrates and returning officers will ensure fair play and a level playing field for every candidate, he added. "We will also request the political parties not to create undue pressure on the officials," Kumar said and added that the parties could ask for any explanation in writing. Assembly polls in Delhi will be held on February 5 and the votes counted on February 8, Kumar announced on Tuesday. Bypolls to two assembly constituencies -- Milkipur in Uttar

Pradesh and Erode in Tamil Nadu -- will also be held on the same date. New Delhi, Jan 6 (PTI) Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar on Tuesday dismissed allegations of manipulation in electoral roll, saying no deletion can occur without thorough documentation, field verification, and giving the concerned individual an opportunity to be heard. Kumar emphasised that the process for additions and deletions is transparent, rigorous, and immune to arbitrary changes. Speaking at a press conference to announce the schedule for Delhi Assembly polls, the chief election commissioner (CEC) said, "Every step of the electoral roll process is rooted in transparency and accountability. Deletion of names is not possible without adhering to strict protocols, and every party has the right to raise objections at various stages." Kumar also



included only after thorough foot-and-field verification by booth-level officers (BLOs), he said. "Regular meetings are held with the representatives of political parties, who have the right to appoint booth-level agents (BLAs). Weekly lists of claims and objections are shared, and both draft and final rolls are published on the Election Commission's website. Polling station rationalisation is also carried out with the consultation of all the stakeholders," the CEC said. On deletions, Kumar clarified that they are processed only through Form 7 or Form B, following strict guidelines. "Mandatory field verification is conducted by the BLOs, and in cases where deletions exceed 2 per cent of a polling station's

voter list, cross-verification is done. Deletions due to death require a certified death certificate, and a seven-day window is provided for objections after notices are published online. Also, the affected voters are given the opportunity for a personal hearing before their names are removed," he said. "No deletion can occur without thorough documentation, field verification, and giving the concerned individual an opportunity to be heard," Kumar reiterated. The CEC also pointed out that claims and objections are not only reviewed, but also shared with all the political parties and made accessible online to ensure transparency. Criticising the tendency to question the integrity of the electoral process only during

elections, the CEC argued that allegations of mass deletions are misleading without evidence and undermine public trust in the system. "Where every vote matters, raising doubts about deletion of thousands of names without evidence is misleading. The processes we follow leave no room for manipulation," he stated. The CEC's comments came in the backdrop of recent allegations made by Delhi Chief Minister Atishi, who claimed the voter list in the New Delhi Assembly constituency had been tampered with to influence the upcoming elections. Atishi also called for an immediate inquiry into the matter, alleging large-scale deletions to manipulate the electoral outcome.

SC allows Asaram interim bail on health grounds, bars meeting followers in group

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday granted till March 31 interim bail to jailed self-styled godman Asaram in a 2013 rape case observing he had various ailments and needed treatment. A bench of Justices M M Sundresh and Rajesh Bindal directed 86-year-old Asaram not to meet his followers in a group post release. "We have also taken note of the medical records pertaining to the petitioner and the fact that he was given periodical treatment outside the prison. Hence, we deem it fit to grant bail to the petitioner on medical ground till March 31, 2025... Subject to the condition that the petitioner shall not meet his followers in a group," it said. Asaram, however, would remain in jail as he faces another rape case in Jodhpur. The court said it won't consider the plea on merits, but only the medical grounds. "There shall be three security



personnel in the form of police officers to be present in the vicinity of the petitioner. We make it clear that the police personnel will not interfere with the petitioner's medical treatment, his meeting with any individual and in a normal or lawful conduct," the bench said. Senior advocate Devadatt Kamat, appearing for Asaram, submitted his client's health condition was precarious. Asaram, he said, was taken in and out of prison on more than thirteen occasions for medical treatment, and even the Rajasthan High Court granted

him parole after taking into consideration his condition. Solicitor general Tushar Mehta, appearing for the state government, opposed the grant of bail and said though the ailment and his age were not in dispute, Asaram could be treated inside the prison. Mehta said three witnesses in the case were killed and said Asaram had the potential, capacity and finances to tamper with the evidence. "He is in the last leg. Whatever may be the nature of the offence when it comes to the health of the convict, the con-

cern is of the state and well as this court," said the top court. A sessions court in January, 2023, convicted Asaram in the 2013 rape case, filed by a woman who was living in his ashram near Gandhinagar at the time of the crime. The Gujarat High Court on August 29 rejected Asaram's plea for the suspension of life imprisonment in the case. Refusing to suspend the sentence and grant him bail, the high court observed no case for relief was made out. It said his contentions about possible delay in the disposal of his appeal, age and the medical conditions were not relevant to the grant the relief. The court also considered the alleged murder of two boys at his Sabarmati ashram besides the attacks on witnesses and the relatives of victims. Asaram's plea said he was a victim of conspiracy, and the allegations of rape were false. The plea said the trial court erred in accepting the survivor's explanation for a delay of 12 years in lodging the complaint.

ITBP deployed six new battalions to enhance operational capability along LAC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indo-Tibetan Border Police has brought "forward" 33 of its earmarked 56 border posts along the India-China LAC and deployed six new battalions as part of its plan to enhance operational capabilities along the icy front. Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) Director General (DG) Rahul Rasgotra said this during the force's 63rd Raising Day parade on Tuesday in Odisha's Khordha district. The about-90,000-personnel strong, mountain warfare-trained paramilitary marks its annual raising day on October 24 but the ceremonial event kept getting delayed for over two months due to a variety of reasons, a senior officer told PTI. The DG said the force prepared a "forwardisation plan" and, as part of this, a total of 56 ITBP border posts along the India-China Line of Actual Control (LAC) were being brought "closer" to the front. Of the 56 border posts, 33 had already been brought closer to



the border, he said. The ITBP chief also said the government sanctioned seven new battalions for border guarding tasks sometime ago. Of these, six have been deployed along the LAC in Arunachal Pradesh while one is being based along the front in Sikkim. Rasgotra also said the force's technology-based surveillance capabilities were reviewed and, after some "shortcomings" were found, it was decided that

these deficiencies would be removed under the forthcoming modernisation plan. The DG said the ITBP would also use the countrywide fibre network for ensuring "secure" operational communications and soon send a proposal to the Union home ministry for upgrading its weaponry. Speaking about the operations of the border force in Maoist violence-affected areas, the DG said some forward bases would soon be created in the most dif-

icult jungle areas of Abujhmad in Chhattisgarh. Union Home Minister Amit Shah has declared that India would be rid of Left Wing Extremism (LWE) by March 2026. Rasgotra thanked the Union government and the home ministry for showing its concern to improve "basic" infrastructure facilities for the force at the LAC. "Funds of Rs 2,500 crore have been made available this year for creating basic infrastructure for the ITBP. Last year, Rs 1,000 crore worth of funds were spent for construction work at forward posts and battalions etc," the DG said. Raised in the aftermath of the 1962 Chinese aggression, the ITBP is primarily tasked with guarding the 3,488-kilometre-long LAC with China, apart from rendering a variety of duties in the internal security domain. Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai officiated as the chief guest at the event.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Trudeau steps down

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau resigns ahead of the upcoming elections

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's announcement of his resignation on January 6, 2025, marks a significant turning point in Canadian politics. Trudeau, who has served as Prime Minister since October 2015, made the decision amidst mounting pressure from his own party and growing challenges to his leadership. Trudeau's decision to step down comes against a backdrop of increasing discontent within the ruling Liberal Party. During his announcement outside Rideau Cottage in Ottawa, Trudeau acknowledged the internal discord that had hindered his leadership. In a strategic move, Trudeau met with Governor General Mary Simon to secure the prorogation of Parliament until March 24, effectively delaying the possibility of a no-confidence vote that was anticipated in the session scheduled to begin on January 27. This decision provides the Liberal Party with a window to elect a new leader and stabilise its position ahead of potential political upheaval. Trudeau's resignation reflects a culmination of political and personal challenges. The Liberal Party's diminishing unity became a significant obstacle for Trudeau's leadership. Discontent among MPs and party members had been growing, fueled by concerns over policy decisions, governance style, and declining public support.



After nearly a decade in office, Trudeau's administration faced criticism over issues such as economic management, healthcare and Canada's climate policy. These challenges eroded his public approval, making him a less viable candidate for the next election. By stepping down before the next election, Trudeau's resignation allows the Liberal Party to rejuvenate its leadership and present a fresh face to voters, potentially mitigating electoral risks. Trudeau's departure will have significant political and national implications. The resignation sets the stage for a competitive leadership race within the Liberal Party. The choice of the next leader will be critical in determining the party's future direction and its ability to retain power. Trudeau's resignation reshapes Canada's political dynamics. The opposition, particularly the Conservative Party, is likely to leverage this transition period to challenge the Liberals' governance record and push for early elections. Trudeau's tenure, marked by landmark achievements such as legalising cannabis, advancing gender equality, and climate initiatives, will now be evaluated in the context of his departure. His legacy will hinge on whether the Liberal Party can sustain these accomplishments under new leadership. Justin Trudeau's resignation underscores the complexities of long-term political leadership in a rapidly evolving landscape. While his decision to step down reflects personal and political pragmatism, it also signals a pivotal moment for Canadian democracy. The coming months will determine how effectively the Liberal Party navigates this transition and whether Canada's political institutions can maintain stability amid change. Trudeau's departure opens the door to new opportunities and challenges for Canada's political future.

torial risks. Trudeau's departure will have significant political and national implications. The resignation sets the stage for a competitive leadership race within the Liberal Party. The choice of the next leader will be critical in determining the party's future direction and its ability to retain power. Trudeau's resignation reshapes Canada's political dynamics. The opposition, particularly the Conservative Party, is likely to leverage this transition period to challenge the Liberals' governance record and push for early elections. Trudeau's tenure, marked by landmark achievements such as legalising cannabis, advancing gender equality, and climate initiatives, will now be evaluated in the context of his departure. His legacy will hinge on whether the Liberal Party can sustain these accomplishments under new leadership. Justin Trudeau's resignation underscores the complexities of long-term political leadership in a rapidly evolving landscape. While his decision to step down reflects personal and political pragmatism, it also signals a pivotal moment for Canadian democracy. The coming months will determine how effectively the Liberal Party navigates this transition and whether Canada's political institutions can maintain stability amid change. Trudeau's departure opens the door to new opportunities and challenges for Canada's political future.

PICTALK



Farmers plant paddy saplings in a field, in Nadia

India's Gorkha Brigade: A legacy at crossroads

The iconic Gorkha Brigade faces an uncertain future with the freeze on Nepal domiciled Gorkha recruitment under the Agnipath scheme



ASHOK K MEHTA

The press and media are flooded with stories about Nepal Domiciled Gorkha soldiers and their imperiled future in the Indian Army under the Agnipath scheme. With the last NDG in India's Gorkha Brigade likely to retire around 2045-50, it is possible two Gorkha soldiers could confront each other in Doklam, or elsewhere along the LAC should NDGs start joining the PLA. Traditionally, they have joined the British Army since the early 19th century, later the Singapore Police and Brunei Army and still later, the French Foreign Legion and the Russian Army (around 15,000 according to Al Jazeera news). Soldiering is in their blood with the first choice always and every time, the British Army has pampered as well as exploited them. On 10 November 2024, Kathmandu Post carried a front-page picture of impeccably smart Gorkhas at an attestation parade in the UK.

Three brothers in a Nepali family could still be in British, Indian and Nepalese armies in that order of preference. But Britain does not recruit Indian Domiciled Gorkhas. NDGs ceased joining the Indian Army for 5 years rendering hopelessly bleak the future of the Gorkha Brigade and a strategic glue that binds India and Nepal. Last year, in November and December, Indian and Nepalese Army Chiefs who became honorary Generals in each other's army spent a week in the other's country and were made much of. Last week, 1/11 Gorkha Rifles commanded by Col JP Singh went for joint training with the Sri Sri Jung battalion of the Nepal Army at Saljhandi near the border town of Butawal. (With PLA Nepal Army does only platoon-level joint training restricted to Kathmandu Valley).

No weapons are carried by either contingent as the host country provides them. No two sovereign armies and their Chiefs have such unique rapport. Despite the shared history, geography and historic links between the two countries and their armies, recruitment of NDGs has been frozen since India took the unilateral decision in June 2022 to change



the terms of engagement that Kathmandu says violated Treaty arrangements. Curiously both countries have remained silent at the political and military levels. India's seniormost officer, Chief of Defence Staff, Gen Anil Chauhan from 11 Gorkha Rifles has been approached by several Gorkha veterans to try to break the stalemate but he is loath to approach PM/RM/NSA saying that the government 'has taken a political decision'. QED

It is his responsibility to raise the decision-making process to the next level as other Army Chiefs in the past have done in the national interest. During the economic blockade in 2015, Gen Dalbir Singh was able to persuade PM Narendra Modi and FM Sushma Swaraj that prolonging the blockade would adversely affect the livelihood of Indian Army Gorkha ex-servicemen and families of serving soldiers in Nepal which in turn would impact bilateral relations. The blockade was ended but bilateral ties were seriously disturbed. After King Gyanendra conducted the Palace coup in 2004, India decided to stop the supply of lethal armaments to the Nepal Army which was fighting the Maoists. Then Army Chief, Gen JJ Singh, recommended against it. In a slanging match between MoD and EAM, Prime



DESPITE THE SHARED HISTORY, GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORIC LINKS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES AND THEIR ARMIES, RECRUITMENT OF NDGS HAS BEEN FROZEN SINCE INDIA TOOK THE UNILATERAL DECISION IN JUNE 2022 TO CHANGE THE TERMS OF ENGAGEMENT THAT KATHMANDU SAYS VIOLATED TREATY ARRANGEMENTS

Minister Manmohan Singh upheld the embargo. On the other hand, Siachen, Army Chiefs had prevailed in convincing Singh not to budge over any withdrawal from or concessions on Siachen.

In 1986, during the Gorkhaland movement in North Bengal, as a senior Gorkha officer who had been deployed there, I was invited to a meeting by Principal Secretary to PM, Sarla Grewal along with Deputy Chief of Army Staff, Lt Gen Rawat for discussion on the violence and our response.

In the higher direction of war in 1971, PM Indira Gandhi consulted Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw at every stage for planning and conduct of battle. In 1975, then Army Chief, Gen Gopal Bewoor, 11 Gorkha Rifles convinced Mrs Gandhi of the negative impact of stopping the recruitment of NDGs. So this is not the first time that the absurd idea of ending NDG recruitment has come up. But this time government decided on NDGs that CDS accepted. Lt Gen Sanjeev Chauhan is the senior officer and President Gorkha Brigade which meets annually in February in a unique assembly of seven Gorkha regiments to discuss professional matters. On recruitment of NDGs, they too are stuck at the Army Chief/CDS level. Two years ago, I wrote a letter

on strategic loss accruing from altered rules of NDG recruitment to the PM, PK Mishra. No acknowledgement nor reply was received. Service Chiefs in the past have been willing and able to advise political authority on military matters. The consultative process has stopped with this government. On December 15, 2024, while inaugurating India's World magazine, Foreign Minister Jaishankar conspicuously omitted to mention national security or the military component of international relations as part of India's foreign policy vision. Answering a question last year on why no NDG recruitment he said foreign policy is determined by India's national interest and not that of any other country, implying Nepal. India's national interests in terms of defence and security are entwined with those of Nepal with whom New Delhi claims a special relationship which Kathmandu mildly reaffirms. It was Modi who said in Nepal's Parliament in 2014 that India has fought no war where Nepalese blood was not shed. India-Nepal relations are written in blood.

(The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. The views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

AUSTRALIA WINS B-G TROPHY

Madam —Australia deserves to be the winner of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy by their immaculate performance under the brilliance of Pat Cummins. While India was beaten thoroughly 3-1, the little hope in the Sydney test was vanquished when the ace Jasprit Bumrah got injured at the inappropriate time. All the credit goes to Bumrah and the world-class bowler claimed the man of the series despite India losing heavily, indicating that he's the supreme bowler from both sides. World stalwarts rated him high with huge respect for him and he has been shortlisted for the ICC men's cricketer of the year award for the Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy, which has seen him walking tall among geniuses among world cricketers.

It's unfortunate that Captain Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli were the great disappointment and the ultimate reasons for Team India losing the rhythm for the Titanic sink at the end. Though the young Jaiswal has been spectacular and K L Rahul did some good work, Pant played a cameo in a few innings that wasn't good enough for the team to pull back when the rest of the batters failed miserably at the end. Aussies Scott Boland's splendid variation and bounce would make Kohli remember Scott Boland more than Anushka in his dreams in this series by dismissing Virat 4 times out of Boland's 5 innings by having faced 68 balls for a mere 28 runs. Boland came into the side during the middle of the series and was the only breather for the Indian team. Anyhow, the series has not only the test for players but also for the head coach too. Gambhir needs to study a few management lessons. Hope the team India would make a comeback in the upcoming fixtures of T20 against England and in the following months to prove their worth to serve a few Badusa to ICC Chief Jay Shah to bring back sweeter moments for the fans too in the future.

A P Thiruvadi | Chennai

Create safe online environment for kids



The digital age has revolutionised childhood, with social media becoming an integral part of how young people connect and communicate. Yet, this evolution brings significant risks that demand urgent action. In this backdrop, India's draft rules under the Digital Personal Data Protection Act mandating consent of parents/guardians for minors to open social media accounts are a commendable step in safeguard-

ing children. The proposed rules make social media companies accountable for verifying parental consent through robust measures, empowering the guardians to guide their wards' online interactions.

To refine these rules, additional measures like AI-driven age verification, digital literacy workshops and transparent complaint mechanisms are essential. Regular audits, stakeholder feedback and alignment with global standards will further enhance the framework. By adopting these rules, India contributes to a global effort to create a safer online environment for children. In a world where digital engagement is unavoidable, prioritising the safety and wellbeing of the youngest users is not merely a responsibility but also an ethical imperative. Building collaboration among parents, educators and social media platforms is crucial for lasting change.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

EDUCATION SYSTEM NEEDS REFORM

Madam—This refers to the article on turning Canada's crisis into India's opportunity. This looks to be an incongruent aspiration. Because Indian industries are already expressing their difficulties in getting recruitable skilled workers. This crisis is further confirmed by the latest programme to train 10 lakh youth as apprentices. 500 industries are listed out to engage in this programme in which both the trainees and the engaged industries are incentivised. The fact is the participants are already educated diploma or degree holders. The education system is yet to be tuned in such a manner as to make those completing education employable with appropriate skills and enough knowledge. It would be more appropriate to correct our systems before aiming at utilising others' crises into our opportunities. Having put education in the hands of the private players, the quality of education suffers the most. Except producing degree holders, simply by utilising the talent of byhearing and reproducing no

scope for creativity is offered. In the name of introducing new educational system subjects like astrology is being introduced. The education system urgently needs a total revamping to make it meaningful.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

BIDHURI SPARKS CONTROVERSY

Madam —BJP candidate Ramesh Bidhuri's statement, "We will make all the roads in Kalkaji like Priyanka Gandhi's cheeks," is not just an insult but also a reflection of his mentality. If such remarks can be made by a prominent senior party candidate, what can we expect from an ordinary citizen? The BJP should take strict action against Ramesh Bidhuri, as such a derogatory statement by a party member not only tarnishes his reputation but also damages the party's image. He should issue a public apology for this remark.

Priya Thakur | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Digital shield: Safeguarding children from the digital trap

The Indian government has proposed the Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025 to fortify children's online safety through robust data protection measures

The digital revolution has profoundly transformed how we live, learn, and connect. While this transformation offers immense opportunities for growth and development, it also poses significant risks, especially for vulnerable populations such as children. The digital world is fraught with challenges, from exposure to inappropriate content to exploitation through targeted advertising. Recognising the urgent need for robust protections, the Indian government has introduced the Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025, under the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023. These rules, still in draft form, have the potential to safeguard children from falling into digital traps by establishing a comprehensive framework for responsible data handling. A cornerstone of the draft rules is the requirement for verifiable parental consent before processing children's data. This mandate ensures that entities cannot collect or use data about minors without explicit authorisation from their parents or legal guardians. For



example, creating an account on a social media platform or an online gaming service requires parents to verify their identity and approve the data processing activities. This provision is vital in reducing the risks posed by predatory targeting, identity theft, and unauthorised data collection. By putting parents in control, the rules prevent businesses from exploiting children's data for financial gain. This safeguard is particularly important in protecting children from behavioural profiling, which can have long-term implications on their psychological development and privacy. Educational institutions play a critical role in a child's growth, but they, too, rely heavily on data collection. The draft rules explicitly

address this by restricting data processing in schools and allied institutions to activities that are essential for educational purposes or the safety of students. For instance, tracking attendance, monitoring behaviour, and ensuring the security of transportation services are permissible, but excessive or irrelevant data collection is prohibited. These safeguards ensure that children's data is not misused or repurposed without clear justification. The digital world can be a double-edged sword. While it offers educational resources and entertainment, it also exposes children to inappropriate or harmful content. The draft rules mandate that data fiduciaries implement measures to ensure that children cannot access content that negatively affects their well-being. This includes filtering out materials related to violence, explicit content, and other age-inappropriate material. Such provisions are critical in protecting the mental and emotional health of children, who are particularly susceptible to the influence of harmful digital stimuli. Moreover,

they underscore the importance of collaboration between regulators and technology companies to create a safer online environment. Consent managers play a pivotal role in the new framework. As intermediaries, they enable data principals—in this case, parents or guardians—to give, manage, review, and withdraw consent for data processing activities. These managers must ensure that the process is transparent and user-friendly, empowering users to monitor how their children's data is being utilised. The draft rules also require consent managers to maintain detailed records of consent given, denied, or withdrawn, enhancing accountability across the board. While the draft rules represent a significant leap forward, their successful implementation hinges on overcoming several challenges. This calls for innovative solutions, such as integrating verified digital IDs like Aadhaar with consent management systems.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies; views are personal)



BIJU DHARMAPALAN



FIRST COLUMN

TEN MEANINGFUL RESOLUTIONS FOR 2025

It is time to focus on resolutions that align with our aspirations



SHAINY SHARMA

The dawn of a new year provides a blank canvas to rewrite your story, redefine your priorities, and reimagine the future. In 2025, seize this opportunity by setting resolutions that not only align with your aspirations but also enhance your quality of life. This year calls for more than just ambitious declarations – it demands realistic, sustainable changes that can truly transform our lives. Here are ten meaningful resolutions worth keeping making 2025 your best year yet.

1. Digital Wellness Revolution: The first and foremost is to break free from screen addiction by implementing a "sunset hour" for devices. Keeping aside one hour before bedtime for offline activities like reading or meditation will definitely help in improving both sleep quality as well as mental health.

2. Financial Intelligence Upgrade: Financial stability is a key component of a stress-free life. Start by evaluating your spending habits and creating a realistic budget by dedicating at least 30 minutes weekly to learning about investments and financial planning. By aiming to save consistently and work towards reducing debt, setting financial goals can provide clarity and motivation.



3. Sustainable Living Practices: As global awareness of environmental challenges grows, adopting sustainable habits is more important than ever. By transforming your environmental impact through practical steps such as switching to reusable products, adopting a plant-based meal day, and calculating your monthly carbon footprint to identify areas for improvement.

4. De-clutter your space: A cluttered environment often mirrors a cluttered mind. Take time in 2025 to organize and declutter your living and working spaces. Try working towards donating or recycling items that are no longer in need and creating systems to maintain the same.

5. Relationship Enrichment: Human connections are the bedrock of happiness and fulfilment. This year, try making a conscious effort to nurture your relationships with family, friends, and colleagues.

6. Physical Health Revolution: Developing regular physical activity is the cornerstone of good health. In 2025, move a daily habit. Whether it's strength training, yoga, swimming, or brisk walking, find an activity you enjoy and stick to it. Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise per week to improve cardiovascular health, strengthen muscles, and boost mental well-being.

7. Mental Fitness Focus: A positive mindset can transform your experiences. In 2025, focus on the good in every situation, practice self-compassion, and surround yourself with uplifting individuals. Integrate daily mental health practices such as five minutes of mindfulness, gratitude journaling, or therapeutic creativity. Positivity fuels resilience and empowers you to overcome challenges with grace.

8. Knowledge Expansion: Read one book monthly on subjects outside your comfort zone. This broadens perspectives and keeps your mind agile in our rapidly changing world.

9. Community Engagement: Helping others fosters a sense of purpose and connection. Find a cause you care about and dedicate time or resources to it. Community service not only helps others but also provides networking opportunities and personal fulfilment. Volunteering not only benefits those in need but also enriches your own life with meaning and fulfilment.

10. Creative Expression: Dedicate time weekly to any form of creativity – writing, painting, music, or crafts. Creative outlets reduce stress and enhance problem-solving skills. As we embrace 2025, let's move beyond traditional resolution-setting and focus on creating meaningful, lasting changes that enhance both our personal growth and our impact on the world around us.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Farmers shunning use of nano-urea despite promotion



UTTAM GUPTA

Despite a strong push from the government and ambitious targets for production and adoption, the fiscal year 2023-24 witnessed a sharp 43 per cent drop in nano-urea sales

Last year, around this time, the Union Minister for Chemicals and Fertilisers Mansukh Mandaviya had said "Consumption of urea this fiscal (read: FY 2023-24) is likely to be 8 percent less than in FY 2022-23 due to the use of its liquid nano variant. Because of this and higher domestic production, import of urea, the soil nutrient that accounts for 70 percent of the fertilizer subsidy bill, declined more than a fifth on year in 2023. Further spread of nano urea consumption and the start of a new large urea plant (Talcher in Odisha) by September 2023 would lead to elimination of imports in two-three years".

Nano-urea is urea in the form of a nanoparticle containing nitrogen particles of 20-50 nanometres (nm) in size. It provides nitrogen or 'N' to plants in liquid form as an alternative to conventional urea which is mostly supplied as prill (it is a small diameter, spherical white solid). The minister's statement pointed towards the commitment of the government to promote the use of nano-urea so that imports of conventional urea are brought down to eliminating it.

However, according to data from the Fertiliser Association of India (FAI) – an umbrella body of the fertilizer industry – the sales of Nano urea plummeted by nearly 43 per cent during FY 2023-24 (this happened after growing by a significant 62 per cent during FY 2022-23). Meanwhile, the total production of Nano urea during FY 2023-24 was 81 per cent less than in the previous FY.

The manufacturers knew that there wouldn't be much demand for it; so they reduced the output even as its production capacity rose by 59 per cent. Why did the sales of Nano-urea decrease? But, before that, we need to understand why the government is so keen to promote its use.

The beauty of nano-urea lies in its ultra-small size and high surface area (10,000 times over 1 mm urea prill), which enable easy absorption by plant leaves. These particles enter the plant through cuticular pores, or stomata, and then penetrate the cell membranes through endocytosis. Once inside the cell, these release nutrients slowly and ensure full absorption by eliminating waste that normally happens with conventional means. The innovator namely Nano Biotechnology Research Centre (NBRC) of the Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative Limited (IFFCO) claims its efficiency (a measure of how much of the 'N' supplied from it is absorbed by the plant) is over 80 per cent against around 40 per cent for the conventional stuff.

The use of nano-urea also results in higher crop yield by 3-16 per cent when compared to traditional urea. Moreover, unlike the latter which raises environmental concerns including nitrate leaching, global warming, ozone layer depletion, and groundwater pollution, the former causes less soil, water and air pollution. According to a study, two foliar sprays of nano-urea curtailed nitrogen load by 25 per cent, besides reducing the greenhouse gas (GHG) emission from 164.2 to 416.5 kg CO₂-eq ha⁻¹ under different crops.



FOR A COUNTRY THAT DEPENDS HEAVILY ON IMPORTS AND EVEN INCURS HUGE SUBSIDIES, WHY WOULD THE GOVERNMENT ALLOW EXPORTS? THE INDUSTRY, HOWEVER, CONCEDES THAT THERE WAS UNSOLD INVENTORY WITH DEALERS AND THAT MIGHT HAVE IMPACTED SALES DURING 2023-24

A more startling claim made by IFFCO/NBRC is that a 500-ml bottle of nano-urea is equivalent to a 45-kg bag of conventional urea.

The latter contains 46 percent N nutrient, or 20 kg (45x0.46). In contrast, the former contains 4 per cent N, or 20 grams (500x0.04). The equivalence between the two means that urea in nano-form with a mere 20 grams can achieve what conventional urea does with 20 kg - a gap of 1000 times in efficiency. It is this monumental difference in efficiency that also enables the manufacturer to deliver a 500-ml bottle of nano-urea to farmers for Rs 240 without any subsidy support.

In contrast, the cost of supplying equivalent conventional urea in a 45 kg bag, is over eleven times at around Rs 2650 (while, this figure is for imported urea, even for urea produced domestically, the cost is substantially higher and varies from unit to unit), the Government has to give a subsidy of Rs 2410 to make available to the farmer at the same price of Rs 240. There being 22.22 bags in a ton of urea (1000/45), the subsidy on the import of a ton of conventional urea comes to Rs 53,550 (2410x22.22).

If we were to replace one million tons of imported urea with nano-urea which doesn't require any subsidy support, the government would save Rs 53,550 million or Rs 5355 crore. Mandaviya had kept a target of producing about 55 million bottles of nano-urea during FY 2023-24 which replaces 2.5 million tons of conventional urea. This would yield savings of around Rs 13,400 crore

in subsidy. Around 600 cubic metres of natural gas (NG) is needed to produce a ton of conventional urea. For generating the same effect through the nano-urea - given the efficiency difference of 1000 times, the requirement of NG would be a mere 0.6 cubic meters (600/1000). This would lead to huge savings in the import of gas (currently, India imports one-third of its requirement for domestic urea production). Drastic reduction in load on infrastructure will be a bonus. Imagine the impact of handling, moving, storing and delivering a 500 - ml bottle of nano-urea vis-à-vis a bag of conventional urea containing 45,000 grams of the material.

The use of nano-urea thus offers unprecedented possibilities in terms of not just a substantial reduction in fertilizer subsidy but also trimming excess consumption of urea thereby reducing the imbalance in fertilizer use improving soil health, and helping achieve the environment-related goals. Additional benefits will accrue by way of savings in foreign exchange outgo, and a reduction in the current account deficit.

What explains the setback during FY 2023-24? Reportedly, the industry's argument that the fall in production and sales was due to 'the launch of new products such as Nano urea plus, with a higher concentration of nitrogen and reduction in sales of earlier variants of Nano urea that had lower nitrogen concentration' is untenable. This is because whatever the level of 'N' concentration, fundamentally the product

remains 'Nano-urea'. Another explanation is that 'the drop in sales could be because fact that farmers had bought large quantities of Nano urea in the previous years' doesn't cut ice. Farmers generally are not prone to stocking fertilizer material as the majority of them just don't have the wherewithal to hold stocks.

A third possibility that lower domestic sales could be due to the export of nano-urea doesn't make sense. For a country that depends heavily on imports and even incurs huge subsidies, why would the government allow exports? The industry, however, concedes that there was unsold inventory with dealers and that might have impacted sales during 2023-24. This shows that even during 2022-23, farmers didn't lift nano-urea to the extent revealed by the sales figures of that year. One can't escape inferring that nano-urea could be losing charm amongst farmers.

If it is due to factors like their being unable to cope with the rigours of the new technology (spraying it on leaves is more challenging than prill urea) or shortage of skilled labour etc, those can be overcome. But, if it is due to tall claims regarding efficiency or yield going haywire, it is a matter of concern. For instance, a study released by Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) in January 2024 says that the 'use of nano-urea led to decrease in the yield of wheat and rice by 21.6 per cent 13 per cent respectively'.

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

Prashant Kishor's Jansuraj: A new political force or BJP's strategic move in Bihar?

As the 2025 assembly elections approach, the big question remains: Can Kishor truly reshape Bihar's political future, or is his role simply to disrupt opposition unity?

Prashant Kishor, a name synonymous with political strategy, has made his debut in Bihar politics with the launch of his party, Jansuraj. Drawing an analogy to a potter, Kishor likens his work to shaping the best clay into something meaningful, declaring, "We are bringing forward the best people of society. My role is to make this party win. I am in the role of a sutradhar (narrator); I have announced after the formation of the party that I will not run it. The party people will run the party." This declaration, however, has done little to quell speculations about his aspirations. Rumors abound that Kishor is vying for the post of Chief Minister, a claim he repeatedly denies. "I am not contest-



RAJESH KUMAR SINGH

ing the elections," he insists. "I do not feel like contesting, but if the party decides that only I can secure a seat, then it will be a collective decision. I am not bigger than the party." Despite his assertions, Kishor's entry into Bihar politics has stirred discussions about the impact of Jansuraj on the state's political landscape, particularly in the context of the 2025 assembly elections. Questions loom: will his party

weaken the NDA or the INDIA alliance? Political analysts suggest that Kishor, with his background as a strategist for both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, could be a disruptive force. Some even speculate that he might be a BJP-backed "pawn," designed to fragment opposition votes, a claim fueled by his apparent inability to align with the Congress or RJD leadership.

Kishor's criticisms of Nitish Kumar's governance have been particularly sharp. He has lambasted Kumar's leadership style, though his past affiliations with the BJP have also fueled skepticism. Adding to the intrigue, JDU leaders have dismissed Kishor's efforts as insignifi-

cant. JDU, meanwhile, continues to champion causes like the nationwide caste census and the "One Nation, One Election" policy. It also plans to hold a workers' meeting in Nalanda on January 20, 2025, to gauge its position before the elections. JDU's reliance on caste-based politics, particularly its focus on Mahadalits, underscores its strategy for retaining relevance. Recognizing the centrality of caste and community dynamics in Bihar politics, Kishor has crafted his approach accordingly. His first major move was targeting the Muslim and backward caste vote banks, which collectively account for 53.8 per cent of the electorate. To solidify his position, he announced plans



to field more candidates from Muslim and extremely backward communities in the upcoming elections. The appointment of a Dalit as Jansuraj's first working president further underscored this strategy. This decision, however, drew criticism, with some perceiving it as an overt counter to JDU's Mahadalit card. Kishor's

emphasis on Dalit representation, though a significant gesture, was met with resistance from sections of the political spectrum. Before launching Jansuraj, Kishor spent two years traveling across Bihar, conducting a padayatra and engaging in public dialogues in villages and towns. His campaign drew heavily from the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore, echoing a narrative of grassroots empowerment. However, his advocacy for ending Bihar's liquor prohibition—a policy closely associated with Nitish Kumar's governance—has sparked controversy. Critics argue that this stance contradicts Gandhian principles and exposes Kishor to allegations of opportunism.

Despite the criticisms, Kishor's efforts signal a genuine attempt to address Bihar's long-standing issues. Bihar has long grappled with challenges like unemployment, poor infrastructure, and rising crime. Kishor positions Jansuraj as a platform to tackle these problems, but whether he can deliver remains to be seen.

Kishor's focus on marginalised communities, grassroots dialogue, and inclusive leadership sets a distinct tone. However, his political credibility and ability to translate ideas into action will be closely scrutinized. As the assembly elections approach, the political battlefield in Bihar is becoming increasingly dynamic. JDU's focus on its traditional voter

base and initiatives like the caste census may clash directly with Jansuraj's appeal to similar demographics. Meanwhile, speculation about Kishor's BJP connections and his critique of Nitish Kumar suggest that his presence will influence alliances and electoral strategies across the board. Prashant Kishor's entry into Bihar politics marks a significant shift. By forming Jansuraj, he has sought to disrupt the status quo and present a new alternative. However, whether he can truly emerge as a transformative leader or will merely fragment votes remains the critical question.

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

Cashless treatment for road accidents soon: Nitin Gadkari

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government will come up with a modified scheme by March to provide cashless treatment for road accident victims nationwide, under which they will be entitled to a maximum amount of Rs 1.5 lakh per accident per person, Union minister Nitin Gadkari said on Tuesday. According to Gadkari, the scheme will be applicable to all road accidents caused by the use of motor vehicles on any category of road. The National Health Authority (NHA) shall be the implementing agency for the programme, in coordination with police, hospitals and State Health Agency etc. The programme will be implemented through an IT platform, combining the functionalities of the e-Detailed Accident Report (eDAR) application of the Ministry of Road Transport

and Highways and the Transaction Management System of NHA. "The broad contours of the pilot programme are -- victims entitled to cashless treatment up to a maximum of Rs 1.5 lakh per accident per person for a maximum period of 7 days from date of the accident," Gadkari said while addressing a press conference. The government will come up with a modified scheme by March this year. On March 14, 2024, the ministry of road transport and highways (MoRTH) had launched a pilot programme to provide cashless treatment to road accident victims. The pilot programme -- initiated in Chandigarh -- was aimed at establishing an ecosystem for providing timely medical care to the victims of road accidents, including during the golden hour. The pilot project was later

expanded to six states. The road transport and highways minister also said the government is studying labour laws to frame a policy for fixing working hours for commercial drivers, on the lines of pilots, as driver fatigue is resulting in fatal road crashes, Gadkari said, adding that India is facing a shortage of 22 lakh drivers. MoRTH organised a two-day workshop on January 6, and 7, 2025 to holistically deliberate issues, solutions and next steps to be taken to help drive transformation in India's road transport sector. During the two-day workshop, accelerating implementation of Vehicle Scrapping Policy, pan-India adoption of PUCC 2.0, timelines for introduction of BS-VII norms were discussed, along with expected reduction in pollution with the norms.

Congress unveils new HQ Indira Gandhi Bhawan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Marking a historic moment in the party's rich legacy spanning over 139 years, the Indian National Congress on Tuesday announced that the new headquarters, Indira Gandhi Bhawan, located at 9A, Kotla Road, New Delhi will be inaugurated at a grand ceremony on January 15, 2025. Former Congress President Sonia Gandhi, also Chairperson of the Congress Parliamentary Party, will formally inaugurate the state-of-the-art facility in august presence of Mallikarjun Kharge, Congress President, and Rahul Gandhi, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok

Sabha. The new AICC headquarters, named after former Prime Minister late Indira Gandhi, India's first woman Prime Minister, symbolises the Congress Party's continuing mission to uphold the vision of its stalwarts. As the party that led India's freedom movement under the leadership of luminaries like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Sardar Patel, the Congress has remained steadfast in its dedication to building a modern, democratic, and equitable India. This prestigious event will bring together a distinguished gathering of leaders from across the country. About 400 top leaders have been invited to attend the ceremony.

SC to review same-sex marriage pleas on January 5

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A five-judge bench of the Supreme Court will on January 9 consider the pleas seeking review of its October 2023 verdict declining legal sanction to same-sex marriage. A bench comprising Justices B R Gavai, Surya Kant, B V Nagarathna, P S Narasimha and Justice Dipankar Datta will take up about 13 petitions related to the matter in chambers. According to practice, the review pleas are considered in chambers by judges. The top court had refused to allow an open-court hearing on the review pleas. The new bench was constituted after Justice Sanjiv Khanna, the present CJ, recused from hearing the review petitions on July 10.



Chauhan urges Atishi to aid Delhi farmers

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Union Agriculture and Farmers Welfare and Rural Development Minister on Tuesday met Delhi-based farmers and urged Chief Minister Atishi to implement central government farmer welfare schemes in the national capital. "Abuse me or call me Dawood, it does not make any difference to me, but implement the farmer welfare schemes of the Government of India for the farmers of Delhi, give them the benefit of the schemes," Chouhan said. When the farmers told their problems, he became emotional and said that farmers are getting troubled and crying in the capital Delhi. "I will put in all my efforts for the welfare of the farmers of Delhi. I will ensure that the farmers get their rights. The Delhi government is not

getting the benefits of the many schemes implemented for the farmers by the Central Government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi," he said. Singh said that earlier also the farmers of Delhi had told him about the problems, on which he had immediately written a letter to Atishi. "I just want to say this to them with folded hands, it is not my nature to abuse anyone, but I am saying that you should reply to the letter, don't even reply, sister Atishi, but you should implement the farmer welfare schemes of the Government of India for the farmers of Delhi." He appealed to Atishi to not harm the farmers in political competition. "In Delhi, even a tractor is considered commercial, registration costs a lot of money, crops get ruined in dirty water here.

6.8-magnitude quake in Tibet kills 95 people with tremors felt in Nepal

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Xizang Autonomous Region also issued a level-II emergency response to the quake. Some 22,000 disaster relief items, including cotton tents, cotton coats, quilts and folding beds, together with special relief materials for high-altitude and frigid areas, have been dispatched by central authorities to the quake-hit area. Over 1,500 local firefighters and rescue workers have also been dispatched to the ground. Xizang also known as Shigaste is close to the border with India. Shigaste is considered one of the holiest cities of Tibet. It is the traditional seat of the Panchen Lama, a key figure of Tibetan Buddhism whose spiritual authority is second only to the Dalai Lama. The epicentre was located in Tsogo Township of Dingri County, which has a population of approximately 6,900 people within a 20-km radius. There are 27 villages within this area. Official data show Dingri County has a population of over 61,000 people. The epicentre is located 90 km North-East of Lobuche in the Khumbu Himalayan range of North-East Nepal. The quake struck at a depth of 10 km, according to a report issued by the China Earthquake Networks Centre, state-run Xinhua reported. In his message, President Xi said it is essential to strengthen earthquake monitoring and early

warning, promptly allocate emergency rescue supplies, expedite the repair of damaged infrastructure, ensure that the basic needs of residents are met, and guarantee a safe and warm winter for all. China refers to Tibet as Xizang, part of the Himalayan region. The Tibetan plateau is known to be prone to heavy earthquakes as it sits right over the place where the tectonic Eurasian and Indian plates meet, often colliding with huge force. Shigaste also suffered significant damage in the massive 8.1-magnitude quake that devastated Nepal in 2015. Eighteen people were killed and 55 injured in the Shigaste region when a massive 8.1-magnitude quake hit Nepal and the wider Himalayan in 2015. Meanwhile, in Nepal, the strong earthquake forced people to run out of their houses. It was felt in K a v r e p a l a n c h w o k , Sindhupalanchok Dhading and Solukhumbu districts as well. Many people came out of their houses due to panic in Kathmandu. People witnessed buildings, trees and electric wires on the streets shaking for some time. However, a Nepal Police spokesperson says that so far they have not received any information regarding any human casualty. An official at Shankhuwasabha District Administrative Office said a two-storey building made of stone was damaged in

Kimathanka Rural Municipality of the district due to the earthquake. As the epicentre lies in Tibet, stronger tremors were felt by people living in Northern Nepal, Nepal Police spokesperson Bishwo Adhikari said. At least half a dozen tremors with magnitude ranging from 4 to 5 were also recorded within a time span of an hour around 7 am, according to the USGS report. The tremor was strong enough to terrorise people in Nepal, who recalled the 2015 great earthquake that killed 9,000 people. Several places in Bihar were also jolted by a 7.1 magnitude earthquake that struck near the Tibet-Nepal border on Tuesday morning. The quake with its epicentre 93 km northeast of Lobuche, near the Nepal-Tibet border, occurred at 6.35 am. The earthquake, centred at a depth of 10 kilometres, caused tremors in Bihar and several parts of north India. According to the Bihar Disaster Management Department, tremors were felt in Patna, Madhubani, Sheohar, Munger, Samastipur, Muzaffarpur, Katihar, West Champaran, East Champaran and several other districts along the India-Nepal border. The tremors triggered panic among people in Patna with citizens rushing out of their residences as a precautionary measure. People in Katihar, Purnea, Sheohar, Darbhanga and Samastipur also came out on the streets when the quake took place.

India's GDP growth to be slowest since Pandemic

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Nominal GDP has witnessed a growth rate of 9.7 per cent in 2024-25 over the growth rate of 9.6 per cent in 2023-24. According to the data, nominal GDP (GDP at current prices) is estimated to attain a level of Rs 324.11 lakh crore in the year 2024-25 against Rs 295.36 lakh crore in 2023-24, showing a growth rate of 9.7 per cent. The size of the economy, as per the current estimates, is USD 3.8 trillion (@ Rs 85.7/USD) during 2024-25. Further, the nominal Gross Value Added

(GVA) is estimated to attain a level of Rs 292.64 lakh crore in 2024-25 against Rs 267.62 lakh crore in 2023-24, showing a growth rate of 9.3 per cent. Private Final Consumption Expenditure (PFCE) at constant prices has witnessed a growth rate of 7.3 per cent during 2024-25 over the growth rate of 4 per cent in the previous financial year. Government Final Consumption Expenditure (GFCE) at Constant Prices has rebounded to a growth rate of 4.1 per cent compared to the growth rate of 2.5 per cent in the previous fiscal.

BSF refutes claims of BGB control over border area

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He said the area is located opposite to Ranaghat in West Bengal's Nadia district. "There is no change in the status quo there," Pandey said. "The status quo is there as it was earlier and there is complete peace," he said.

SC orders quick appointments in CIC

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Advocate Prashant Bhusan, appearing for petitioner Anjali Bhardwaj and others, said in 2019 the apex court issued seminal directions for filling of posts in the CIC and SICs but states delayed the selection process and virtually killed the Right to Information Act. While urging the court to summon the secretaries concerned or seek responses, Bhusan submitted the vacancies caused immense hardship to the people using the platform, and the failure of the state governments to appoint people defeated the very purpose of the Act. The top court, Bhusan said, issued directions for appointment of people from different fields. The bench directed the Centre to file a status report on the selection process that started in August, 2024, for such posts and explain the timeline of its completion. The Joint Secretary at Department of Personnel and Training was

asked to file an affidavit, indicating when the names of 161 candidates, who applied for the post of information commissioners, would be processed. The bench further asked the Centre to disclose the names of candidates, who applied for the post and the criteria for short-listing them in two weeks. The top court made a serious note of Jharkhand, which did not appoint Information Commissioners despite its repetitive directions on the ground there was no leader of opposition in Vidhan Sabha. The bench said the advertisements for appointment of Information Commissioners in the Jharkhand SIC was issued in June, 2024, but there was no headway. It directed the largest opposition party in Jharkhand Vidhan Sabha to nominate one of its elected members to the selection committee for the limited purpose of choosing the information commissioners and appointments could start thereafter.

'Rajasthan Maru Udaan' women's...

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Financial assistance can also be taken by onboarding CSR partners. As part of 'Maru Udaan' in Barmer, 12 block- and one district-level dialogue was organised across all panchayat headquarters. "More than 3,000 women participated. The programme began on November 12 and the final block-level dialogue took place on November 28, with the district-level event

concluding on November 29 at Barmer's town hall," said Dabi. She said the programme's long-term goal was to create a chain system for women's empowerment. "Women who participate in the sessions will be trained and motivated to educate others about health, financial management and skill development, becoming 'brand ambassadors' for the initiative," she said. The initiative was designed to promote women's health,

education, self-employment, self-defence, and confidence. The block-level programmes focused on maximising women participation to foster empowerment, she said. Instead of large groups, small groups of 55-60 women were formed for the sessions to encourage open discussion. "This approach allowed women to freely express their issues and concerns, which were then addressed by the experts," Dabi said.

India boosts surveillance for HMPV

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Former chief scientist with the WHO, Soumya Swaminathan said on X platform that the virus "is nothing to panic about. It's a known virus that causes respiratory infections, mostly mild. Rather than jump at detection of every pathogen, we should all take normal precautions when we have a cold: wear a mask, wash hands, avoid crowds, consult

a doctor if there are severe symptoms." No deaths reported in India so far, she added. HMPV is one of the many respiratory viruses that can cause infections in people of all ages, particularly during the winter and early spring months. The virus infection is usually a mild and self-limiting condition and most patients recover on their own. The meeting convened by the

Union Health Secretary was attended by Health Research Department Secretary Dr Rajiv Bahl, Director General of Health Services Dr Atul Goel, experts from National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme, (IDSP), Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR), National Institute of Virology (NIV) and State Surveillance Units of IDSP, said the statement.

Mid-week polls in Delhi on Feb 5

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With its surprise performance in 2013, when it got 29% of the total votes polled and won 28 of the 70 seats, AAP dug into Congress' vote bank, pushing the grand old party to third position with 24.5% votes and just eight seats. In subsequent assembly polls in 2015 and 2020, Congress' vote share further fell to 9.7% and 4.3%, respectively, while AAP won a massive mandate with 54.6% and 53.6% vote share. The BJP has been able to improve its assembly election vote share during the decade of the AAP's rise in Delhi. It got 33.1% vote share in 2013, 32.2% in 2015 and 38.5% in 2020. However, its number of seats drastically went down from 31 in 2015 to 3 in 2015 and 8 in 2020. In the last three Lok Sabha polls, it has made a clean sweep in Delhi, bagging vote share higher than that of the AAP and Congress combined. In BJP is always considered a party of the middle and upper-middle-class people, with the trading community as its staunch supporters, Congress in Delhi-till the 2008 assembly polls when it formed govt in the city for the last time-was known for representing the poor, the Dalit, and the Muslim community. The high-stakes Assembly

election will feature a fierce contest between former MP Parvesh Verma, son of the late Chief Minister Sahib Singh Verma, Former MP Sandeep Dikshit from Congress and AAP leader and former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal for the New Delhi seat. Similarly, former MP Ramesh Bidhuri of BJP and Congress's Alka Lamba will face off against Chief Minister Atishi from Kalkaji. The Assembly elections are being seen as a prestige battle for all camps. The BJP is making all-out attempts to come back to power in Delhi after over 25 years focussing on its slogan "Parivartan (change) and a targeted campaign against the Arvind Kejriwal-led AAP over corruption allegations, relying on Prime Minister Narendra Modi as its face yet again. Meanwhile, the BJP, boosted by its clean sweep in the Delhi Lok Sabha polls and thumping victories in Haryana and Maharashtra, has coined the word 'AAPda' (disaster) to launch a blistering attack against the ruling party. Prime Minister Narendra Modi at 'Parivartan Rally' in Rohini last week made the party's intentions clear giving the call 'Aapda (AAP) nahi sahegne, badal kar rehenge' (won't tolerate the disaster (AAP), will bring change").

The BJP has an uphill task against the AAP which has a strong support base in the slums, unauthorised colonies, minority-dominated areas, lower middle class localities. It has so far failed to come up with announcements to tackle AAP's promises like honorarium to women and priests. Prime Minister Modi has, however, assured that public welfare schemes of the current government will continue. The AAP, battling a wave of corruption allegations, is pushing hard for a third term, focusing on the announcement of welfare schemes - enhancing the monthly grant to non-tax paying women to Rs 2,100 if voted back to power; healthcare coverage for all Delhi voters over the age of 60 in government as well as some private hospitals. Similarly, it has also taken recourse to "soft Hindutva" to nullify the BJP's "Chunavi Hindu" charge by promising Rs 18,000 monthly compensation to temple priests and gurdwara granthis. Many in AAP have acknowledged that the February 2025 polls are the party's "toughest yet". Kejriwal, who stepped down as Chief Minister after he was granted bail in a corruption case, is leading the party's campaign. It also relies on the

immense popularity of the free water, free 200 units of power per month, and free bus rides for women schemes. Campaigns like 'Revdi Par Charcha' ensure these benefits remain in public focus, showcasing AAP's consistent voter outreach. Insiders say anti-incumbency looms large, with AAP completing more than a decade in power. Many voters might feel the need for change, which could affect the party's chances. Corruption allegations and arrests of key leaders, including Arvind Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia, have tarnished the party's clean image. Leadership transitions and internal rifts, including departure of key figures like Kailash Gahlot, signal instability that could weaken its campaign. The 'Sheesh Mahal' controversy has dented Kejriwal's image, with the BJP using it to fuel its campaign against AAP. The Congress, unrepresented in the Delhi assembly Since 2015, is desperately trying to gain a foothold in the February 5 elections. To counter AAP's Mukhya Mantri Mahila Samman Yojna of a monthly assistance of Rs 2,100 post elections, the Congress has announced 'Pyaari Didi Yojana' where it promised a monthly financial assistance of Rs 2,500 to

women if voted to power. In this election, all the senior leadership of the state unit have been fielded - Sheila Dikshit's son Sandeep Dikshit, Delhi Congress chief Devender Yadav, All India Mahila Congress president Alka Lamba, and former Delhi minister Haroon Yusuf. After two consecutive election losses, the party's lower cadres may be short on motivation, which could hinder its campaign efforts. If Congress fails to make any significant gains in this election, it could face the real possibility of being wiped out from the Delhi political landscape. Strong presence of AAP and BJP, along with their well-established support bases, poses a major threat to Congress' chances of regaining power. The Congress has fielded former Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit's son and two time MP Sandeep Dikshit from New Delhi Seat against Kejriwal. BJP has given ticket to former MP Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma, son of former Chief Minister Sahib Singh Verma. It has also fielded Alka Lamba against Atishi from Kalkaji. So far, the Delhi Congress has announced 48 candidates for the upcoming elections, with its first list released on December 12 last year and the second on December 24.

PWD withdraws Atishi's Bungalow allotment

From page 1

The officials had also said that inventory of the bungalow was not complete and while Atishi was in possession of the keys for the bungalow, she did not have the official allotment letter. The PWD officially allotted the house to Atishi on October 11. She accepted the offer on October 14. The 'authority slip' was issued by the PWD on October 16 with validity up to October 23, 2024 - during this period, Atishi had to shift to the bungalow. The Chief Minister never took physical possession of this property despite multiple communications, the PWD said in letter while mentioning also reasons behind cancellation of allotment. "The department's decision to withdraw the offer was influenced by several factors: the ongoing investigations requiring periodic access to the property, the fact that the bungalow is not a designated Chief Minister's residence but belongs to the General Pool category, and the provision that allotment is automatically cancelled if physical occupation isn't taken within five working days of the Habitability Certificate's issuance," the PWD. "However, the Chief Minister, Delhi, did not take physical possession of the bungalow, but only took technical possession on October 23, through her representative

Aswathi Muralidharan PS (personal secretary)... On the same day, an email was issued to the CM, with the request to arrange to conduct a joint visit with PWD engineers to the bungalow, as has been the normal practice for taking possession of allotted houses. On October 26, a reminder email was issued... no response had been received," PWD said in the letter. It added that on December 18, the department received a communication from the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) that they want to inspect the bungalow and suggest renovation/repairs required, if any. As per the letter, a joint inspection was carried out on December 24 and the bungalow was found in a "very good and habitable condition". "...though the representative of CM orally suggested some minor repair works, no formal communication was made from the CMO...", said the letter, adding that all the 14 suggestions given orally the CM's representative were "attended" to. The CM, however, is yet to move into the house, it further said. "...As per provisions... if the allottee failed to take physical occupation of the house within five working days from the date of issue of 'Habitability Certificate', the allotment shall be cancelled automatically," the letter added. Addressing media, Atishi said

that she will write a letter to the prime minister asking him to leave the 'Rajmahal' and come and live at 131, North Avenue (AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh's residence). Will the prime minister come and live in this residence? "The BJP threw me out of the chief minister's residence three months ago. But I kept working for the people of Delhi without stopping," Atishi said. Hitting back, BJP IT department head Amit Malviya said there are "no takers for her lies". "The allotment of 'Sheesh Mahal' has been withdrawn, as we learn, for two key reasons: first her failure to take possession and second CBI/ED investigation," he said in a post on X. In another post on X, the BJP leader also posted a purported letter of withdrawal issued by the Public Works Department (PWD) Secretariat on Monday and said, "Delhi Chief Minister Atishi Marlena is lying. She was allotted Sheesh Mahal on October 11, 2024." "She hasn't still occupied it because she doesn't want to offend Arvind Kejriwal," he added. Reacting to the issue, AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal said in a post on X, "Within three months, BJP again expelled Chief Minister Atishi from the CM's residence. These people are showing their frustration by abusing Atishi and throwing her out of the house."

South Korean agency receives new warrant to detain impeached President Yoon

AP ■ SEOUL
South Korea's anti-corruption agency said it received a new court warrant on Tuesday to detain impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol after its previous attempt was blocked by the presidential security service last week. The Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials, which plans to question the embattled president on rebellion allegations over his short-lived martial law decree on Dec. 3, didn't immediately confirm how long the warrant would remain valid. The agency's chief prosecutor, Oh Dong-woon, refused to answer when asked by lawmakers when the warrant would expire, saying such information is sensitive as the agency and

police contemplate ways to execute it. Detention warrants typically last seven days but can be extended to around 10 days. Oh didn't say when investigators planned to make their next attempt to detain Yoon. The Seoul Western District Court last week had initially issued a warrant to detain Yoon and a separate warrant to search his residence after he repeatedly defied authorities by refusing to appear for questioning. About 150 anti-corruption agency investigators and police officers attempted to detain Yoon on Friday but retreated from his residence in Seoul after a tense standoff with the presidential security service that lasted more than five hours. The investigators did not

make another attempt to detain Yoon and the previous court warrants expired after a week on Monday. If investigators manage to detain Yoon, they will likely ask a court for permission to make a formal arrest. Otherwise, he will be released after 48 hours. The anti-corruption agency and police have pledged to make a more forceful effort to detain Yoon, which could be a complicated process as long as he remains in his official residence. The anti-corruption agency is leading a joint investigation with the police and military into Yoon's brief power grab, which included declaring martial law and dispatching troops to surround the National Assembly. Lawmakers who managed to get past the block-

ade voted to lift martial law hours later. Yoon's presidential powers were suspended after the opposition-dominated Assembly voted to impeach him on Dec. 14, accusing him of rebellion. The Constitutional Court has started deliberations on whether to formally remove Yoon from office or reinstate him. Members of the presidential security staff were seen installing barbed wire near the gate and along the hills leading up to the presidential compound over the weekend. Oh confirmed to lawmakers that the agency was debating with police on whether to arrest members of the presidential security staff if they forcefully obstruct efforts to detain Yoon. Police have said they are considering "all avail-

able options" to bring Yoon into custody and haven't publicly ruled out the possibility of deploying SWAT teams, although it's unclear whether investigators would risk escalating a confrontation with presidential security forces, who are also armed. Park Jong-joon, chief of the presidential security service, has hit back against criticism that it has become Yoon's private army, saying it has legal obligations to protect the incumbent president. He and his deputy have so far defied summonses by police, who planned to question them over the suspected obstruction of official duty following Friday's events. In a parliament hearing Tuesday, Oh criticized the country's acting leader,

Deputy Prime Minister Choi Sang-mok, for instructing police to oblige with the presidential security service's request to deploy personnel to Yoon's residence to beef up security ahead of Friday's detention attempt. The police did not carry out Choi's instruction, and Oh said the agency was reviewing whether Choi's actions constituted an obstruction of official duty. The agency has repeatedly called for Choi to instruct the presidential security service to comply with the execution of the detention warrant against Yoon. Choi hasn't commented. Yoon's lawyers argued the detention and search warrants against the president cannot be enforced at his residence due to a law that protects locations potentially

linked to military secrets from search without the consent of the person in charge — which would be Yoon. They also argue the anti-corruption office lacks the legal authority to investigate rebellion charges and delegate police to detain Yoon. Yoon's lawyers on Monday filed complaints with public prosecutors against Oh and six other anti-corruption and police officers over Friday's detention attempt, which they claim was illegal. The lawyers also filed complaints against the country's acting national police chief, the acting defense minister and two Seoul police officials for ignoring the presidential security service's request to provide additional forces to block Yoon's detention attempt.

Trump renews offer of making Canada 51st state of US

PTI ■ WASHINGTON
Hours after the resignation of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, US President-elect Donald Trump on Monday renewed his offer of making Canada the 51st state of the United States. Trudeau, 53, announced to resign Monday as he was forced by his ruling Liberal Party amidst his growing unpopularity. General elections are scheduled this year. The Canadian prime minister said that he would stay on as prime minister till the party elected a new leader. Trump, 78, who never had a good relationship with Trudeau even during his first term from 2017-2021, has been floating the idea of making Canada the 51st state of the United States ever since he met Trudeau after his November 5 electoral victory in Mar-a-Lago. Thereafter, he has been mentioning this on his social media posts several times. "Many people in Canada LOVE being the 51st State. The United States can no longer suffer the massive Trade Deficits and Subsidies that Canada needs to stay afloat. Justin Trudeau knew this, and resigned," Trump said on Truth Social. "If Canada merged with the US, there would be no Tariffs, taxes would go way down, and they would be TOTALLY SECURE from the threat of the Russian and Chinese Ships that are constantly surrounding them. Together, what a great Nation it would be!!!" said the president-elect after the resignation of Trudeau on Monday. There has not been much reaction to Trump's proposal from the Canadian side. Trump has threatened to impose 25 per cent tariffs on Canadian imports if Toronto is not able to stop the flow of illicit drugs and illegal migrants from its southern border with the US. In some of the posts, Trump even mocked Trudeau as "Governor of the Great State of Canada".

Biden 'doing everything possible' to make transition difficult: Trump

PTI ■ WASHINGTON
US President-elect Donald Trump has accused Joe Biden of making the presidential transition difficult, citing recent executive orders on climate and other official acts being taken by him in his last weeks as president. Trump, 78, is slated to be sworn in as the 47th President of the United States on January 20. He replaces Biden as the new occupant of the White House, the official residence of the US President. "Biden is doing everything possible to make the TRANSITION as difficult as possible, from Lawfare such as has never been seen before, to costly and ridiculous Executive Orders on the Green New Scam and other money wasting Hoaxes," Trump said in a post on Truth Social. "Fear not, these 'Orders' will all be terminated shortly, and we will become a Nation of

Common Sense and Strength. MAGA!!!" said the president-elect. Trump issued the statement shortly before Congress certified his victory in the Electoral College — and after Biden, 82, banned drilling for oil and natural gas off most of America's coastline, with the total area covered by the order greater than the land of Alaska and Texas combined. Biden announced earlier Monday he would block new drilling off the entire East Coast, as well as California, Oregon and Washington state, and block some drilling off Alaska's coast in portions of the Northern Bering Sea and in the eastern Gulf of Mexico. Biden made the move just two weeks before Trump, who has promised to promote domestic energy production, is sworn in. Trump vowed to undo Biden's recent executive orders, though it's unclear if he would be able

to reverse the decision to block oil drilling, considering he was blocked in 2019 when he tried to reinstate drilling in areas blocked off by former President Barack Obama. Despite Trump's assertion that Biden's White House has not been helpful during the transition, his incoming chief of staff Susie Wiles has said otherwise. She told in an interview published Monday the White House has been helpful during the transition process. "White House chief of staff Jeff Zients has been very helpful. He has made great suggestions, helped make sure we stay on time with required functions, helped us navigate the labyrinth that is the Executive Office of the President, and been very professional," she said. "He introduced me to the 'former chief of staff club' and even hosted a dinner (for Wiles and the former chiefs) at his beautiful home," Wiles added.

Trump Jr arrives in Greenland

AP ■ NUUK (GREENLAND)
The eldest son of US President-elect Donald Trump arrived in Greenland on Tuesday for a private visit that has heightened speculation that the incoming US administration could seek to take control of the Danish territory. The Danish state broadcaster reported that Donald Trump Jr's plane landed in Nuuk, the capital of the vast and icy territory. Greenland's government said Trump Jr's visit would take place "as a private individual" and not as an official visit and that Greenlandic representatives would not meet with him. Minguuq Kleist, permanent secretary for the Greenland foreign affairs department, said that Trump Jr would stay for about 4 to 5 hours.



Camels walk through snow during El Museo del Barrio's 47th annual Three Kings Day parade on Monday, in New York. AP/PTI

China shuts down Mt Everest scenic area after quake

PTI ■ BEIJING
China has closed for tourists the scenic areas of its side of Mt Everest, also known as Mount Qomolangma, following a 6.8-magnitude earthquake that jolted Dingri County in the Tibet Autonomous Region on Tuesday. Dingri is home to the base camp of the world's highest peak. According to local authorities, the staff and tourists were in safe condition after the quake, which hit the region at 9:05 am Tuesday (Beijing Time). The hotel buildings and surrounding areas in the scenic area have remained intact, state-run Xinhua news agency reported, citing the Dingri Culture and Tourism Bureau. However, the Qomolangma Station for Atmospheric and Environmental Research of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, located in Dingri, is experiencing a power outage. Despite this, the facilities have remained in good condition. Located at the China-Nepal border, Mount Qomolangma reaches an altitude of more than 8,840 metres, with its northern section located in Tibet referred to as Xizang by China.

Singapore passes law to protect scam victims

PTI ■ SINGAPORE
Singapore on Tuesday passed a new Law providing the police with powers to order banks to restrict the banking transactions of potential scam victims. The Protection from Scams Bill comes as scams remain a "grave concern" in Singapore, said Minister of State for Home Affairs and Social and Family Development Sun Xueling as she tabled the Bill for a second reading in Parliament. "This Bill, passed unanimously, allows the police to act decisively and close a gap in our arsenal against scammers," Channel News Asia quoted the minister as saying in the House. The Bill will allow specified officers, including those from the police and Commercial Affairs Department, to issue restriction orders to banks if there is reasonable belief that account holders will be making transfers to scammers. These restriction orders will suspend money transfers, the use of ATM facilities and all credit facilities, although individuals will still be provided access to their monies for daily living expenses. "The intent is to buy the police more time to engage and convince the individual that he is being scammed, including through enlisting the help of his family members," Sun



told the House. She added that the restriction orders would involve the seven Domestic Systemically Important Banks (DSIBs) - DBS, OCBC, UOB, Citibank, HSBC, Maybank and Standard Chartered Bank — which account for the vast majority of consumer bank accounts in Singapore. The orders can also be issued to non-DSIB banks if there is reason to believe that victims will make transfers to scammers. Sun said the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is "mindful of the need to strike a balance between protecting an individual from further harm and not unduly inconveniencing him". Several safeguards are in place, such as requiring restriction orders be issued only "as a last resort if all other efforts to convince the individual have failed". Individuals can also appeal to the Commissioner of Police against the restriction orders - a process that MHA will ensure is expeditious, Sun added. The Bill will limit the duration of a restriction order to "a maximum of 30 days at the outset". Each order may be extended up to five times if the officer deems it necessary. After five extensions, the restriction order "must lapse... even if the victim is still at risk of transferring more money to the scammer," said Sun.

Planned trip to Kyiv by Trump's Ukraine envoy unlikely

AP ■ KYIV
An upcoming trip to Kyiv by US President-elect Donald Trump's special envoy for Ukraine and Russia has been cancelled but will be rescheduled, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybaha said Tuesday. The planned meetings between Keith Kellogg, a highly decorated retired three-star general who has long been Trump's top adviser on defence issues, and Ukrainian officials are "extremely important," Sybaha told reporters in the Ukrainian capital. "I am confident that this meeting will take place in its own time," he said during a news conference with his visiting Icelandic counterpart. "We are in contact to clearly define the timeline for its organisation and to ensure that the meeting is as meaningful as possible." Trump's arrival in the White House on January 20 injects another measure of uncertainty into how the almost 3-year-old war might unfold and whether it can end in the foreseeable future. Ukraine, up against a larger enemy, Russia, relies on Western — and especially US — military backing to keep fighting. But Trump has criticised the billions of dollars the Biden administration has spent on Ukraine. He has also said he could end the war in 24 hours, though he hasn't elaborated on how he might do that. Ukrainian officials are eager to sway Trump on sticking with Ukraine. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has praised Trump's "strength" and said the American president's "unpredictability" could work in Ukraine's favour. Ukrainians have expressed hope tinged with pragmatism about Trump's election victory last November. The war is draining the resources of both sides, though military analysts say the conflict is less sustainable for smaller Ukraine, and the war's recent trajectory has not been in its favour.

Seattle police officer who fatally struck Jaahnavi Kandula sacked

PTI ■ SEATTLE / NEW YORK
In a significant development, a Seattle police officer who killed Indian student Jaahnavi Kandula in January 2023 when the patrol vehicle he was driving struck her, has been fired from the police department, officials said. Kandula, 23, from Andhra Pradesh, was struck by a police vehicle driven by Officer Kevin Dave when she was crossing a street in Seattle on January 23, 2023. He was driving 74 mph (more than 119 km/h) on the way to a report of a drug overdose call. Kandula was thrown 100 feet when she was struck by the speeding police patrol vehicle. According to a report in The Seattle Times on Monday, Interim Seattle Police Chief Sue Rahr said that she had fired Dave from the Seattle Police Department. The report, citing an email sent by Rahr to employees, said she fired Dave on Monday after the Seattle Office of Police Accountability found he had violated four department policies. "I believe the officer did not intend to hurt anyone that night and that he was trying to get to a possible overdose vic-



tim as quickly as possible," Rahr said. "However, I cannot accept the tragic consequences of his dangerous driving. His positive intent does not mitigate the poor decision that caused the loss of human life and brought discredit to the Seattle Police Department," according to the Seattle Times report. It added that the policies Dave failed to follow "include using emergency lights for an emergency response and being responsible for safely operating a patrol vehicle," according to the copy of Rahr's email. The development comes months after another Seattle police officer Daniel Auderer was fired following his insensitive comments and laughter after Kandula's death. The Consulate General of India in Seattle had been working consistently with authorities and law enforcement officials to ensure justice in the case, with Auderer's firing and now the action against Dave bringing

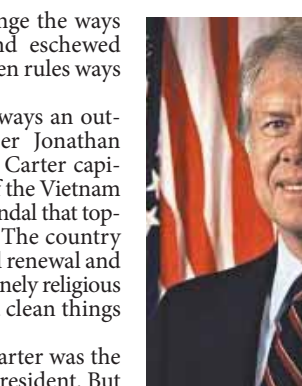
a sense of closure and justice for Kandula's family. The Consulate had been in regular touch with Kandula's family representatives and had said that it would continue to extend all possible support in ensuring justice for Jaahnavi and her family. In a February 2024 post on X, the Indian Consulate in Seattle said that "On the recently released investigation report of the King County Prosecution Attorney on the unfortunate death of Jaahnavi Kandula, Consulate has been in regular touch with the designated family representatives and will continue to extend all possible support in ensuring justice for Kandula and her family. "We have also raised the matter strongly with local authorities, including Seattle Police for appropriate redress. The case has now been referred to the Seattle City Attorney's office for review. We await completion of Seattle Police's administrative investigation and will continue to monitor progress on the case." Rahr was appointed as interim chief in May 2024 and in July last year, she had announced Auderer's firing. However, decision about Dave's action came in only now.

Jimmy Carter to be honoured in Washington, city where he remained outsider

AP ■ WASHINGTON
Nearly 44 years after Jimmy Carter left the nation's capital in humbling defeat, the 39th president returns to Washington for three days of state funeral rites starting on Tuesday. Carter's remains, which have been lying in repose at the Carter Presidential Centre since Saturday, will leave the Atlanta campus Tuesday morning, accompanied by his children and extended family. Special Air Mission 39 will depart Dobbins Air Reserve Base north of Atlanta and arrive at Joint Base Andrews in Maryland, with a motorcade into Washington and the Capitol, where members of Congress will pay their respects at an afternoon service. Carter, who died December 29 at the age of 100, will then lie in state Tuesday night and again Wednesday. He then receives a state

funeral Thursday at Washington National Cathedral. President Joe Biden will deliver a eulogy. There will be the familiar rituals that follow a president's death — the Air Force ride back to the Beltway, a military honour guard carrying a flag-draped casket up the Capitol steps, the Lincoln catafalque in the Rotunda. There also will be symbolism unique to Carter: His hearse will stop at the US Navy Memorial, where his remains will be transferred to a horse-drawn caisson for rest of his trip to the Capitol. The location nods to Carter's place as the lone US Naval Academy graduate to become commander in chief. All of the pomp will carry some irony for the Democrat who went from his family peanut warehouse to the Governor's Mansion and eventually the White House. Carter won the presidency as the smiling Baptist and technocratic engineer

who promised to change the ways of Washington — and eschewed many of those unwritten rules when he got there. "Jimmy Carter was always an outsider," said biographer Jonathan Alter, explaining how Carter capitalised on the fallout of the Vietnam War and Watergate scandal that toppled Richard Nixon. "The country was thirsting for moral renewal and for Carter, as this genuinely religious figure, to come in and clean things up." From 1977 to 1981, Carter was the city's highest-ranking resident. But he never mastered it. "He could be prickly and a not very appealing personality" in a town that thrives on relationships, Alter said, describing a president who struggled with schmoozing lawmakers and reporters. The gatekeepers of Washington society never embraced Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter, either, not quite



knowing what to make of the small-town Southerners who carried their own luggage and bought their clothes off the rack. Carter sold what had been the presidential yacht, a perk his predecessors had used to wine and dine Capitol power players. Early in Carter's presidency, Washington Post society columnist

Sally Quinn tagged the Carters and their West Wing as "an alien tribe," incapable of "playing the game." An elite Georgetown hostess herself, Quinn nodded to Washington's "frivolity" but nonetheless mocked "the Carter people" as "not, in fact, comfortable in limousines, yachts, or in elegant salons, in black tie" or with "place cards, servants, six courses, different forks, three wines... and after-dinner mingling." He endured a rocky four years that left him without enough friends in the town's power circles and, ultimately, across an electorate that delivered nearly 500 Electoral College votes to Ronald Reagan in the 1980 election. Long after leaving office, Carter still bemoaned a political cartoon published around his inauguration that depicted his family approaching the White House with his mother, "Miss Lillian," chewing on a hayseed. Carter often flouted the ceremoni-

al trappings that have been on display in Georgia and will continue in Washington. As president, he wanted to keep the Marine Band from playing "Hail to the Chief," thinking it elevated the president too much. His advisers convinced him to accept it as part of the job. And the song played Saturday as he arrived at his presidential centre after a motorcade through his hometown of Plains and past his boyhood farm. He also never used his full name, James Earl Carter Jr, even taking the oath of office. His full name was printed on memorial cards given to his mourners who paid their respects in Atlanta. He once addressed the nation from the White House residence wearing a cardigan, now on display at his museum and library. His remains now at rest in a wooden casket being carried and guarded by military pallbearers in their impeccable dress

uniforms. "He was a simple man in so many ways," said Brad Webb, an Army veteran who came to honour the former president at his library, which is on the same campus as The Carter Centre, where the former president and first lady based their decades of advocacy for democracy, public health and human rights in the developing world. "He was also a complicated man, who took his defeat and did so much good in the world," said Webb, who voted for Republican Gerald Ford in 1976 and Reagan in 1980. "And, looking back, some of the things in his presidency — the inflation, the Iran hostages, the energy crisis — were really things that no president can actually control. We get to look back with some perspective and understand that he was an excellent former president but also had a presidency we can appreciate more than we did as it was happening."

Duty cut on smartphone parts to hit electronics ecosystem: GTRI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Any reduction in the customs duty on smartphone parts in the forthcoming budget will harm India's developing component ecosystem, discourage investment, increase imports, and make local firms uncompetitive, potentially resulting in job losses, think tank GTRI said on Tuesday.

India's smartphone industry is a 'Make in India' success story, with 2023-24 production reaching USD 49.2 billion and exports at USD 15.6 billion, making smartphones the fourth-largest export after diesel, aviation fuel, and polished diamonds.

However, a few industry groups are pushing for further import tariff cuts on smartphone components in the Union Budget for FY26. The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) warns that this could harm India's growing local manufacturing ecosystem and long-term ambitions in electronics.

"Instead of cutting tariffs, GTRI recommends setting up component hubs near ports to reduce import delays and warehousing costs. This

approach, used by countries like Vietnam and China, would support local manufacturing and reduce import dependency," the think tank's founder Ajay Srivastava said.

Highlighting six key risks of reducing tariffs, he said any reduction would harm India's developing component ecosystem, discourage investment, and hurt the goal of self-reliance; and would not help pushing exports as current export schemes already allow duty-free imports for manufacturing exports.

He added that the country's success in smartphone manufacturing stems from policies promoting local production through tariffs, incentives, and phased programmes and cutting tariffs could weaken this framework.

"Lower tariffs could encourage unsustainable assembly-based operations, as seen in past policy failures. Besides, the mid- and low-end segments depend on local components and provide employment. Duty cuts would make local firms uncompetitive, resulting in job losses," he added.

He also said that the



electronics imports have risen significantly, and further tariff cuts would worsen this trend, increasing India's reliance on foreign suppliers. Tariffs were already reduced from 15 per cent to 10 per cent last year.

Explaining further, the GTRI said that out of USD 49.2 billion worth of production of smartphones last fiscal, premium phones account for about 20 per cent of production, mid-range 30 per

cent, and low-end 50 per cent. "Local components are used in 70 per cent of low-end phones, 50 per cent of mid-range phones, and only 5-30 per cent of premium phones. The rising use of local parts is driven by India's production of key components for mid- and low-end phones like printed circuit boards (PCBs), display modules, camera modules, battery packs, smart phone chargers and adapters, wiring

microphones and speakers, SIM card holders, and USB connectors," it said.

However, the ecosystem is still developing and needs protection, and reducing import tariffs would allow duty-free imports, making it harder for local firms to compete and would force them to shut down, it said.

"This would discourage further investment in local manufacturing and undo the progress made under the Phased Manufacturing Programme (PMP). It would harm not just the smartphone industry but the entire electronics sector, jeopardizing India's goal of becoming self-reliant in electronics production," it said.

It added that the mid-range and low-end smartphone segments, which heavily rely on locally produced components, provide significant employment opportunities.

"If import duties are reduced, local firms will struggle to compete with duty-free imports, leading to job losses. In contrast, countries like South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan have focused on developing specialised local ecosystems for high-value

components, which has helped them sustain their electronics industries and create long-term jobs," it said.

On imports, the GTRI said that India's electronics component imports are rising. It rose from USD 15.8 billion in FY19 to USD 34.4 billion in FY24.

Cutting tariffs further will increase this dependence on foreign suppliers, making India vulnerable to global supply chain disruption. (Multi Modal international Cargo Hub and Airport at Nagpur), cancelling the award of contract to GMR Airports, had said the impugned judgment was based on sound reasoning and true analysis of facts and did not warrant interference.

"We are of the considered opinion that the findings recorded by the High Court allowing the writ petition are in accordance with law. Those findings do not suffer from any illegality, warranting interference by this court in exercise of the power under Article 136 of the Constitution. All these appeals are hereby dismissed," a bench of Justices Vineet Saran, since retired, and J K Maheshwari had said on May 9, 2022.

Rupee falls seven paise against USD



PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee fell 5 paise to settle at 85.73 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, as higher crude oil prices and outflow of foreign funds continued to weigh on the local unit.

Forex traders said the rupee pared some of its intraday losses as the American currency retreated from its elevated levels. Moreover, the recovery in the domestic equity market also aided sentiments.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 85.77, touched the day's peak of 85.65 and hit an intraday low of 85.80 against the greenback. The unit settled at 85.73 (provisional) against

the dollar, registering a fall of 5 paise from its previous close.

On Monday, the rupee settled 11 paise higher at 85.68 against the dollar. During intraday, the unit had hit the lowest-ever level of 85.84 against the American currency.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a negative bias on FII outflows and underlying strength in the US dollar amid expectations of no rate cut by Fed in January. However, any extended recovery in the domestic markets may support rupee at lower levels.

"Traders may take cues from ISM services PMI, trade balance and JOLTS jobs data from the US. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 85.50 to Rs 85.90," Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.30 per cent lower at 107.92, amid disappointing US services PMI and factory orders data, while President-elect Donald Trump dismissed rumours over stringent trade tariffs.



Microsoft to invest USD three billion in India: Nadella

PTI ■ BENGALURU

IT major Microsoft will invest USD 3 billion in India for the expansion of cloud and AI infrastructure in the country, the company's chairman and CEO Satya Nadella said on Tuesday.

There is a fantastic momentum in India where people are pushing for a multi-agent kind of

deployment.

"I am really really excited to announce the single largest expansion we have ever done in India by putting USD 3 billion additional dollars to expand our Azure capacity," Nadella said. He said that the company is doing a lot of regional expansions in India.

Nadella said that Microsoft's mission to empower every person and organisation in

India drives the company. "To that end it is about being able to ensure that the human capital of this country is able to continue to scale, take advantage of immense opportunity and potential the technology has. That's why we are very excited to announce today our commitment, which we have always had, to train 10 million people around AI skills by 2030," Nadella said.

Automobile retail sales rise in 2024: FADA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Automobile retail sales grew 9 per cent year on year in 2024 riding on the back of robust demand for two-wheelers and passenger vehicles amid challenging business environment, dealers' body FADA said on Tuesday.

Overall vehicle registrations stood at 2,61,07,679 units last year as compared to 2,39,28,293 units in the 2023 calendar year, recording a growth of 9 per cent.

"Despite multiple headwinds in CY24, including heatwaves, elections at both central and state levels and uneven monsoon, the auto retail industry remained resilient," the Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations (FADA) President C S Vigneshwar said in a statement.

In the two-wheeler segment, improved supply, fresh models and strong rural demand propelled growth, though finance constraints and rising EV competition continued to pose challenges, he noted.



The passenger vehicle (PV) segment benefited from robust network expansion and product launches, albeit with margin pressures due to higher inventory, thus leading to a discount war towards the second half, Vigneshwar stated.

Commercial vehicle segment performance was subdued amid election-driven uncertainty and reduced infrastructure spending, he noted.

PV sales stood at 40,73,843

units last year, up 5 per cent compared to 38,73,381 units in 2023.

Two-wheeler sales rose 11 per cent year on year to 1,89,12,959 units in 2024 as against 1,70,72,932 units in 2023.

Three-wheeler registrations rose 11 per cent year on year to 12,21,909 units as against 11,05,942 units in 2023.

Tractor sales witnessed a 3 per cent year on year growth at 8,94,112 units while commercial vehicle sales

remained flat at 10,04,856 units in 2024.

On business outlook, FADA noted that in the two-wheeler segment, rising rural incomes, fresh model introductions and an eventual plateau in EV disruption could revitalise growth after years of sluggish demand.

The CV sector is looking for the momentum from infrastructure investments, stable credit availability and government incentives -- factors that could spark a healthy uptick in fleet renewals and expansions, it said.

Meanwhile, PV dealers anticipate strong consumer pull from new SUV launches and feature-rich EVs amid maturing ecosystem, FADA noted.

However, price-sensitive buyers and interest rate fluctuations remain watch points, it added.

"Overall, FADA remains optimistic that market recovery, coupled with strategic OEM support and policy-level clarity, will enable the automotive retail industry to end CY25 on a

robust note," it said.

In December 2024, automobile retail sales declined 12 per cent year on year to 17,56,419 units.

Two-wheeler registrations fell 18 per cent to 11,97,742 units as compared to 14,54,353 units in December 2023.

PV retail sales also dipped 2 per cent to 2,93,465 units last month as compared to 2,99,351 units in December 2023.

PV retails declined primarily due to high inventory levels following the festive season and aggressive discounting aimed at clearing stock, FADA noted.

Poor market sentiment, limited new model launches and intense price competition among co-dealers further impacted sales, it added.

Overall, despite certain headwinds, automotive dealers remain hopeful that steady product availability, strategic marketing and supportive government measures will sustain momentum in the near term, it added.

Government notifies procedure for export of certified organic products

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has laid out a procedure for export of certified organic products, requiring mandatory certification under the National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP) for such shipments, according to a public notice.

The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) in a public notice said that a product will be allowed to be

exported as "organic product" only when accompanied by a Transaction Certificate (TC) issued by a certification body accredited by the National Accreditation Body for such items under the NPOP of the Department of Commerce.

India has fixed a target of USD 2 billion exports for organic food products by 2030.

It added that exports of these goods shall only be certified as such if produced, processed, packed and labelled as per the



standards laid down in the NPOP.

"Procedure for export of certified organic products has been notified," it added.

The revised edition of the NPOP will come into force with effect from 180 days from January 5.

The commerce ministry's arm APEDA (Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority) has revised the NPOP's regulations to make it

more farmer-friendly and help India push exports of organic food products.

The National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP) provides standards for organic production and procedure for accreditation of certification bodies.

The standards and procedures have been formulated in harmony with other international standards regulating the import and export of organic products.

During April-November this fiscal, these exports rose by about 40 per cent to USD 456 million. It was USD 495 million in 2023-24.

To promote Indian organic goods in the global markets, he said, APEDA is facilitating the participation of a number of companies in 'BioFach', which is the largest organic food trade fair in Nuremberg, Germany. The four-day fair will start from February 11.

Tata Elxsi and CSIR-NAL partner for air mobility



PTI ■ MUMBAI

Global design and technology services provider Tata Elxsi has inked an initial pact with CSIR-National Aerospace Laboratories (CSIR-NAL) for a strategic partnership in advanced air mobility amid a rapidly evolving market for unmanned aerial vehicles and urban air mobility globally, a statement said on Tuesday.

The partnership combines NAL's deep aeronautical expertise and Tata Elxsi's technological capabilities in electrification, AI/ML, sensor fusion, and certification processes to support global and Indian markets, it stated.

This partnership will

accelerate product development cycles for these sectors by providing access to advanced testing infrastructure, methodologies, and expertise, Tata Elxsi said.

The two partners, as per the statement, will jointly focus on technologies such as aerodynamic design, autonomous systems, and secure communications to address the unique needs of both manned and unmanned air mobility systems.

"We believe the future of aerospace innovation lies in technologies like UAVs and UAM. This strategic partnership with NAL combines our strengths to push the boundaries of

innovation and accelerate the development of next-generation air mobility solutions for our customers globally," said Manoj Raghavan, MD & CEO at Tata Elxsi.

Stating that India presents significant opportunities through initiatives like Make-in-India, indigenisation, and the growing demand for advanced air mobility solutions, Tata Elxsi said the partnership will contribute to building a robust ecosystem of precision manufacturing, component suppliers, and tool vendors.

This ecosystem aims to bring together key stakeholders to foster innovation, enhance scalability, and address the unique requirements of advanced air mobility systems, the company said.

"CSIR-NAL's deep expertise in aerospace research and testing, along with Tata Elxsi's advanced technology and design expertise, will help us develop innovative, scalable, and sustainable solutions that will shape the future of urban transportation," said Abhay A.

Lectrix delivers over one lakh meals on electric vehicles in just eight hours

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Lectrix delivered 114,985 meals in just 8 hours using a fleet of Lectrix electric vehicles, including their latest scooter model, NDuro. This groundbreaking initiative, titled "1 Lakh Meals on Lectrix Wheels," was not just about numbers—it was a testament to the power of sustainable action to solve pressing global challenges.

In collaboration with social purpose organizations including Navodyam (an SDMC Trust initiative), the Robin Hood Army, and The Akshay Patra Foundation, Lectrix showcased how technology and sustainability can work together to solve real-world social problems. This event earned a prestigious place in the Asia Book of Records and India Book of Records for the highest number of meals delivered via electric vehicles in 8 hours.

From 10 AM to 6 PM, the



capital city witnessed an extraordinary operation powered by Lectrix's vehicles. Speaking about the initiative, Pritesh Talwar, President of EV Business, Lectrix, said, "At Lectrix, we believe innovation should not only drive progress but also serve humanity and the planet. This initiative was about more than breaking records; it was about demonstrating how green technology can create meaningful change. By delivering over 1 Lakh meals using electric vehicles, we

proved that sustainability isn't just a goal—it's the future. We tested how, in the future, we could roll out EVs in a pandemic or emergency scenario and reach more than a lakh people in just a few hours in a sustainable way. We invite the world to join us in embracing this vision for a greener and more equitable tomorrow."

The operation began at Akshay Patra's four kitchens, where thousands of meals were prepared and dispatched to 11 strategically identified hubs across Delhi.

Market benchmarks rebound after a two-day decline

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded on Tuesday after a sharp decline in the previous two sessions, driven by intense buying in blue-chip stocks like Reliance Industries, ICICI Bank and L&T amid a firm trend in global markets.

However, a decline in IT stocks ahead of the earnings season and a weak rupee against the greenback restricted the market rally, traders said.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex climbed 234.12 points or 0.30 per cent to settle at 78,199.11. During the day, it jumped 487.75 points or 0.62 per cent to 78,452.74.

The NSE Nifty gained 91.85 points or 0.39 per cent to 23,707.90.

From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Tata Motors, Reliance Industries, ICICI Bank, Asian Paints, Nestle India, UltraTech Cement, Larsen & Toubro and Adani Ports were



among the biggest gainers.

In contrast, Zomato, HCL Tech, Tata Consultancy Services, Tech Mahindra, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Infosys were among the losers.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, and Shanghai settled in positive territory while Hong Kong ended lower.

European markets were trading with gains in mid-session deals. US markets ended mostly higher on Monday.

The rupee fell 5 paise to settle at 85.73 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 2,575.06 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.12 per cent to USD 76.21 a barrel.

AC Milan 3-2 win over Inter Milan in Italian Super Cup final

AP ■ RIYADH

It took exactly one week on the job for Sergio Conceicao to earn his first trophy as AC Milan's coach — with two comeback wins no less. Milan came back from two goals down to beat city rival Inter Milan 3-2 and win the Italian Super Cup on Monday. Rafael Leao came off the bench and played a part in all three of Milan's goals from Theo Hernandez, Christian Pulisic and Tammy Abraham. Conceicao was hired to replace the fired Paulo Fonseca last Monday and also led the Rossoneri to a comeback win over Juventus in the semifinals. So what changed with Conceicao? "We played with confidence, courage and hunger," Abraham said. "We're a

strong team." Added Pulisic, "He told us we need to have more hunger and that that's more important than tactics." After the semifinals, Conceicao was asked if he embraced his players. "I'm not so nice and I'm not someone who hugs," he said. "I'm not here to make friends. I'm here to win." But after the final, Conceicao was seen dancing with his players and smoking a cigar in the changing room. It was Milan's first trophy since winning Serie A in 2022; and eighth Super Cup title but first since 2016. Lautaro Martinez and Mehdi Taremi put Inter ahead with goals on either side of halftime. Leao then earned a foul that resulted in a free kick which Hernandez curled in around Inter's wall. Then Pulisic finished off a counterattack by shooting



through Augusto's legs on a play that began with Leao. For the third goal, Leao provided a through ball for Pulisic, who crossed to Abraham, who tapped into an empty net in stoppage time. The final was moments away from going to a penalty shootout, since there was not going to be any extra time according to the competition rules. "It's also our fault that Fonseca was fired," said Hernandez, who like Leao often clashed with Fonseca. "We didn't have much time to work together (with Conceicao) but it's gone well in that short span." It was the fifth time in the last seven years that the competition was played in Saudi Arabia, and the second year of an expanded four-team format. A throw-in led to Inter's opener as Taremi fed the ball inside the area to Lautaro,

who cut back before shooting through Hernandez's legs on Inter's only real chance of the half. Taremi, who was playing in place of the injured Marcus Thuram, finished off a counterattack right after the break. Milan plays its first Serie A match under Conceicao against Cagliari on Saturday. The Rossoneri are in eighth place with only seven wins in 17 matches but will return to league action with much more confidence. Inter lost for only the third time this season across all competitions, and for the second time to Milan, which won the Serie A derby 2-1 in September. The Nerazzurri's other loss was to Bayer Leverkusen in the Champions League. "Inter stopped playing when it was 2-0," Lautaro said. "You pay for that in games like these."

Djokovic says he still feels 'trauma' when he travels to Australia because of his deportation

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Novak Djokovic said he still feels "a bit of trauma" when he travels to Australia, stemming from his deportation in 2022 because he was not vaccinated against COVID-19. "The last couple of times that I landed in Australia, to go through passport control and immigration, I had a bit of trauma from three years ago," Djokovic said in an interview with Melbourne's Herald Sun newspaper published Monday, ahead of the Australian Open. "And some traces still stay there when I'm passing passport control, just checking out if someone from immigration zone is approaching." Djokovic, who has won 10 of his 24 Grand Slam championships at Melbourne Park, continued: "The person checking my passport — are they going to take me, detain me again or let me go? I must



admit I have that feeling." Back in 2022, Djokovic sought, and initially obtained, an exemption that would allow him into the Australian Open — and the country — even though there were strict rules requiring shots to protect against the coronavirus. But after his flight landed, he was detained at the airport, his visa was canceled and he was sent to an immigration hotel. A judge later reinstated the visa and ordered Djokovic's

release, ruling he wasn't given enough time to speak to his lawyers. Australia's immigration minister then took away the visa again, based on "public interest." Djokovic's appeal of that ruling was denied by a three-judge panel, and he was deported. He faced a possible three-year ban from the country as someone whose visa was revoked, but Australia had a change of government, its pandemic border rules

changed and a new immigration minister granted Djokovic a visa in 2023 — when he went on to claim the trophy. "I don't hold any resentment, to be honest," Djokovic told the Herald Sun about the saga. "I don't hold a grudge." The Australian Open begins Sunday (Saturday EST), and Djokovic will be pursuing his 11th trophy in Melbourne to add to his men's record and an unprecedented 25th major singles title overall. A year ago, Djokovic lost in the semifinals to eventual champion Jannik Sinner. "I just hope to, before I retire, get at least one more title there," said the 37-year-old Djokovic, whose only triumph at a tournament in 2024 was his singles gold medal for Serbia at the Paris Olympics in August. Djokovic opened 2025 at the Brisbane International last week, losing in the quarterfinals to Reilly Opelka.

Cameron Norrie accidentally hits spectator with thrown racquet at Auckland ATP event

AP ■ AUCKLAND

British tennis star Cameron Norrie apologized and avoided disqualification when a racquet he tossed in the air struck a spectator at the ATP Tour tournament in Auckland on Tuesday. Auckland-born Norrie was facing match point against Facundo Diaz Acosta of Argentina when he lightly tossed his racquet into the air. The racquet struck a woman in a court-side box who was unhurt. Norrie received a warning from the chair umpire and went on to lose 6-2, 6-3 in the first round of the tournament. He reached the final in Auckland in 2023. "I wasn't meaning to do that but it's still not ideal to be doing that and I've never done something like that," Norrie said. (The spectator) "was laughing and I just said so sorry, I didn't mean to do



that.' And she said yeah, I'm completely OK.' "That was not a big deal. But as we saw with some other players, you can easily be defaulted if it catches them in the wrong spot or they're not looking or something. "I was not meaning to do that and it is completely not me to do something like that. I apologized very quickly and I want to apologize in general. I'm not happy with how I behaved." Novak Djokovic was

disqualified from the 2020 US Open after accidentally hitting a line judge with a ball and at the 2023 French Open Miyu Kato and Aldila Sutjiadi were defaulted from the women's doubles after a ball hit by Kato struck a ball girl. Also in 2023, Australian tennis player Marc Polmans was defaulted from the final round of qualifying at the Shanghai Masters after hitting a ball into the face of the chair umpire.

Malaysia Open: Treasa-Gayatri pair makes pre-quarters

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR

India's women's doubles duo of Treasa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand easily overcame the challenge from O r n n i c h a Jongsathapornpan and Sukkita Suwachai, beating the Thai pair in straight games in the opening round of the Malaysia Super 1000 tournament here on Tuesday. The Indian pair, seeded sixth here, won 21-10, 21-10 in just 30 minutes to secure a place in the round of 16. On a high following their success in the Syed Modi International Super 300 tournament in Lucknow, Treasa and Gayatri faced little challenge from the unseeded Thai pair taking a 17-8 lead in no time. The second game saw the Thai pair go neck-and-neck till 8-all before Treasa and Gayatri ran away with the game and the match.

India to host top javelin competition with Neeraj and best in world competing later this year

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Olympic gold and silver medalist Neeraj Chopra will headline a star-studded global javelin competition which India will host most likely in September, the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) announced on Tuesday. This event is in addition to a slew of competitions India has expressed its interest to host, including the marquee 2029 World Championships. Outgoing AFI president Adille Sumariwalla confirmed that India has expressed interest to host the 2029 World Championships, as well as the 2027 World Relays. The AFI has already submitted its expression of interest to host the 2028 World Junior Championships when the international body chief Sebastian Coe visited the country in November last. "There will be a top javelin competition in India in which the top-10 javelin throwers in the world will compete. This will be an invitation tournament to be held later



this year," Sumariwalla, whose 12-year tenure as AFI chief ended on Tuesday, said on the first day of the AFI Annual General Meeting (AGM). "Neeraj Chopra will be there. He is part of the team that is organising the event, along with JSW, a foreign firm and the AFI are together creating this competition. This is being done as there is so much interest in javelin with August 7 -- when Chopra won the Tokyo Olympics gold -- being observed as National Javelin Day." Sumariwalla later told PTI that the event is most likely to be held in September.

Just before the start of the AGM, 2002 Asian Games shot put gold medalist Bahadur Singh Sagoo was elected unopposed as the new AFI chief. Talking about the big global events India is hoping to host in the next four years, Sumariwalla said, "Bids are open at the moment for (2028) World Junior Championships, 2029 World Championships, World Relays (2027) and India is going to bid for all of them. We have put in our expression of interest and so the process has started." "We might also do a World Half Marathon," he said.

Over 300 athletes to participate in Boccia nationals

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Over 300 athletes from across the country will participate in the 9th Boccia Sub-Junior, Junior and Senior National Championship, scheduled to be held at the Andhra Pradesh MedTech Zone in Visakhapatnam from January 8 to 14. The championship, held annually, provides a platform for athletes with cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, and other locomotor disabilities to demonstrate their skills, resilience, and determination. The primary goal of the championship is to prepare athletes for events such as the Paralympic Games and to amplify awareness about the capabilities of differently-abled individuals, said Boccia Sports Federation of India (BSFI) chairman Ashok Bedi. "The event highlights India's dedication to fostering inclusivity in sports and creating opportunities for athletes with disabilities to excel. It represents a significant step in India's journey as a developing nation



toward fostering equality in sports," Bedi said. Boccia, a precision ball game, has been recognised as a Paralympic sport since 1984. Played individually, in pairs, or in teams, the sport requires strategic thinking, precision, teamwork, and discipline. India is making significant strides in creating platforms for differently-abled athletes to shine on the national and international stage, and Boccia has become a symbol of empowerment, providing opportunities to athletes to represent the country in global competitions like the Paralympics. "The sport is not just a game but a movement that inspires hope, resilience, and equal opportunity for all," Bedi said.

China's most successful club folds under weight of debts

AP ■ GUANGZHOU

Guangzhou FC, the most successful soccer club in Chinese history, disbanded on Monday due to crippling debts. The club, formerly known as Guangzhou Evergrande, has been unable to meet the Chinese Football Association's financial entry requirements needed to compete in the 2025 domestic season. "Due to heavy financial burdens resulted from previous seasons, the club could not pay off all the debt by the deadline," Guangzhou said in a statement. "We express our sincere apology to all the supporters from across the community and we appreciate the understanding and forgiveness of all the fans very much." After being taken over by property developer Evergrande in 2010, the club started the spending spree in China that made headlines around the world. Helped by players such as



Paulinho and elite coaches such as Marcello Lippi of Italy and Brazil's Luiz Felipe Scolari, Guangzhou won eight Chinese Super League titles from 2011 to 2019. The team triumphed also won the Asian Champions League in 2013 and 2015. Other clubs followed with world-famous stars such as Carlos Tevez, Nicolas Anelka, Oscar, Didier Drogba and others heading to China. In 2021 however, Evergrande reported debts of over \$300 billion and, as key players left the club due to financial issues, it was relegated to China's

second tier in 2022. On the same day, Chinese Super League club Cangzhou Mighty Lions also announced its disbandment, as did third tier club Hunan Billows. "Only by setting sights on the long term, keeping the financial operation in a healthy status and investing in youth with patience should clubs build a robust future," the Chinese Football Association said in a statement, adding that 49 teams had been deemed financially ready to compete in the top three tiers of the league system in 2025.

Former Aston Villa forward Vassilev on US roster ahead of friendlies against Venezuela, Costa Rica

AP ■ CHICAGO

Former Aston Villa forward Indiana Vassilev was picked Monday for a U.S. Training camp ahead of friendlies against Venezuela and Costa Rica and is among 10 players who could make their national team debuts. The Vassilev made his first Aston Villa appearance on Jan. 4, 2020, against Fulham in the FA Cup and his Premier League debut 14 days later against Brighton. At 18 years, 11 months, 2 days, he became the second-youngest American to appear in the Premier League behind Jonathan Spector, who was 18 years, 5 months, 27 days in 2004. Defender Walker Zimmerman and Jesus Ferreira, who haven't played

for the U.S. Since 2023, also are on coach Mauricio Pochettino's 24-man roster along with goalkeeper Zack Steffen, who last appeared for the national team in March 2022. Other veterans include 37-year-old defender Tim Ream, who captained the Americans in Pochettino's first four games, along with defenders Miles Robinson and Shaq Moore. No Europe-based players are on the roster for the games against Venezuela on Jan. 18 at Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and Costa Rica four days later at Orlando. The matches are not on FIFA international fixture dates. Europe-based players will return for the CONCACAF Nations League semifinal match against Panama on

March 20. Born in Savannah, Georgia, to parents of Bulgarian heritage, Vassilev played at the IMG Academy in Bradenton, Florida, and signed with Aston Villa in 2018. He played for the U.S. Alongside Josh Sargent and Tim Weah at the 2017 Under-17 World Cup. Vassilev made four Premier League appearances for Aston Villa in 2019-20 but didn't appear with Villa's first team after that season. He spent time on loan with third-tier club Burton Albion and fourth-tier club Cheltenham Town, then was loaned to MLS's Inter Miami in July 2021 and was acquired by St. Louis after the 2022 season. Zimmerman, 31, hasn't played for the national team



since the CONCACAF Nations League final against Canada on June 18, 2023, and Ferreira, 24, since the CONCACAF Gold Cup semifinal match against

Panama on July 12, 2023. The 29-year-old Steffen was a surprise cut from the 2022 World Cup roster by coach Gregg Berhalter and hasn't played for the U.S. Since the World Cup qualifiers in March 2022. He returned to the roster after Pochettino replaced Berhalter but Matt Turner started all four matches in October and November. Twenty-three players are from MLS and the roster includes Matko Miljevic, a 23-year-old midfielder who is among the players who could make debuts. Miljevic, who spent last year with Argentine club Newell's Old Boys, appeared with the U.S. Under-20 team in 2020 and also is eligible to play for Argentina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia.

When Miljevic was with Montreal, MLS announced on Sept. 18, 2023, that his contract was terminated "for engaging in conduct detrimental to the league and violating his standard player agreement." MLS did not announce any details. In addition to Vassilev and Miljevic, defender George Campbell, midfielders Max Arfsten and Emeka Eneli, and forwards Patrick Agyemang and Brian Gutierrez will be attending their first U.S. National team camp. Three others who have attended prior camps could make debuts: goalkeepers Drake Callender and Matt Freese, and forward Caden Clark. **The roster:** Goalkeepers: Drake

Callender (Miami), Matt Freese (New York City), Patrick Schulte (Columbus), Zack Steffen (Colorado) Defenders: Max Arfsten (Columbus), George Campbell (Montreal), DeJuan Jones (Columbus), Shaq Moore (Dallas), Jalen Neal (Montreal), Tim Ream (Charlotte), Miles Robinson (Cincinnati), John Tolkin (New York Red Bulls), Walker Zimmerman (Nashville) Midfielders: Benjamin Cremaschi (Miami), Emeka Eneli (Salt Lake), Diego Luna (Salt Lake), Jack McGlynn (Philadelphia) Forwards: Patrick Agyemang (Charlotte), Caden Clark (Montreal), Jesus Ferreira (Dallas), Brian Gutierrez (Chicago), Matko Miljevic (no club), Indiana Vassilev.

Rohit and Kohli's Test future depends on selectors: Gavaskar

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma's Test future is now in the hands of selectors, said former India captain Sunil Gavaskar while advocating an honest deep-dive into the team's downward spiral in the last six months.

In an interview to PTI, Gavaskar spoke about India's recent debacles, including the home whitewash by New Zealand, the way forward and the responsibility on the Ajit Agarkar-led national selection committee to give a fair chance to those waiting in the wings.

Asked about the raging debate surrounding the future of struggling stars Rohit and Kohli, Gavaskar said, "How long they continue, is really up to the selectors."

"Now that India has failed to qualify for the WTC (World Test Championship) final, it would be pertinent to reflect on the reasons that (why it) happened," he added.

This is the first time since the WTC's inception that India could not make the finals following a 1-3 loss to Australia in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy that concluded on Sunday.

That defeat also meant that the coveted BGT was surrendered to Australia for the first time in a decade. The primary reason for the debacle was the batting unit's failure to fire with Rohit and Kohli proving to be the weakest link. Kohli scored 190 runs in nine innings including an unbeaten century, while Rohit's tally was a dismal 31 from five completed knocks.

Gavaskar didn't mince words while pointing out the repeated failures of the team's batters, who failed to cross the 200 mark six out of nine times during the series. "It is clear that in the last six months, the batting failed and that was the main reason that we lost matches that we should have won," the former captain stated.

"So, if changes are required for the new cycle of the WTC which



starts in mid-June in England, then hopefully the selectors will take into account who would still be there for the final in 2027 and choose accordingly," Gavaskar put things perspective.

Time for next crop to step up

The 75-year-old former India captain did not take names but said there are some good performers coming up in the domestic circuit and the onus is now on the selectors to give them a fair chance.

"Unless they are given a chance how will we know if those doing well in Ranji Trophy will do well at the international level? Here's where good selections come in," he said.

Gavaskar also complimented the selection committee for unearthing a talent like Nitish Kumar Reddy, who was one of India's three centurions in the just-concluded tour, others being Yashasvi Jaiswal and Kohli.

"Compliments to Ajit Agarkar and his team for seeing the potential in Nitish Kumar Reddy and picking

him for the Test squad too," he said of the player, who also enjoys strong backing of head coach Gautam Gambhir.

On the bowling front, Gavaskar said India has enough talent that needs to be given the requisite opportunities to ensure that a generational star like Jasprit Bumrah is not overburdened.

Once again, he refrained from taking names of the potential candidates, who would shape the bowling attack going forward.

"India has got loads of promising pacers who are waiting for an opportunity. Yes, Bumrah should not be overburdened and if others step up then we can have an attack that can win matches in any conditions," he said.

"Be honest"

The culture of putting stars at a pedestal has been an oft-stated problem in Indian cricket. But Gavaskar said it is not very difficult to stay grounded even with that if one is capable of taking an honest look at performances.



Whitewash at home bigger failure than BGT loss: Yuvraj

PTI ■ DUBAI

World Cup-winning former all-rounder Yuvraj Singh has said that being whitewashed at home by New Zealand was a bigger low for Team India than the loss of Border-Gavaskar Trophy but refused to join the chorus of criticism against embattled veterans Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli.

India have endured a difficult last few months in the five-day format, going down 0-3 to an under-strength New Zealand at home, which was a first in the team's Test history. This was followed by a 1-3 drubbing by Australia in the away edition of the Border-Gavaskar series.

Both the debacles have been largely attributed to the team's batting frailties, especially those of Rohit and Kohli.

"According to me, losing (to) New Zealand is more hurting (sic). Because they are losing 3-0 at home. You know, that is not acceptable. This (losing BGT) is still acceptable because you have won two times in Australia. And this time you lost," Yuvraj told 'PTI Videos' in an interview here.

"Australia has been a dominant side for the last so many years, that is my thought," the 43-year-old hero of India's 2011 World Cup triumph said.

While Kohli managed at least a hundred during the series despite continuing to be dismissed whenever he was

baited outside the off stump, Rohit was worse with a tally of just 31 runs and had to drop himself from the final Test.

But Yuvraj said it is unfair to lambast the duo given their past achievements.

"We are talking about our greats, Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma, we are saying very bad things about them," he said.

"...People forget what they have achieved in the past. They are one of the greatest cricketers of this time. Okay, they lost, they did not play good cricket. They are getting hurt more than us," he added.

Hopeful that India would bounce back strongly, Yuvraj said he has full faith in not just Rohit and Kohli but also new head coach Gautam Gambhir, who was his former teammate as well.

"I feel that Gautam Gambhir as a coach, Ajit Agarkar as a selector, Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, Jasprit Bumrah, they are the best minds in cricket right now," he asserted.

"And they have to decide what's the way for Indian cricket in future," he said.

The big-hitting former batter also lauded Rohit for dropping himself from the Sydney Test, saying it was a selfless act.

"I think it is a big thing. I have never seen in the past that the captain's form is not going well and he himself has gone out. And this is Rohit Sharma's greatness that he has kept the team ahead of himself," Yuvraj said.

We know how to beat Aussies: Rabada

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

Fiercy South African pacer Kagiso Rabada, no stranger to beating Australia, believes the prospect of facing them in the World Test Championship final at Lord's in June has already sparked anticipation and motivation in his side.

Reigning champions Australia secured their spot in the WTC final with a six-wicket victory over India in the fifth and final Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy in Sydney, clinching the series 3-1.

South Africa were the first team to qualify after defeating Pakistan by 10 wickets in the Boxing Day Test.

"It's actually quite some distance away, but a big occasion like the World Test Championship final gets you up for it," Rabada said on SuperSport after taking a six-wicket haul in his side's 10-wicket, second-Test demolition of Pakistan that completed a 2-0 sweep.

Up against defending champions Australia, the Proteas will start as underdogs but Rabada,



who twice played a big part in winning series against Australia in 2016-17 and 2017-18, is confident of pulling off an upset.

"South Africa versus Australia has always been an intense rivalry, because we play cricket quite similar. We play hard -- and they're going to come hard at us, and we know that. But we also know how to beat them," he said.

About the significance of Test cricket, Rabada said: "One hundred per cent, Test cricket is still alive. It's our best format that we've been playing right now.

"When you look at South African cricket and all our legends, they've all been great Test cricketers. The world's best players are Test cricketers, and this series against Pakistan has been a wonderful advertisement for Test cricket, especially in South Africa."

The Proteas don't have any Test assignment in the build-up to the WTC Final at Lord's from June 11-16 and coach Shukri Conrad has said they're looking at the possibility of a one-off match against either Ireland or Afghanistan.

"We're going to try and get a

Test match, possibly in the UK, against Ireland or Afghanistan, whoever is free. And if unsuccessful, we'll obviously go out a couple of days earlier, and make sure we camp there really well, probably in Canterbury," said Conrad. The coach was also all praise for his skipper Temba Bavuma for playing a key role in South Africa's resurgence.

"He's played unbelievably well this summer, and full marks to him," Conrad said.

"I think any captain who wants to lead from the front, they want to lead through performance as well, and that's what Temba's done exceptionally well.

"He's not lost a game as captain of South Africa (winning eight out of nine Tests). Leading from the front, turning out the performances he's had, he's probably in the form of his life.

"I haven't seen him play any better, and that obviously gives you a lot of confidence when you're captaining as well. I wouldn't want anyone else to be captaining us."



England urged to boycott Champions Trophy game against Afghanistan by UK politicians

AP ■ LONDON

England should refuse to play the Champions Trophy cricket match against Afghanistan next month according to a letter signed by more than 160 U.K. Politicians.

The politicians want the England and Wales Cricket Board to take a stand against the Taliban regime's assault on women's rights and boycott the men's one-day international against Afghanistan in Lahore, Pakistan, on Feb. 26.

Female participation in sport has effectively been outlawed since the Taliban's return to power in 2021, a move that puts the Afghanistan Cricket Board in contravention of International Cricket Council rules.

Because Afghanistan's men are still allowed to compete by the ICC, a strongly worded letter has emerged from the U.K. Parliament pleading for the ECB to make its own moral objection.

Penned by Labour MP Tonia Antoniazzi and signed by a cross-party group from the House of Commons and House of Lords including Nigel Farage and Jeremy Corbyn, it raises the "insidious dystopia" unfolding in Afghanistan.

The statement, addressed to ECB chief executive Richard Gould, concludes: "We strongly urge the England men's team players and officials to speak out against the horrific treatment of women and girls in Afghanistan under the

Taliban.

"We also urge the ECB to consider a boycott of the upcoming match against Afghanistan... To send a clear signal that such grotesque abuses will not be tolerated.

"We must stand against sex apartheid and we implore the ECB to deliver a firm message of solidarity and hope to Afghan women and girls that their suffering has not been overlooked."

Gould issued a swift response, reaffirming ECB principles while suggesting it favoured a uniform approach from all member nations rather than acting alone.

"The ECB strongly condemns the treatment of women and girls in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime," he said.

"The ICC constitution mandates that all member nations are committed to the growth and development of women's cricket. In line with this commitment, the ECB has maintained its position of not scheduling any bilateral cricket matches against Afghanistan.

"A coordinated, ICC-wide approach would be significantly more impactful than unilateral actions by individual members.

"We understand the concerns raised by those who believe that a boycott of men's cricket could inadvertently support the Taliban's efforts to suppress freedoms and isolate Afghan society. It's crucial to recognise the importance of cricket as a source of hope and positivity for many Afghans, including those displaced from the country."

Don't feel I was in race for opener's slot in Border-Gavaskar Tests: Renshaw

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Australian Test batter Matt Renshaw said on Tuesday that he had no idea if he was in the race to replace retired opener David Warner in the recently-concluded Border-Gavaskar series against India, which the hosts won 3-1.

Several names, including Cameron Bancroft, Marcus Harris, Nathan McSweeney, Sam Konstas and Renshaw, were discussed by Cricket Australia as potential options for opening the innings.

McSweeney and Konstas made it to the playing XI, with the former playing the first three Tests and the latter getting included in the last two.

Renshaw felt he figured way down in the Australian selection pecking order for the opener's slot.

"I probably wouldn't say that



I got caught up in the opener race. I don't think I was in it at all," Renshaw told SEN Radio.

"I'm probably further away than a few of the boys (to be selected) but most of my Tests have been in Asia so I've got a fair bit of experience there if called upon," added Renshaw, who

would be fancying his chances as Australia select the squad for the Test series against Sri Lanka later this month.

Renshaw said he just wants to enjoy his cricket without bothering too much about selection issues.

"It's been me trying to play my cricket the way I want to

and I've really enjoyed it. (I'm) feeling really good about my cricket and how my batting is going and obviously there's aspirations there but I'm really enjoying my cricket right now."

Renshaw, 28, who has played 14 Tests, said opening the batting was a specialist's job and not everyone is cut out for the role.

"Opening is a specialist position, it's one of the toughest jobs in world sport," said Renshaw who last played a Test in February 2023 in the tour of India.

"If Steve Smith goes up the top and doesn't have the experience he would like, you can tell it's pretty difficult. I feel like I could bat anywhere if that opportunity came but I'll keep opening for Queensland because it brings me the most satisfaction when you succeed."

Shastri, Ponting question Shami's injury management, say his inclusion could have boosted India

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Questioning Mohammed Shami's injury management, former greats Ravi Shastri and Ricky Ponting said the veteran pacer could have tilted the series in India's favour had he been added to the squad in the second half of the five-match Border-Gavaskar series.

India's decade-long stranglehold on the Border-Gavaskar Trophy ended after they went down by six wickets in Sydney to lose the series 1-3.

The pacer, after recovering from an ankle injury, returned to action for his home state Bengal and

impressed in all the three formats -- Ranji Trophy, Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 and Vijay Hazare one-dayers --, raising hopes of a late inclusion.

But he was officially ruled out before the fourth Test in Melbourne with the BCCI medical team citing a knee swelling, though both Ponting and Shastri believe a trip to Australia and a return late in the series could have been pushed.

"To be honest, I was very surprised with the communication going on in the media as to what exactly happened to Mohammed Shami," the former Indian head coach stated in The ICC Review.

"Where is he when it comes to recovery? He's been sitting in the NCA for I don't know how long. Why can't proper communication come out on where he stands? A player of his ability, I would have brought him to Australia.

"Absolutely, there's no question about that (Shami could have tilted the series in Melbourne or Sydney)," Shastri added.

The 62-year-old further said it would have been beneficial if Shami had, at least, travelled with the group in Australia.

"I would have kept him part of the team and made sure that his rehabilitation was done with the team," said Shastri.



"And then if we thought by the third Test match that no, this guy can't play the rest of the series, I would let him go. But I would have brought him

with the team, kept him, monitored him with the best of the physios and best of the advice even from international physios who are

in Australia and seeing how he went. But I would have kept him in the mix."

Shastri believes the fast bowler could have provided adequate help to Jasprit Bumrah, who too struggled with fitness at the end of the series and could not bowl in the second innings of the Sydney Test.

"It got so tight at 1-1 going into Melbourne," he said.

"You just needed that experience and support. For all you know, he might have raised the bar as well. And it would have been the two guys there (Bumrah and Shami)."

"Pat Cummins couldn't have done it on his own, Scotty Boland had to

step in. So you needed a bowler of his experience. You know, as hard as Mohammed Siraj tried, you needed Shami's experience there."

Echoing Shastri's views, Australian World Cup-winning captain Ponting said: "I was really surprised when he wasn't flown out even halfway through the series, two Test matches in."

"India's make-up obviously had Nitish Reddy there. So you had another seam bowler all-rounder anyway.

"So, if Shami, even if he wasn't fully fit, if he had to bowl fewer overs in a day, you had a backup seam bowling option to help him out and I think he could have been the

difference. "When you asked me (in an earlier The ICC Review) at the start about what I thought the result would be, I said 3-1 Australia because Shami wasn't there. That was the first thing I said. That's how important I felt he was to India.

"If Shami, Bumrah and Siraj were in their starting team, I think things could have been completely different here in Australia."

Shami is currently playing in the domestic one-dayers for the Vijay Hazare Trophy and it remains to be seen if he's included for the England home series ahead of the ICC Champions Trophy in February.

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