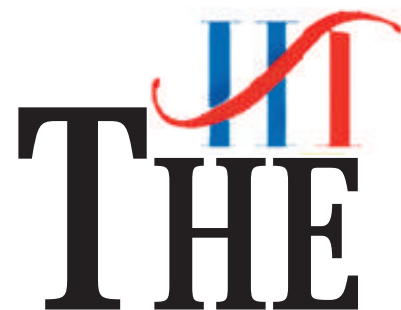


WORLD  
NATION

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- 'Israeli airstrikes hit Yemen airport as jet with hundreds onboard was landing'
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**King of Bhutan, foreign minister of Mauritius among foreign dignitaries to pay tributes to former PM ● Cong urges govt to confer Bharat Ratna on Dr Singh**

## Manmohan Singh cremated with full state honours

**NEW DELHI, Dec 28:** Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who led India to the path of economic liberalisation in the 1990s, was cremated with full state honours here on Saturday in the presence of top dignitaries from the country and abroad.

Singh's funeral pyre was lit by his eldest daughter, Upinder Singh, at the Nigambodh Ghat as family members, friends, and dignitaries bid farewell to the reformist former prime minister.

President Droupadi Murmu, the supreme commander of the armed forces, led the nation in paying last respects to the departed leader.

Priests and family members recited religious hymns from the holy Gurbani, while chants of "Satnam Waheguru" filled the air, as Singh was cremated according to Sikh rituals.

Before Singh's mortal remains were consigned to flames, the security forces gave a salute of three volleys of small arms and the buglers sounded the "Last Post" as a mark of honour for the former Prime Minister.



At the Nigambodh Ghat, a sense of deep grief united the assembly featuring Murmu, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union ministers and senior Congress leaders, including party president Mallikarjun Kharge, Sonia Gandhi, and Rahul Gandhi.

King of Bhutan Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and the foreign minister of Mauritius,

Dhananjay Ramful, were among the foreign dignitaries who paid tributes to Singh, who served as the Prime Minister from 2004 to 2014. Singh (92) died on the night of December 26.

Defence minister Rajnath Singh, home minister Amit Shah and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla also paid their last tributes to the former Prime Minister and laid wreaths on his mortal remains.

Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan and the chiefs of the tri-services also laid wreaths on the former Prime Minister's mortal remains.

Several chief ministers, including Siddaramaiah (Karnataka), Revanth Reddy (Telangana), Sukhwinder Singh Sukhu (Himachal Pradesh) and Atishi (Delhi), besides Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena, also attended the last rites of Singh.

Former chief ministers Bhupinder Singh Hooda, Ashok Gehlot, and Bhupesh Baghel were also present, apart from All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretaries K C Venugopal, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Jairam Ramesh, Randeep Surjewala, and several former Union ministers.

Among the first ones to place a wreath on the mortal remains of the late Prime Minister was his political mentor, Sonia Gandhi, to whom he deferred his entire life even at the cost of criticism by political rivals. It was Sonia Gandhi who, after powering the Congress-led (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Govt insulted ex-PM by not holding last rites at dedicated place: Cong



**NEW DELHI, Dec 28:** The Congress on Saturday accused the Centre of insulting Manmohan Singh, the country's first Sikh Prime Minister, by carrying out his last rites at the Nigambodh Ghat instead of a designated spot that could later become his memorial.

The opposition party had written to the Centre for identifying a designated place for Singh's last rites, where a memorial could be set up for him.

As politics over the matter erupted, the Centre said a decision to set up a memorial has already been taken and a trust would be formed to identify the place soon.

Leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi said the great son of Mother India and the first prime minister from the Sikh community has been "totally insulted" by the BJP-led Centre by performing his last rites at the Nigambodh Ghat on Saturday.

He said Singh was the Prime Minister for 10 years, the country became an economic superpower during his tenure and his policies are still the support system for the poor and backward classes.

## 'Divisive rhetoric major challenge to fraternity'

**AHMEDABAD, Dec 28:** The increasing use of divisive rhetoric based on religion, caste, and ethnicity poses a major challenge to the constitutional ideal of fraternity as well as the sense of unity in the country, Supreme Court judge Justice Prashant Kumar Mishra has said.

He was speaking on the theme of 'Fraternity: Spirit of the Constitution' at a national council meeting of the Akhil Bharatiya Adhivakta Parishad, a lawyers' organisation, at Vadatal in Gujarat's Kheda district. The use of identity politics for votes by politicians can deepen social divisions, he warned.

Divisive ideologies, growing economic inequality, and social injustice are major threats to the spirit of brotherhood, and upholding fraternity is a "shared responsibility" of common citizens, institutions as well as leaders, Justice Mishra said.

Among the ideals of liberty, equality, and justice, fraternity shines as the unifying thread that binds the fabric of our democratic society, and without fraternity, the other ideals remain fragile, "like a tripod missing a crucial leg," he said. "A major challenge to the fraternity is the increasing use of divisive rhetoric based on religion, caste and ethnicity. When individuals or groups promote narratives that pit one community against another, it weakens the sense of unity envisioned by the Constitution," Justice Mishra said.

Identity politics, while sometimes (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Jaishankar meets Trump's NSA pick Waltz, discusses bilateral ties



**SAN FRANCISCO, Dec 28:** External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has met Congressman Michael Waltz, President-elect Donald Trump's nominee for National Security Advisor, during which they had a wide-ranging conversation on the bilateral partnership between India and the US as well as current global issues.

Jaishankar is currently on an official visit to the US from Dec 24-29. This was the first highest-level

in-person meeting between the Indian government and the incoming Trump administration.

"Delighted to meet" Waltz "this evening", Jaishankar posted on X on Friday. "Enjoyed a wide-ranging conversation on our bilateral partnership as well as current global issues. Look forward to working with him," he said.

Waltz, 50, would replace Jake Sullivan as the National Security Advisor on January 20, when

Trump would be sworn in as the 47th President of the United States. Waltz is no stranger to the India-US relationship. A three-term Congressman from the Sixth Congressional District of Florida, Waltz is the Republican Co-Chair of the Congressional India Caucus, which is the largest country-specific caucus in the US House of Representatives.

Waltz also co-led a Congressional delegation to India in August last year and attended the Independence Day celebrations at Red Fort. He has been the sponsor of several India-friendly legislations in the House of Representatives. On November 12, Trump announced that Waltz would be his National Security Advisor. Earlier in the day, Jaishankar said he "concluded a very useful two-day conference of team @IndianEmbassyUS and our Consuls General in Washington DC".

"Confident from the deliberations that the continuous growth of the India-US partnership will be accelerated," he posted on X. (PTI)

## NMHC at Lothal crucial to make India leading maritime nation: Sonowal

**LOTHAL, Dec 28:** Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Saturday said the ₹ 4,300-crore National Maritime Heritage Complex (NMHC) being developed at Lothal in Gujarat is a project of national importance and will be a crucial step towards making India a leading maritime nation.

Sonowal, who is ports, shipping and waterways minister, reviewed the progress of the NMHC project along with Union sports and youth affairs minister Mansukh Mandaviya and Gujarat chief minister Bhupendra Patel.

Secretary of the ministry of ports, shipping and waterways, T K Ramachandran, said, "The phase 1-A of the project, coming up with an estimated cost of ₹ 1,200 crore, is expected to get over by August, 2025, with 65 per cent of its construction completed."

The entire project, being executed in two phases, is expected to



be completed by 2028, he said.

Work on phase 1-A of the project, comprising six galleries, a jetty walkway, Lothal town, etc, started in March 2022, before the Union Cabinet approved it in October 2024.

"Apart from 14 galleries in phase 1 (six in phase 1-A and eight in phase 1-B), phase 2 will have

conceptualisation of Lothal city as it existed in ancient times, surrounded by the pavilions showcasing the maritime heritage of coastal states in their individual pavilions," he said.

"We are planning for the inauguration of Phase 1-A of the project by August-September 2025, and the aim is (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Contribution to PM CARES Fund falls in 2022-23

**NEW DELHI, Dec 28:** The total voluntary contribution to the PM CARES Fund fell to ₹ 912 crore in the fiscal year 2022-23, its lowest since the public charitable trust was created in March 2020 following the COVID-19 outbreak.

A study of the audited statements on the Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations (PM CARES) Fund website shows that the voluntary contribution peaked at ₹ 7,184 crore in 2020-21 and then fell to ₹ 1,938 crore in 2021-22, before declining further in 2022-23 as the Covid threat receded after 2021.

The fiscal 2022-23 is the last year for which the statement is available on the website.

Foreign contribution has seen a sharper decline, registering a high of ₹ 495 crore in 2020-21, before falling to ₹ 40 crore and ₹ 2.57 crore in the next two years.

The total expenditure in 2022-23 was around ₹ 439 crore, with ₹ 346 crore of it used by the "PM CARES for Children", a government initiative to support children who lost both of their parents, legal guardians, or surviving parents to the Covid pandemic.

An amount of nearly ₹ 92 crore was spent on the procurement of oxygen concentrators, according to the statement.

The Narendra Modi government had set up the PM CARES Fund with the primary objective of dealing with any (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Drugs worth ₹ 6 crore seized, 5 arrested



**GUWAHATI, Dec 28:** Drugs worth nearly ₹ 6 crore have been seized and five persons apprehended in two separate operations in Assam, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

In Guwahati city, Special Task Force (STF) personnel conducted an operation at a hotel in Paltan Bazar on Friday night and seized 416 gm of heroin, estimated to be worth ₹ 2.75 crore.

Four persons were apprehended from the hotel, Sarma said.

"In a late-night anti-narcotics operation carried out by @STFAssam, 4 traffickers were apprehended at a hotel in Paltan Bazar, Guwahati and 416 gm of heroin were recovered from their possession. We will continue our mission of #AssamAgainstDrugs to save our youth from the vices of contraband substances," the chief minister posted on X.

In another operation in the Nagaon district, drugs worth over ₹ 3.5 crore were seized and a person was apprehended by the police on Friday night, Sarma said.

"Based on input from an apprehended individual, @nagaonpolice intercepted a vehicle and recovered 532.46 grams of heroin upon thorough search. The seized drugs are worth ₹ 3.5 crore and were hidden in secret chambers of the vehicle. Good job @assampolice," the chief minister posted on X. (PTI)

## Putin apologises to Azerbaijani leader for 'tragic incident'

**MOSCOW, Dec 28:** Russian President Vladimir Putin on Saturday apologised to his Azerbaijani counterpart for what he called a "tragic incident" following the crash of an Azerbaijani airliner in Kazakhstan that killed 38 people.

The Kremlin said in a statement that air defence systems were firing near Grozny, the regional capital of the Russian republic of Chechnya, due to a Ukrainian drone strike as the plane attempted to land on Wednesday. It stopped short of saying the plane was shot down by Russian air defences.

According to a Kremlin readout of the call, Putin apologised to Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev "for the fact that the tragic incident occurred in Russian airspace."

The plane was flying from Azerbaijan's capital of Baku to Grozny when it turned toward Kazakhstan

and crashed while making an attempt to land. There were 29 survivors.

On Friday, a US official and an Azerbaijani minister made separate statements blaming the crash on an external weapon.

Friday's assessments by Roshan Nabiyev and White House national security spokesman John Kirby echoed those made by outside aviation experts who blamed the crash on Russian air defence systems responding to a Ukrainian attack. Neither Kirby nor the Azerbaijani minister directly addressed the statements blaming air defences.

Kirby told reporters on Friday that the US "has seen some early indications that this jet was brought down by Russian air defence systems," but refused to elaborate, citing (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## LGBIA attained 'Level 2' of the ACI Airport Customer Experience Accreditation

### Guwahati airport records increased passenger, aircraft movements in 2024

**GUWAHATI, Dec 28:** The Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport (LGBIA), Guwahati, recorded the "highest-ever" international passenger and aircraft movements this year since the Adani Group began managing its commercial operations from October 2021, a company statement said on Saturday.

The airport also registered an increase in domestic passengers and added new domestic destinations during the year, it said. The facility managed 6.26 million domestic and more than 85,000 international passengers.

Of the domestic passengers, 3.09 million were arrivals and 3.17 million departures. Additionally, it handled 47,578 international passenger



arrivals and 38,528 international departures, the statement said.

The LGBIA has direct flights to three international destinations - Paris, Malaysia and Singapore - which have contributed to a signifi-

cant increase in the international passenger count and air traffic movements (ATMs), with the airport witnessing 44,746 domestic and 970 international air traffic movements during the year.

The airport recorded the "highest-ever" international passenger numbers and ATMs since the commencement of commercial operations (October 8, 2021), the statement said.

The airport introduced three new domestic routes: Guwahati-Ahmedabad, Guwahati-Durgapur, and Guwahati-Ziro, with the routes expected to boost connectivity and open up new avenues for trade, tourism, and cultural exchange, it added.

The Guwahati International Airport Ltd (GIAL) handled 225 million tonnes of perishable cargo in December 2024, making it one of the "highest-ever" for the airport.

The total cargo handled by the airport this (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



# Telcos investment recovery in limbo as tariff hike backfires

**NEW DELHI, Dec 28:** The country's private telecom operators face twin challenges on investment recovery in the New Year — customers leaving their network after tariff hikes and satellite players mainly Elon Musk's Starlink eyeing a chunk of their bread and butter data business.

Private operators have invested around ₹70,000 crore in telecom infrastructure and radiowave assets this year to expand the coverage of next-generation 5G services which is one of the main highlights of 2024 for the sector.

To recover investments and protect margins, private telcos resorted to tariff hikes in mid-year but that move backfired.

Around 2 crore subscribers dropped their connections. Reliance Jio, Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea jointly lost 2.6 crore customers due to a 10-26 per cent price hike.

Around 68 customers switched to state-run player BSNL which refrained from price hike. The loss-making PSU still offers generation-old 3G service and is on the path of rolling out 4G network across the country.

Despite subscriber loss, private players need to recover investment and invest more in 5G to offer new-age services to drive future growth.

According to EY India Markets and Telecom leader Prashant Singhal, the cumulative investment of Reliance Jio, Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea was around ₹70,200 crore in 2024.

Digital Infrastructure Providers Association Director General Manoj Kumar Singh says the telecom infrastructure sector looks at a



cumulative investment of ₹92,100 crore to ₹1.41 lakh crore in 2022-2027 to support the 5G ecosystem. Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia also backed telecom operators on the tariff hike issue citing investments made by companies in the network.

The rollout of 5G services in 2024 has paved the way for the adoption of emerging technologies like artificial intelligence which offers huge growth potential.

"5G deployment has been a game-changer. We've witnessed a significant surge in 5G base transceiver stations, rising from 412,214 in December 2023 to 462,854 by November 2024," says DIPA, whose members include Indus Towers and American Tower Corporation.

Impending huge investments in 5G and maintaining healthy margins in the face of subscriber loss are not the only challenges for private telecom players.

A new threat from satellite broadband service providers is staring at private telcos in the New

Year. The satellite broadband sector has seen intense lobbying on the spectrum allocation issue in 2024.

Private telecom operators led by Mukesh Ambani-promoted Jio have been strongly protesting against the administrative allocation of spectrum to satellite broadband service providers like Elon Musk's Starlink.

Telcos fear that allocation of radiowaves to satellite broadband providers without auction will come at a low price and make a dent in their data subscriber market share.

The government's decision to allocate satcom spectrum without auction also saw political mudslinging with opposition members equating the move with 2G spectrum case. As per the Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2G spectrum allocation caused a notional loss of ₹1.76 lakh crore to the national exchequer.

Scindia said the country cannot forget the "2G scam" a blot on the country's history. "A scam that not

just led to a colossal loss of ₹1,76,645 crore to the exchequer, but also gave government-corporate collaboration its worst name, a.k.a. crony capitalism," he said on X.

The minister reiterated that even administrative allocation of spectrum to satcom players will be done at a price recommended by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India.

Indian Space Association Director General AK Bhatt has batted for expeditious allocation of satcom spectrum, saying it would help satcom players start their services in India as soon as possible and bring the unconnected areas under the coverage.

According to analysts, satcom players' entry may delay mobile services tariff hikes by telcos and new entrants may trigger another round of price war which may push the sector into another round of financial stress as well as lower investments in the network.

Private players like Vodafone Idea are already ridden under huge debt. It has awarded a ₹30,000 crore contract to Nokia, Ericsson and Samsung for the supply of 4G and 5G network equipment for three years.

GX Group CEO Paritosh Prajapati says that the investment in the Indian telecom sector will continue as operators are looking to improve their network.

EY India Markets and Telecom leader Prashant Singhal cautions that it is crucial for the telecom industry to find a balance between tariff rationalisation to recover their investments without compromising on subscribers' experience. (PTI)

## Tax officials initiate inspection of M&M records in Chennai



**NEW DELHI, Dec 28:** Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd on Saturday said state tax authorities in Tamil Nadu initiated an inspection of records at one of the places of its business operations in Chennai. Authorisation for inspection/search proceedings under CGST Act 2017 was issued by Additional Commissioner (ST), Intelligence-I (FAC), Chennai-6 on the company, M&M said in a regulatory filing.

Subsequently, the State Tax officer, Gr-I, Intelligence - I, Chennai - 6, initiated an inspection of the records at one

of the places of business operations of the company in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, it added.

The authorisation for inspection/search proceedings dated December 26, 2024, was shown to the company's officials on December 27, 2024, at around 12.15 pm, it added.

"The GST officials have inspected the records and given some observations on certain GST compliance issues and have advised the company's officials to submit the necessary documents for reconciliation," it said.

During the proceedings, the

officers sought records related to transactions relating to the supply of goods or services, including payment under reverse charge and input tax credit claims by the company for a specific period.

The company officials cooperated with the GST officials and responded to all the clarifications and details sought by them, M&M said, adding that it will further be providing all the necessary additional documents sought in the due course.

This has not impacted the operations of the company, which are continuing as usual, it added.

Based on the initial assessment, the company does not reasonably expect the outcome of the proceedings to have any material impact on the company, it said, adding that it has "always maintained high standards with respect to compliance of all laws and regulations, including the prompt payment of applicable taxes". (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## Manmohan Singh cremated

United Progressive Alliance (UPA) to victory in the 2004 Lok Sabha polls, stepped back from the Prime Minister's chair, nominating Singh to lead the coalition.

The quintessential economist went on to steer the nation for the next 10 years, a period that saw him end India's nuclear apartheid by pressing ahead with the Indo-US civil nuclear deal, despite resistance from the Left Front that was giving support to the UPA from outside.

In a show of uncharacteristic firmness in 2008, Singh risked his government over the deal after the Left withdrew support. He faced and won a no-confidence vote in the Lok Sabha.

Entering the Rajya Sabha in 1991 as a member from Assam, Singh remained in the House of Elders till April 2024. His last innings in the Upper House was from Rajasthan, the only other state he ever represented besides Assam. Singh died of age-related complications at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in Delhi, the ace tertiary-care public establishment where the former Prime Minister always got admitted whenever he faced medical complications. Sources close to the family said the "Akhand path" would be held at Singh's residence on January 1 and its "bhog" would be held on January 3. They said the Antim Ardas and kirtan for Singh would be conducted at the Gurdwara Rakab Ganj on the evening of January 3.

Earlier in the day, Singh's body, placed in a flower-bedecked casket and carriage, was taken from his 3, Motilal Nehru residence in Lutyens' Delhi to the headquarters of the Congress party, which he represented in Parliament for 33 long years.

At the party office, Kharge, Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra paid rich tributes to their leader, as did thousands of Congress workers who had gathered to catch a last glimpse of Singh.

The former prime minister's final journey then started from the AICC office to the Nigambodh Ghat, where the procession reached around 11:30 am. A large crowd had gathered at the AICC office as well as at the Nigambodh Ghat. The vehicle carrying the mortal remains of Singh left his residence a little before 9 am. The procession moved forward amid chants of "Manmohan Singh Amar Rahe". A number of Congress workers and leaders, along with hundreds of Singh's well-wishers, walked along chanting "jab tak suraj-chand rahega, tab tak tera naam rahega".

Demands for honouring Singh with Bharat Ratna, the highest civilian award of the country, were also raised during the procession. Draped in the tricolour, the flower-bedecked casket was placed on a raised platform at the ghat, where leaders cutting across party lines laid wreaths on Singh's mortal remains.

Singh's wife Gursharan Kaur and one of their daughters also laid a wreath on his body at the AICC headquarters. The three daughters of Singh -- Upinder Singh, Daman Singh and Amrit Singh -- along with other relatives, were present. (PTI)

## NMHC at Lothal crucial

to complete the entire project by 2028. We have completed 65 per cent of the work under phase 1-A," he said. The Union ministers toured key project landmarks, including INS Nishank, the Lothal Jetty Walkway and the Museum Block, and interacted with workers at the site to know their challenges and work progress.

Sonawal expressed satisfaction with the significant milestones achieved in civil infrastructure development, noting that the project is advancing on schedule, an official release said.

He said the government is committed to ensuring that the NMHC is completed on time and is of the highest standards. "This project will boost tourism, provide a platform for maritime education, and foster collaboration between India's maritime community and the global industry. It is a crucial step toward making India a leading maritime nation," the release quoted him as saying.

"The NMHC is a project of national importance, offering tremendous opportunities for growth and learning in the maritime sector. The visionary leadership of PM Narendra Modi ji has ensured that India remains on course towards all round development of the country and that the people reap the fruit of India's developmental story," Sonawal said. The project will boost tourism, provide a platform for maritime education, and foster greater collaboration between India's maritime community and the global maritime industry, he added.

The release said this world-class facility will showcase India's maritime heritage from ancient to modern times, adopting an innovative "edutainment" approach using cutting-edge technology to spread awareness and attract international tourists. Lothal, located some 80 km away from Ahmedabad, was a prominent city of the ancient Indus Valley Civilisation dating back to 2400 BCE. It holds historical significance for its advanced dockyard, thriving trade, and renowned bead-making industry. (PTI)

## Contribution to PM CARES

kind of emergency or distress situation, like the one posed by the Covid pandemic, and to provide relief to the affected. It was registered as a public charitable trust.

The Prime Minister is the ex-officio chairman of the body and the fund consists entirely of voluntary contributions and does not get any budgetary support.

The fund has been used over the years to boost emergency care, including for setting up oxygen plants and purchasing ventilators in hospitals run by the central and state governments as part of the larger exercise to meet the challenges posed by the pandemic.

In 2021-22, an amount of ₹1,703 crore was spent on pressure-swing adsorption oxygen plants, besides spending ₹835 crore on ventilators, out of a total expenditure of nearly ₹1,938 crore.

The closing balance of the fund at the end of the 2022-23 fiscal was more than ₹6,283 crore. (PTI)

## 'Divisive rhetoric major challenge

empowering marginalised groups, can become harmful when it focuses solely on narrow group interests at the expense of the common good, often resulting in "exclusion, discrimination, and conflict," he said.

"Divisive rhetoric creates mistrust among communities, leading to the spread of stereotypes and misunderstandings. These tensions can escalate into social unrest. Moreover, when political leaders use social identities for electoral gains, it deepens these divisions, making it harder to build a collective sense of belonging," the judge added. Digital technology and social media have often been misused to spread hate speech, misinformation and divisive content, Justice Mishra observed.

"These challenges to safeguarding fraternity highlight the importance of collective efforts in addressing these issues. Overcoming divisive rhetoric, bridging economic disparities, and harnessing technology responsibly requires active participation from every segment of society," he noted.

"When we live by the principle of fraternity, we ensure that the values of justice, equality, and freedom endure for generations to come. However, the responsibility to uphold fraternity does not rest on any single individual or group. It is a shared responsibility that involves every citizen, institution, and leader in society," he said. Justice Mishra also called for a "multi-faceted approach" to promote fraternity effectively, involving collaborative efforts of lawmakers, civil society, and technology.

"Laws should be crafted not just to protect rights but to ensure social cohesion and address systemic inequalities. By prioritising these values, the legal framework of the nation can provide the foundation for a society built on fraternity," he said.

The judiciary must play a proactive role in safeguarding the principles of fraternity, the judge further said. "We can prioritise mediation and reconciliation where appropriate, write judgments that are not only legally sound but also explained in accessible language, and ensure that court procedures themselves reflect fraternal values," he said. (PTI)

## Govt insulted ex-PM

Singh's funeral at the Nigambodh Ghat. "It was difficult to see very much, beyond the backs of the heads of assorted dignitaries and close relatives of the departed soul, so it became more of an occasion to reflect on the life and legacy of the late great PM," Tharoor said, adding that he found himself seated next to Navjot Singh Sidhu, who was a memorable companion during the proceedings.

"We shared a great regard for the late Prime Minister and agreed that a fitting memorial must be established by the government for Dr MMS without delay," he said while sharing pictures of the funeral.

Former Indian Youth Congress chief B V Srinivas said when former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee passed away on August 16, 2018, his funeral took place at the National Memorial, the designated place for the cremation of former Presidents, Vice-Presidents, and Prime Ministers.

He referred to Vajpayee's memorial, "Sadbhav Atal", which is spread over seven acres and "where memories related to Atalji are present", and shared pictures of the memorial on X.

"But during the tenure of the same Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, the last rites of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh were performed at the public Nigambodh Ghat instead of the National Memorial. Because he was a Congress leader, not a BJP leader?" he asked in a post in Hindi on X.

After the matter of a memorial for Singh took a political colour, the Centre clarified that a decision to build one was already conveyed to Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge by Union home minister Amit Shah after Friday's Cabinet meeting. A government statement also said the funeral could be held as the process of setting up a trust and allotting land for the memorial could take a while.

Kharge had written to Modi on Friday seeking a memorial for Singh. Several sections of the society have also urged the government to confer Bharat Ratna, the highest civilian honour of the country, on the late economist-prime minister. (PTI)

## Putin apologises to Azerbaijani

an ongoing investigation. Nabiye, Azerbaijan's minister of digital development and transportation, told Azerbaijani media that "preliminary conclusions by experts point at external impact," as does witness testimony. Passengers and crew who survived the crash told Azerbaijani media that they heard loud noises on the aircraft as it was circling over Grozny.

Dmitry Yarov, head of Russia's civil aviation authority Rosaviatsia, said Friday that as the plane was preparing to land in Grozny in deep fog, Ukrainian drones were targeting the city, prompting authorities to close the area to air traffic.

Yarov said that after the captain made two unsuccessful attempts to land, he was offered other airports but decided to fly to Aktau in Kazakhstan, across the Caspian Sea.

He didn't comment on statements from some aviation experts, who pointed out that holes seen in the plane's tail section suggested that it could have come under fire from Russian air defence systems.

Earlier this week, Rosaviatsia cited unspecified early evidence as showing that the pilots diverted to Aktau after a bird strike led to an emergency on board.

In the days following the crash, Azerbaijan Airlines blamed "physical and technical interference" and announced the suspension of flights to several Russian airports. It didn't say where the interference came from or provide any further details. (AP)

## Guwahati airport records

year has been 10,089 million tonnes. During the year, LGBIA attained 'Level 2' of the Airports Council International (ACI) Airport Customer Experience Accreditation. It underscores the airport's delivery of customer experiences and commitment to continuous improvement, the statement added.

The GIAL is managed by Adani Airport Holdings Limited (AAHL), a subsidiary of Adani Enterprises. GIAL is a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) venture between AAHL and the Airports Authority of India (AAI). (PTI)

# Union Ministers, CMs to join world leaders in Davos for WEF meet

**NEW DELHI, Dec 28:** Union ministers Ashwini Vaishnaw, CR Patil, Chirag Paswan, K Ram Mohan Naidu and Jayant Chaudhary, alongside three chief ministers -- Devendra Fadnis, Chandrababu Naidu and Revant Reddy, will join hundreds of government and business leaders from across the globe in Swiss ski resort town Davos next month for the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2025.

Andhra Pradesh chief minister Naidu will also be joined by his son and senior minister in his state Nara Lokesh, while Karnataka's deputy chief minister DK Shivakumar, Tamil Nadu minister TRB Rajaa and Uttar Pradesh minister Suresh Khanna will also be there for the five-day annual congregation of the world's rich and powerful, starting January 20, 2025.

Actor Bhumi Pednekar, known for films like Dum Lagha Ke Haisha, Toilet: Ek Prem Katha, Shubh Mangal Saavdhan, Pati Patni Aur Woh, Badhai Do and Saand Ki Aankh, would also be there.

Besides over 50 Presidents and Prime Ministers from across the world, top officials of international organisations like the United Nations, IMF, World Bank, Interpol, NATO, European Central Bank and WTO are also expected to be in Davos for the WEF Annual Meeting 2025.

Senior ministers from Pakistan and Bangladesh, including Bangladesh Government's chief adviser and head of the interim government Muhammad Yunus would also be present.

Vaishnaw, Minister for Railways, Information & Broadcasting and Electronics & IT, had also attended the last WEF annual meeting, alongside Smriti Irani and Hardeep Singh Puri from the Union Council of Ministers.

This time, Vaishnaw will be joined by Jal Shakti Minister Patil, Food Processing Industries Minister Paswan, Civil Aviation Minister Naidu and Minister of State for Skill Development and Education Chaudhary.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also attended the meeting in the past, but there is no official word so far about his participation in the high-profile summit, for which the main theme this time will be 'collaboration for the intelligent age'.

Expected to be attended by nearly 50 heads of state and governments from across the world, the annual meeting would take place against the backdrop of a change of regime in the US and various geopolitical and macroeconomic issues, including the Ukraine war and continuing West Asia crisis.

Both Modi and Donald Trump attended the WEF Annual Meeting in 2018 for the first time as India's Prime Minister and the US President, respectively.

While Modi became Prime Minister of India for the third consecutive term earlier this year, Trump is set to assume office for the second time on January 20, and his return is expected to be among the key topics of discussion at Davos.

Maharashtra chief minister Fadnis and Andhra Pradesh chief

minister Naidu have been to Davos multiple times, while Telangana chief minister Reddy attended the WEF Annual Meeting in January 2024 as well.

Besides government leaders and civil society members, the Indian presence would comprise top executives of business conglomerates like Reliance, Tata, Adani, Birla, Bharti, Mahindra, Godrej, Jindal, Bajaj and Vedanta groups.

Besides Mukesh Ambani and Gautam Adani, the next-generation leaders from their groups are also expected to be present, while technology leaders, including Salil Parekh of Infosys, Rishad Premji of Wipro, as also Sumant Sinha of ReNew, Vijay Shekhar Sharma of Paytm and Adar Poonawalla of Serum Institute are expected in the Swiss Alpine resort town.

Geneva-based WEF, which describes itself as an international organisation for public-private cooperation, will convene leaders from government, business and civil society as well as scientific and cultural thinkers for its 55th annual meeting under the theme of 'Collaboration for the Intelligent Age'.

According to the WEF, the meeting will serve as a trusted global platform for dialogue and cooperation, bringing together a diverse community of stakeholders, seek to connect the dots in an era of complexity and be firmly future-oriented -- both in terms of insights and solutions.

Several sessions are expected to be attended by Indian leaders, including one on 'India's Economic Blueprint'.



# Governor takes stock of development schemes and their progress in Sonitpur district

## Emphasis on welfare schemes, education and green initiatives

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Dec 28:** Governor of Assam Lakshman Prasad Acharya took stock of development schemes and their progress in Sonitpur district, an official statement said on Saturday.

On the final day of his maiden three-day visit to Sonitpur district, Governor Acharya held a meeting with Sonitpur district administration and took stock of implementation of government schemes with District Commissioner (DC) Ankur Bharali and other heads of the departments at the conference hall of DC Office in Tezpur.

The district commissioner briefed the Governor on the implementation of various Central and State government flagship schemes aimed at the welfare of the people of the district.



While taking stock of the progress under MGNREGA, the Governor emphasised the need for timely completion of targets.

Addressing the progress of the

Amrit Sarovar, the Governor directed the concerned officials to conduct physical inspections and expedite the completion of all three phases of Amrit Sarovars.

He suggested transforming the Sarovars into ideal recreational spaces by incorporating plantations, shaded seating areas and flagpoles will help the program to achieve its objective.

The Governor also asked the education department to devise strategies to root out school dropout rates if any in the district.

He highlighted the critical role of education in societal progress, he assured officials of his help in addressing challenges of the education sector in the district.

He further stressed on the importance of enhancing the green cover in the district. He advised officials to initiate tree plantation drives in public spaces such as schools and parks and inspire public participation in this cause.

During the review of the "TB

Mukt Bharat Abhiyan," the Governor encouraged capable citizens to become Nikshay Mitras and contribute to the mission of eradicating tuberculosis completely. He underlined the pivotal role of administrative support in achieving this goal.

Acharya also inquired about the functioning of "PM Jan Aushadhi Kendras" and instructed officials to monitor them closely to ensure they effectively serve the public by providing affordable medicines.

The Governor reviewed several other schemes, including PMAY(G), Jal Jeevan Mission, PM Kisan Samman Nidhi, and Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana. He also assessed the performance of departments such as Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry, PWD and PHE.

## Nagaon district administration distributes new ration cards



HT Correspondent

**NAGAON, Dec 28:** Nagaon district administration distributed new ration cards among the beneficiaries at separate venues across the district on Sunday.

The initiative aims to provide essential food items to low-income families. At a function organised by district administration at the Nehrubli field in Nagaon, local MLA Rupak Sarma officially handed over new ration cards to several beneficiaries.

Sarma emphasised that the ration card serves as an identity document for families, enabling them to access various government welfare schemes, including Arunodoi and Ayushman Bharat.

The MLA appreciated the current government's efforts in ensuring transparent and hassle-free distribution of ration cards, unlike in the past when poor families faced difficulties and even had to pay bribes.

As per an official press note, over 3,155 new ration cards were distributed, benefiting 13,811 beneficiaries in Nagaon Batadropa assembly constituency.

Similarly, in Barhampur constituency, over 3,645 new ration cards were distributed, benefiting 16,000 beneficiaries at a function held in Barhampur Swahid Bhawan.

DC Narendra Kr Shah ceremonially inaugurated the distribution of new ration cards among the beneficiaries at Barhampur Swahid Bhawan.

Likewise, in Raha constituency, a total of 3,241 new ration cards were distributed, benefiting 13,260 beneficiaries while in Dhing assembly constituency a total of 2,207 new ration cards were distributed, benefiting 8,991 beneficiaries.

On the other hand, in Rupohihat constituency, a total of 3,024 new ration cards were distributed, benefiting 12,204 beneficiaries while in Samaguri assembly constituency, a total of 3,474 new ration cards were distributed, benefiting 15,336 beneficiaries.

The district administration has assured that the remaining families will receive their ration cards in a phased manner, the press note added here.

## Residents stage protest against Gaon Pradhan in Margherita



HT Correspondent

**MARGHERITA, Dec 28:** Residents of Hawai Pathar, Timihuti and Maulang under the Khumchhai Gaon Panchayat under 83rd number Margherita Constituency staged a protest, demanding the immediate removal of Gaon Pradhan Chowphan Tikhak.

The protestors staged a protest on Friday, citing grievances against Tikhak, accused him of displaying rude behaviour and using vulgar languages.

A local resident of Hawai Pathar stated, "His attitude towards us has been deeply disappointing. Whenever we approach him with issues,

he responds with offensive language."

To address their concerns, the residents urged the Margherita district commissioner to take action against Chowphan Tikhak and submitted a memorandum.

On Saturday, the discontent escalated as locals gathered at North Margherita Rangamancha, raising slogans against the Gaon Pradhan and calling for his prompt removal.

The matter has drawn significant attention in the region, highlighting the residents' growing dissatisfaction with local governance and their demand for respectful and responsible leadership.

## SBOF to organise awareness cum free coaching program from Jan 5

HT Correspondent

**TEZPUR, Dec 28:** The State Bank of India Officers' Association (SBOF) of North-Eastern Circle is all set to organise awareness cum free coaching program from January 5 at Tezpur Sahitya Sabha Bhawan.

Stating the main aim of conducting the awareness cum coaching program, the organisation has been trying to create awareness amongst the eligible candidates of Assam and other north-eastern states so that maximum number of

local candidates appears in the actual exam.

To make eligible local candidates "exam ready", the coaching program will train them to increase speed and accuracy so that our local candidates are not only confident of appearing in the actual exam but also can compete with candidates at the national level as equals.

Although the Junior Associate Exam in State Bank of India has a local language reservation, many candidates from outside the state

come to Assam and appear in the exam by producing a proficiency certificate in Assamese or Bengali.

Further, the organisation strives to act as a career counsellor and guide the candidates regarding jobs in the banking sector informing them into details regarding salary, perks and privileges, most appropriate path for career growth in SBI as this year also, SBI has come out with 14,000+ vacancies all over India; 369 of which are in Assam.

## Dihanam Sanrakshan Samiti to host first Annual Foundation Day



**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Dec 28:** The "Dihanam Sanrakshan Assam," an organisation dedicated to preserving Assam's rich devotional folk art, Dihanam, is set to celebrate its first Annual Foundation Day, an official statement said on Saturday.

The two-day event will be hosted by the Kamrup District Committee at the Srimanta

Sankardev Sangha in Rangiya on January 6-7, 2025.

Preparations are in full swing, with a strong reception committee chaired by MLA Bhabesh Kalita, supported by executive chairman Hiren Kumar Das and general secretary Paresh Das.

Key events include an environmental cleanliness drive, tree plantation and a cultural evening showcasing Borgeet, Sattriya dance, Bhor Taal dance, Dihanam and other folk traditions.

On January 7, the day will feature flag hoisting by Dr Prashant Kumar Khound, an open session and the unveiling of the organisation's annual journal.

This event marks a significant step in uniting and preserving Assam's cherished cultural heritage.

## Assam Guv urges officials to lead by selfless service and transformative initiatives

HT Correspondent

**TEZPUR, Dec 28:** Governor of Assam Lakshman Prasad Acharya urged district officials to lead by example through selfless service and transformative initiatives for public welfare, in a meeting on Saturday.

The meeting was held in Sonitpur, in the presence of district Commissioner Ankur Bharali, superintendent of Police Barun Purkayastha, DDC Lakhinandan Saharia, CEO Zilla Parishad Karabi Saikia Karan, all ADCs, additional SPs, and heads of departments to review the implementation of several flagship schemes of the Central and State governments.

Governor Acharya conducted a detailed review of schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Gramin (PMAY-G), Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), Amrit Sarovar, Swachh Bharat Mission, and programs in education, health and

agriculture.

Taking note of the Education sector, he put special focus on maintaining the teacher-student ratio, addressing dropout rates (especially for girl students), conducting parent-teacher meetings, implementing PM Poshan and rationalising teacher deployment and especially looking into the issues of schools in remote or forested areas.

Governor emphasised upon encouraging Plantation Drive and plantation activities.

Speaking about Amrit Sarovar Project he reviewed the progress and highlighted their potential as community gathering and celebration spaces.

Later on, Governor Acharya urged officials to maintain strict vigilance and ensure the success of the Nasha Mukh Bharat Abhiyan.

He further sought updates on the progress of the TB Mukh Abhiyan.

## NFR to run all passenger trains from January 2025



HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Dec 28:** Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has decided to run all passenger trains from January 2025 with their regular numbers as was running prior to COVID-19, an official statement said on Saturday.

As per decision by Railway Board, all NFR owned passenger trains (ICF/DEMU/LHB) will run with regular number (instead of existing '0' numbering system).

All the 60 pairs of passenger trains will operate as per earlier frequency with their earlier train numbers

from January 2025 onwards.

Out of the 60 pairs of passenger trains, 04 pairs will operate from Tinsukia Division, 19 pairs from Lumding Division, 10 pairs from Rangiya division, 06 pairs from Alipurduar division and 21 pairs will operate from Katihar division.

The number of those train are including, train no - 55909/55910 (Simaluguri Jn - Dibrugarh - Simaluguri Jn) and train no - 75904/75905 (Makum Jn - Dangari Makum Jn) of Tinsukia Division; train no - 55603/55604 (Guwahati - Mairabari - Guwahati) and train no - 55687/55688 (Dullabcherra - Silchar - Dullabcherra) of Lumding Division; train no - 55619/55620 (Mendipathar - Guwahati - Mendipathar) and train no - 55821/55822 (Rangiya - Dekargaon - Rangiya) of Rangiya Division; train no. - 55421/55422 (Malda Town - Balurghat - Malda Town) and train no 55465/55466 (Alipurduar Jn - Bamanhat - Alipurduar Jn) of Alipurduar Division and train no 55727/55728 (Katihar - Radhikapur - Katihar) and train no. 75743/75744 (Katihar - Siliguri Jn - Katihar) of Katihar Division.

"The details of stoppages and timings of all the 60 pairs of trains are available in IRCTC website and social media platforms of NFR passengers are requested to verify the details before undertaking their journey," the statement said.

## Aturkimi Baptist Church celebrates silver jubilee

HT Correspondent

**BOKAJAN, Dec 28:** Aturkimi Baptist Church from Wai Terang village in Balipathar conducted a daylong programme to celebrate the church's silver jubilee on Saturday.

The executive secretary of Nihang Karbi Baptist Association (NKBA) Rev Tenson Bey inaugurated the celebration, with the theme, "To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Luke 4:19.

Time was taken for felicitation to former church leaders by presenting them gifts and mementos for their contribution to the Church, which was taken up by Pastor Babu Teron. Introduction and felicitation of guests, and necessary announcement were

taken up by Onh Kro. Rev Tenson Bey gave an exhortation speech to thank God for the blessings bestowed upon the Church and to hold on to God's merciful steadfastly. Other dignitaries like Karbi Anglong Baptist Convention, general secretary Kamson Rongphar; Rev Abraham Taro, Rev James Rongpi, Rev Unique Terang, William Singnar and Silarsong Rongpi of NKBA attended the jubilee service in giving thanks to God for the abundant blessings showered upon Aturkimi BC Saphapani Area Baptist Fellowship Women's Department. Sunday School children and the reception committee presented special songs.

## Nurse abducted from nursing home, abandoned on roadside in critical condition

HT Correspondent

**NAGAON, Dec 28:** In a shocking incident, a nurse was allegedly abducted from a nursing home in Batadropa and later found lying on the roadside in a critical condition near Bhumuraguri.

According to sources, the nurse was abducted by a group of miscreants in directive of one Billal Uddin from the nursing home on December 23 last. The incident was captured on CCTV cameras, which showed three girls, allegedly students of a local college, took the nurse away from the Nursing home, playing tricks.

The family of the victim nurse, who is currently undergoing treatment at the Nagaon Metro Hospital, alleged that she was given a sedative-laced drink by the miscreants at a hotel near Sonai Ghat soon after abduction following which she was found in a critical condition near at Bhumuraguri by Batadropa police.

The family of the victim claimed that she was assaulted in her unconscious state and left on the roadside.

The victim's family has filed a complaint with the senior police authority concerned of Nagaon police, demanding justice and action against the perpetrators. The incident has sparked widespread outrage in the district, with locals demanding stringent action against the miscreants. Meanwhile, Batadropa police registered a case in this regard and further investigation is on, sources added.

## Indian Army organises weapons and equipment display in Margherita

HT Correspondent

**MARGHERITA, Dec 28:** On the 75th Foundation Day of Margherita Public Senior Secondary School, Indian Army organised a weapon and equipment display in Margherita.

The event which started from December 26th concluded on December 28. The display included 84 mm Rocket Launchers, 7.62 mm Medium Machine Guns and newly inducted SAKO Sniper Rifles along with Hand Held Thermal Imagers and Passive Night Vision Goggles.

The display was an instant hit amongst students and locals who thronged the stands in large numbers, having a firsthand experience on their working.

Prominent alumnus of school

and dignitaries, including Pabitra Margherita minister of State for External Affairs, Government of India, Bhaskar Sharma Member of the Assam Legislative Assembly from 83 number Margherita constituency, Lakhya Konwar general secretary of Assam Olympic Association also attended the weapon display.

The event was successfully inspired the next generation of students to join the Armed Forces and work towards Nation Building. The initiative also strengthened civil military relations in insurgency hit areas.

The event culminated with a debate competition sharpening the young minds and honing the ability of critical thinking among youngsters.



HT Correspondent

**MORIGAOON, Dec 28:** An assistant professor of Guwahati College, Dr Arup Kumar Nath formally released two books titled 'Yatharth' and 'Xoru Sumatu' in a event held in Morigaon.

The event was held on Friday on the occasion of 'Nath Sahitya Sanskriti Samaroh - 2024'.

De Nath has published total 5 (five) poetry books, 2 (two) short story books including a collection of English poem 'Peters Wheel' in his career.

## ALMDB distributes 54 e-rickshaw and 328 water filter and presser cooker in Hojai

'Government is continuously working for the welfare of the people of Assam'

HT Correspondent

**HOJAI, Dec 28:** Assam Linguistic Minority Development Board (ALMDB) distributed 54 e-rickshaw and 328 water filter and presser cooker to beneficiaries at Swami Vivekanand Kriyangan in Hojai on Saturday.

Speaking on the occasion, district Commissioner of Hojai Bidyut Bikas Bhagwati, said that the state government is continuously working for the welfare of the people of Assam.

"People should make good use of these materials and emphasised that government can provide facilities, but the proper utilisation of the facilities has to be done by the general public, how the public takes advantage of these facilities



is vital," DC Bhagwati said.

While addressing the program,

chairman of Assam Linguistic Minority Development Board Shila-

ditya Dev, paid emotional tribute to the former Prime Minister of India, Dr Manmohan Singh.

He further explained the purpose of the program.

"Such programs will be held at six places in the whole of Assam, which includes Kokrajhar, Hailakandi, Barak Valley, Upper Assam and Central Assam. In this process, the beneficiaries will get this facility after online registration, he said.

The dais was shared by Serman Ali Ahmed, member secretary, Assam Linguistic Minority Development Board, Chaturthi Rani Biswas, chairperson, Hojai Municipal Board, Mukibur Rahman, accountant, Assam Linguistic Minority Development Board.



## Editor's pick

## What awaits Moscow under Trump

By: Rajoli Siddharth Jayaprakash

President-elect Donald Trump's second term marks a policy shift from the previous Biden administration. He aims to shift Washington's focus from Europe to the Indo-Pacific to counter China's rise. Trump wants to do so by ending the Ukraine war by facilitating negotiations between Kyiv and Moscow. Further, he hopes to split the maturing Moscow-Beijing and the Moscow-Tehran partnership. The President-elect, however, has not mentioned how he plans to do so.

Despite the nature of United States (US) policy towards Ukraine likely changing under Trump, the Kremlin has reacted cautiously to his victory because Trump, despite wanting to improve relations with Moscow in his first term, was unable to do so. Second, Moscow is sceptical of Trump's ability to deliver on Moscow's demands about European security architecture. Meanwhile, Trump wants North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries to increase their defence spending and wants to continue arming Ukraine while pursuing a ceasefire.

### Endgame in Ukraine?

Since the early days of his campaign, Trump has claimed that he would end the war "in 24 hours" if elected. While Trump has not outlined his plans, a few proposals have emerged from his aides. In September, Vice-President-elect J.D. Vance presented the plan of freezing the conflict along current lines, creating a heavily fortified demilitarised zone, offering security guarantees to Ukraine and assuring Moscow that Ukraine would not join NATO. Another plan was presented by Keith Kellogg and Fred Fleitz, former Chiefs of Staff in the National Security Council under Trump, which suggested that US military aid to Ukraine would be contingent on Kyiv negotiating with Moscow and imposing a moratorium on its NATO membership. Easing of sanctions would be contingent on Moscow's willingness to negotiate, and levies would be imposed on the revenue generated from Russian energy exports, which would be used for Ukraine's reconstruction. With the nomination of Keith Kellogg as the special envoy for Russia and Ukraine, Washington's policy approach to the war will likely reflect this plan.

While Ukrainian ruling elites are aware that the terms for ending the conflict will lead to the ceding of some territory to Russia, the official stance for negotiations remains that Russia would have to withdraw from all of the occupied territories, including Crimea, which Russia annexed in 2014. However, for Russia, the war in Ukraine is not about territory alone, as Moscow wants guarantees that Ukraine will not join NATO and remain neutral. However, outgoing US President Joe Biden granted Ukraine permission to use long-range Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMs), significantly escalating the conflict. Biden's last-ditch efforts to arm Ukraine, which are exacerbating the conflict, are probably driven by his desire to drag the Trump administration into continuing support for Kyiv. Ukraine currently fires AT-ACMS and Anglo-French Storm Shadow missiles into Bryansk and Kursk regions in Russia. This has led to Putin approving changes to the Russian nuclear doctrine, lowering the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons. Also in a show of determination to the West, and to reemphasise red lines and stop further escalation, Putin launched the intermediate-range ballistic missile 'Oreshnik' on an industrial plant in the city of Dnipro, Ukraine. For Putin, despite scepticism, there is some hope for marginal de-escalation in the conflict. He will also seek a dialogue with the US about European security, but Washington's position on this is unclear.

### On splitting the Russia-China and Russia-Iran partnership

Trump's desire to break the Russia-China and Russia-Iran partnership may be more difficult to achieve than he anticipates. Beijing is Moscow's largest trading partner, with bilateral trade increasing from US\$88 billion in 2014 to US\$240 billion in 2024. With markets shrinking in the West because of sanctions, China has emerged as a pivotal partner to Russia, with cooperation spanning across military, economic, critical technology, energy, and other sectors. Beijing is an important stakeholder in Moscow's strategy to pivot eastwards and move its supply chains from Europe towards Asia. With the invasion of Ukraine, Moscow's reliance on China has increased further, with the Chinese yuan becoming an important reserve currency in Russia.

Despite growing asymmetry with concerns over Chinese banks not processing ruble transactions, and China complying with certain sanctions and export control regulations due to its business interests in the West, China still remains an important partner for Moscow, as both nations have shared grievances with the West. This is reflected in Russia-China cooperation within regional and plurilateral organisations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and BRICS, where both countries aim to carve out an alternative geoeconomic framework to the West. Thus, along with increasing political-economic interaction, the prospect of Moscow de-linking from China looks highly unlikely.

Similarly, in the case of Iran, the Moscow-Tehran partnership improved in the 21st century, with Russia assisting Iran in developing its nuclear energy, and with talks to expedite deliveries of advanced military platforms such as the S-400 Anti-Missile System. Since 2022, Iran has increased its supply of drones to Russia. Further, Iran is an important regional player for Moscow, as it is a critical node in the International North-South Trade Corridor, connecting Russia to the Indian Ocean. Further, Iran is an important partner in intergovernmental and plurilateral organisations like the SCO and BRICS.

### Trump 2.0 a repeat of Trump 1.0?

Trump's arrival in the White House in 2016 came with the possibility of a reset in America's relationship with Russia and was thus well-received by Moscow. Still, despite the campaign promises, Moscow's hopes were unaddressed. Sanctions imposed by Trump's predecessor continued and required the assent of US congressional committees for its revocation. The first Trump administration continued to impose more sanctions against Russia, particularly on Russian energy, with the sanctioning of the Nord Stream 2 undersea gas pipeline, which aimed to transport gas from Russia to Europe via the Baltic Sea. Further, it was during Trump's first term that the US withdrew from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) treaty.

For these reasons, uncertainty looms over what the future holds for Moscow under Trump 2.0. While Russia's concerns about European security remain unaddressed, it is unlikely that US sanctions on Moscow will be lifted, as certain sanctions, such as sanctions on Russian Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), profit the US as it increases American LNG exports. Further, it is doubtful that Russia's frozen sovereign assets (worth US\$300 billion) will be unfrozen, and it is unlikely that Russia will agree to these funds being used in Ukraine's reconstruction or to pay a tax on its future energy sales to contribute to the reconstruction. Thus, while Trump may attempt to end the conflict in Ukraine by offering certain concessions to Moscow, it is unlikely that a lasting, long-term peace will be achieved in 2025. (Courtesy: ORF)

# Live-streaming has improved courtroom accountability

By: Shivam Jadaun

The judicial system has not been left untouched in a world increasingly defined by digital transparency. Courtroom live-streaming, once unthinkable due to its perceived threat to the sanctity of judicial proceedings, is now rapidly gaining momentum as a tool to enhance accountability and transparency.

At the heart of this shift is the public's demand for a justice system that can be scrutinised in real-time, one that holds judges accountable not only for their rulings but also for their conduct within the courtroom.

This article explores the transformative role live-streaming has played in shaping the way we view judicial accountability. Using recent incidents, such as the controversial remarks made by Karnataka High Court Justice V. Srishananda, we will delve into how this technological shift has highlighted the importance of judicial decorum, the potential consequences of misconduct, and the delicate balance between transparency and the judicial process.

The decision to live-stream court proceedings in India began as a response to the growing demand for transparency in the judicial process. In 2018, the Supreme Court of India, in its landmark decision in *Swapnil Tripathi vs. Supreme Court of India*, held that live-streaming was a fundamental right of access to justice under Article 21 (Protection of Life and Personal Liberty) of the Constitution.

The court observed that transparency was a vital component of judicial accountability and that live-streaming could enhance the quality of judicial conduct.

Moreover, in the case of *Naresh Shridhar Mirajkar vs. State of Maharashtra and Ors.*, the court held that "courts must take the aid of tech to enhance open court move beyond physical accessibility to virtual accessibility".

The Supreme Court, in the case of *Supt. and Remembrancer of Legal Affairs vs. Satyen Bhowmik* (1981), reaffirmed the requirement of "in-camera proceedings" wherever needed from time to time.

These decisions ushered in a new era for the Indian judiciary, where the concept of 'open courts' was no longer limited to the physical confines of a courtroom. Judicial proceedings became accessible to the broader public, embodying transparency in its truest sense.

For many, this was a welcome change, offering citizens the chance to witness the judicial process firsthand. But with increased visibility came increased scrutiny—not just of the rulings handed down, but of the language of the judges themselves.

Justice V. Srishananda's contro-

versial remarks serve as a case study of the perils of live-streaming courtroom proceedings. During a hearing, he referred to a Muslim-dominated area in Bengaluru as "Pakistan", a communal and inflammatory comment that sparked outrage.

In another instance, he made gender-biased remarks toward a female advocate in a matrimonial dispute, revealing deep-seated biases that had no place in a court of law. These incidents, captured on camera and circulated widely, put judicial conduct in the spotlight, raising serious questions about how judges are held accountable for their words and actions.

What made these incidents even more troubling was not just the nature of the comments but the lack of immediate accountability. Had these remarks not been captured on live-stream, they might have gone unnoticed or been minimised. The very fact that the public could witness these incidents in real time forced the judiciary to confront the reality that the conduct of judges is now open to widespread scrutiny.

Justice Srishananda's actions were not just personal missteps, they became a reflection of a larger issue within the judiciary—an issue of unchecked authority and a lack of accountability. Judges occupy a unique position in society. They are entrusted with the immense responsibility of upholding the rule of law and dispensing justice fairly and impartially.

As such, their conduct inside the courtroom must be beyond reproach. The introduction of live-streaming into courtrooms has only heightened this expectation, as every word, gesture and action is now subject to public observation.

Judicial decorum—the professional and respectful behaviour expected of judges—is not merely a formality. It is a safeguard for the integrity of the judicial process. When judges allow their biases to seep into their conduct, whether through gendered comments or communal remarks, they compromise the very notion of impartiality. And in the age of live-streaming, these compromises are no longer hidden behind the closed doors of a courtroom—they are exposed for all to see.

In Justice Srishananda's case, his remarks damaged the credibility of the judiciary and cast doubts on the impartiality of the proceedings he presided over. His comments about a Muslim-majority area being akin to "Pakistan" were not only insensitive but also reflected a communal bias that could influence his decision-making.

Similarly, his gendered comments toward a female advocate revealed an inherent lack of respect for women in the legal profession, further eroding trust in the system.

While hearing a case *suomotu*, former Chief Justice of India D.Y.



Chandrachud remarked, "The answer to sunlight is more sunlight. Not to suppress what happens in the court. This is a very important reminder to everyone. The answer is not to close doors and shut down."

Underscoring the importance of transparency in judicial proceedings, he argued that live streaming of court cases should continue despite controversies surrounding judges' comments, emphasising that suppressing information is not the solution. This statement serves as a vital reminder of the judiciary's responsibility to maintain openness and accountability in a democratic society.

He also emphasised that the controversies created due to the circulation of objectionable remarks made by judges cannot be a reason to shut down the live-streaming of court proceedings.

The statement was made in response to advice from Attorney General R. Venkataramani and Solicitor General Tushar Mehta to hold a judicial proceeding in-house to prevent misrepresentation of remarks on social media.

In the related incident, the Supreme Court objected to remarks made by Justice V. Srishananda of the Karnataka High Court and expressed that no part of India should be referred to as Pakistan because that is fundamentally contrary to the territorial integrity of the nation.

Justice Srishananda later expressed regret for his comments, clarifying that he did not intend to offend any community or members of the Bar. The Supreme Court Bench accepted his apology but also issued strong observations regarding the need for judges to refrain from making casual, misogynistic or prejudicial remarks.

In this digital age, where court proceedings are widely reported, the Bench emphasised the importance of judges acting with care and caution in their statements.

The consequences of such misconduct extend beyond the individual judge. They impact public perception of the judiciary as a whole. Judges are meant to be impartial arbiters of justice, and when they display bias, whether through

their rulings or their conduct, they undermine public confidence in the legal system.

The live-streaming of Justice Srishananda's remarks brought this issue to the forefront, as the public could witness firsthand the prejudices at play in a court of law. The widespread dissemination of these videos on social media further fuelled public outrage, with many calling into question the impartiality of the judiciary. When the public loses faith in the fairness of the legal system, it erodes the very foundation of democracy.

This incident also highlighted the lack of immediate mechanisms to hold judges accountable for their conduct. While there are disciplinary processes in place for judicial misconduct, they are often slow and opaque, leaving the public with little recourse when judges act inappropriately.

In the case of Justice Srishananda, his eventual apology came only after the Supreme Court took *suomotucognisance* of the incident, illustrating the reactive nature of judicial accountability.

The introduction of live-streaming has fundamentally altered the way the public interacts with the judiciary. Previously, courtroom proceedings were confined to the physical audience present in the courtroom, limiting the scope of public scrutiny. Now, with live-streaming, the judiciary is under constant observation, with every decision and every comment subject to real-time critique.

While some may argue that live-streaming puts undue pressure on judges, it is important to recognise that this transparency is essential for ensuring accountability. The power wielded by judges is immense, and with that power comes the responsibility to maintain the highest standards of conduct. Live-streaming ensures that judges are held to these standards, as their actions are now visible to a much larger audience.

Moreover, live-streaming has the potential to democratise access to justice. In a country as vast and diverse as India, many citizens are unable to attend court proceedings in person.

Live-streaming allows them to engage with the judicial process in

a way that was previously impossible. It offers a window into the workings of the legal system, fostering a greater understanding of and respect for the rule of law.

While live-streaming offers significant benefits in terms of transparency and accountability, it also poses challenges. One of the primary concerns is the potential for judicial proceedings to become sensationalised.

In a media landscape that thrives on controversy, there is a risk that live-streamed court cases could be reduced to sound bites, with complex legal arguments oversimplified for the sake of public consumption.

Additionally, live-streaming raises concerns about the impact on the integrity of the judicial process. Judges may feel pressured to cater to public opinion or avoid making controversial decisions for fear of backlash. This could lead to a chilling effect, where judges become overly cautious in their rulings, prioritising public perception over the merits of the case.

To mitigate these risks, it is crucial to strike a balance between transparency and the integrity of the judicial process. Live-streaming should be seen as a tool for enhancing accountability, not as a means of turning the courtroom into a spectacle. Judges must be given the space to make independent decisions, free from undue external pressures, while still being held accountable for their conduct.

The introduction of live-streaming into Indian courtrooms has undoubtedly changed the way we view judicial accountability. Incidents such as Justice Srishananda's controversial remarks have highlighted the importance of judicial decorum and the need for greater transparency in the legal system.

Live-streaming offers a powerful tool for holding judges accountable, but it also poses challenges that must be carefully navigated.

As the judiciary continues to adapt to the digital age, it is essential to ensure that transparency does not come at the expense of the integrity of the judicial process. Judges must uphold the highest standards of conduct, and when they fail to do so, they must be held accountable—not just by their peers, but by the public as well.

Live-streaming has opened the doors to a more transparent and accountable judiciary, but with this increased visibility comes the responsibility to ensure that justice is not only done but seen to be done.

Hence, live-streaming is an irreversible trend, increasing scrutiny of judges' actions. As a result, any misconduct will be more readily exposed and criticised, necessitating judges to uphold high standards of behaviour consistently, regardless of whether their actions are being filmed. (IPA Service)

## Trump's threat of a tariff wall has grave economic implications

By: Prabhat Patnaik

Donald Trump is threatening to use tariffs as a weapon against other countries. He has already made three threatening statements: first, he threatened the BRICS countries that if they dared to move away from the dollar, then they would have to face 100 percent tariff in the US market. Second, he has threatened the European Union that unless the EU bought more American oil and gas as a means of reducing its trade surplus vis-à-vis the US (the surplus on goods trade was \$208.7 billion in 2023), it would face high tariffs in the US market. Third, he has announced that there will be a 10 percent tariff anyway on global imports into the US and a 60 percent tariff on Chinese goods. (China had a \$279.4 billion surplus on goods trade vis-à-vis the US in 2023, which was lower than earlier, e.g., the \$418 billion surplus in 2018, but quite substantial nonetheless).

Each of these proposed measures has important economic implications. For instance, while EU's replacing its residual reliance on Russian gas by the purchase of American gas may not lead to cost escalation within EU, it will certainly raise gas prices within the US; in fact it has been estimated that US gas prices will rise by as much as 30 percent in such an eventuality. Trump's response to this has been to say that gas production will be raised within the US to cope with the increased demand for it. But raising gas production requires investment, and that too private investment in the US, which cannot be ordered to happen. Besides, given the environmental damage associated with oil and gas, and hence the general commitment to move away from them, such investment may not actually occur; and even if it does, the environmental concerns will

only become more acute. Likewise, if 100 percent tariffs are levied on BRICS countries, they would certainly retaliate, whose effects can be quite serious for American exports.

All this, however, is still in the realm of mere possibilities; what is more certain is the 10 percent tax on global imports and the 60 percent tax on imports from China; and I would like to discuss one obvious impact they would have on the world economy. Let us assume that such tariffs do not lead to any retaliation by other countries (and if they do, then this fact will only modify the argument presented below, not negate the thrust of it). They would however increase the demand for American goods within the US which should raise the level of output and employment within that country. In fact Trump has been complaining that while Americans buy large numbers of European cars, the reverse is not true; the imposition of tariffs on European cars will increase the demand for American cars within the US and hence raise their production (and employment in that industry).

As against this, however, the rise in the cost of living because of tariffs on imported goods, will reduce purchasing power in the hands of the consumers which will have an employment-contracting effect, that would be even more pronounced if the Trump administration undertakes anti-inflationary "austerity" measures to counter the rise in prices. But let us assume, as is more likely, that there would be a net increase in employment and output in the US because of this tariff measure of Trump.

In the rest of the world, however, by the same token the loss of American markets would reduce employment in the absence of any countervailing measures to boost demand. The US in such a case would simply have exported its un-

employment to the rest of the world; it would have pursued through tariff measures a beggarly-neighbour policy towards the rest of the world. True, the rest of the world would not be affected adversely if there is a boost to its domestic demand through the pursuit of an expansionary fiscal policy (monetary policy for expansion is a blunt instrument); but this is not possible in economies other than China.

Such an expansionary fiscal policy must take the form of either a larger fiscal deficit, or heavier taxes on the capitalists, and the rich in general, who save a large proportion of their incomes; taxing the working people who consume the bulk of their incomes anyway and using such tax proceeds for boosting government expenditure would only change the composition of aggregate demand (less working people's consumption and more government spending), but not its magnitude. But such fiscal measures as would actually increase the magnitude of aggregate demand are precisely the ones that international finance capital opposes; it opposes fiscal deficits beyond a stipulated limit (typically 3 percent of the GDP) and it obviously opposes any taxes on the rich, for such taxes fall heavily on the financiers themselves. An economy pursuing such demand-boosting measures, therefore, becomes a victim of capital flight and hence gets destabilised, which is why such fiscal expansion cannot occur within a neoliberal regime characterised by the hegemony of globalised finance.

Even if the imposition of tariffs by the US entails a certain shift away from neoliberalism, the essence of such a regime consists in the free cross-border movement of capital, especially of finance, and no compromise on this score will be tolerated by international finance capital; in fact it is significant that Trump, while championing protectionism has not said a word in favour of capital controls. The absence of capital controls exposes countries to the threat of capital flight in the event of fiscal expansion which they would, therefore, like to avoid.

The case of China, however, is altogether different. In fact, successive US administrations have been protecting the US market from the entry of goods produced in China for quite some time, as is evident from the decline in China's goods trade surplus vis-à-vis the US mentioned earlier. China has managed to counter to a great extent this loss of the American market by expanding its domestic market.

The reason China has been able to do this, while other countries cannot, is because China, notwithstanding all the "liberalisation" it has undertaken, still remains essentially a "command economy" where the political leadership's writ runs in economic matters: there is a substantial presence of public sector, and generally non-capitalist, enterprises in the Chinese economy, whose investment decisions, and even wage policy, can be influenced by the government.

Indeed it is not surprising that even as there has been a general stagnation in real wage-rates over much of the world, including in the countries of the global north, China has seen increases in real wages as a result of government directives. The expansion of the domestic market in China, therefore, is not constrained by the dictates of international finance capital, unlike in the case of capitalist countries.

Hence, leaving aside China, where the effects of American protectionism can in principle be countered, the rest of the world would see an aggravation of recession because of it (unless it moves

away from a neoliberal regime). This effect will be particularly sharp in countries of the global south. The Bretton Woods institutions that remain silent in the face of Trump's protectionism will lecture to countries of the global south about the virtues of free trade and prevent them from adopting any protectionist policies of their own; at the same time they would be made to adhere strictly to "fiscal deficit norms" while avoiding any heavier taxation of the rich (so as not to disincentive capital inflows). They would, therefore, be made to face American protectionism meekly and bear the brunt not only of the recessionary tendency it would generate but also of a drying up of capital inflows into their shores for relocating plants for producing export goods.

The accentuation of the recessionary tendency in the rest of the world would also entail a further strengthening of the neo-fascist tendency that is currently sweeping the world.

Since neo-fascism gets a boost because of the alliance between corporate capital and the neo-fascist elements in a period of economic crisis, any aggravation of crisis will only lead to a further strengthening of the neo-fascist tendency, of the "othering" of some hapless minority group in each such crisis-affected country in an attempt to divert the discourse away from issues of material life.

Rosa Luxemburg's statement that the development of capitalism ultimately leads to a denouement where mankind is presented with a choice between socialism and barbarism is thus coming true with a vengeance. The dead-end of neoliberal capitalism, which is the latest phase of capitalism, is bringing mankind to a situation of pervasive and barbaric neo-fascism, from which only a transition to socialism, effected in stages, can provide a way out. (IPA Service)



# 2024: The year of AI

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

The year 2024 has emerged as a defining moment for artificial intelligence (AI), marking a period of profound transformation in technology, society, and global industries. As AI moves beyond the realm of theoretical discussion and experimental prototypes, it is now an undeniable force that shapes the world in ways once confined to science fiction. With rapid advancements in machine learning, generative AI, and neural networks, the potential of AI has skyrocketed, bringing both excitement and trepidation. This year is poised to be remembered as a landmark year where AI is not just a tool but a pervasive influence, affecting economies, labor markets, ethical frameworks, and human cognition.

One of the most striking elements of 2024 is the integration of AI in almost every sector, from healthcare to education, finance to entertainment, and beyond. The healthcare sector, for instance, has witnessed AI systems not only assisting in diagnosis but also playing crucial roles in drug discovery, precision medicine, and patient care optimization. Algorithms now analyze vast datasets of medical records to predict health risks with remarkable accuracy, aiding doctors in making better-informed decisions. In research, generative models are streamlining drug development processes, dramatically reducing the time it takes to bring new medications to market. As these tools become more refined, healthcare is entering an era where AI could offer not only improved medical outcomes but also personalized treatment plans tailored to the unique genetic makeup of individuals.

Similarly, AI's influence on finance is growing exponentially. Algorithms now manage portfolios, automate trading decisions, and conduct predictive analytics to identify market trends. The rise of AI-powered fintech has made services like banking, investing, and insurance more efficient and accessible. Investment strategies that would have previously required the expertise of highly trained

professionals can now be executed by machines with speed and precision. However, this progress raises important questions about fairness and transparency. The increasing reliance on AI in financial decisions demands a robust framework for oversight, ensuring that automated systems are free from bias and that they do not disproportionately disadvantage certain individuals or communities.

In education, AI is reshaping traditional teaching methods and facilitating more personalized learning experiences. The global shift toward online learning, accelerated by the pandemic, has created fertile ground for AI to thrive. From adaptive learning platforms to AI tutors, technology is helping students access education in a more customized manner, with learning materials tailored to their pace, needs, and preferences. AI tools are also enhancing the ability to assess students' progress in real time, enabling educators to offer timely interventions. While these advancements hold immense promise for making education more inclusive, they also present challenges in terms of data privacy, equity, and the potential for over-reliance on technology in classrooms.

Despite the significant strides AI has made in improving efficiency and outcomes in various sectors, the rise of AI is accompanied by challenges that must be addressed with careful consideration. The issue of employment is a central concern as automation and AI-driven systems displace traditional jobs. While AI is creating new roles, such as data scientists, machine learning engineers, and AI ethicists, it is also making certain jobs obsolete. The retail and manufacturing industries, in particular, are seeing widespread automation, with robots and AI systems taking over routine tasks that were once performed by human workers. This shift raises important ethical questions about the future of work, the retraining of displaced workers, and the social ramifications of widespread unemployment.

Moreover, as AI systems become more advanced, questions surrounding control and accountability become increasingly urgent. The

lack of transparency in many AI systems, particularly those based on deep learning models, makes it difficult to understand how these systems reach their conclusions. This "black box" nature of AI is especially concerning in critical applications like autonomous vehicles or criminal justice systems, where the consequences of errors can be catastrophic. AI must be built in a way that allows humans to remain in control, with clear lines of accountability when things go wrong. Furthermore, as AI systems become more autonomous, there is the risk that they could be used maliciously, whether by individuals or nation-states. Ensuring that AI is used responsibly and safely requires not only technological safeguards but also strong legal frameworks and international cooperation.

The ethical dimensions of AI are perhaps one of the most discussed aspects in 2024. Issues such as privacy, bias, discrimination, and decision-making transparency are at the forefront of conversations surrounding the technology. The question of how AI can be used in a way that is fair and equitable is increasingly critical as AI systems are deployed across diverse societies. Bias in AI algorithms, often a reflection of biased data, has already been demonstrated in numerous high-profile cases, from hiring algorithms that favor certain demographics to facial recognition systems that are less accurate in identifying people of color. Addressing these biases requires both the development of more inclusive data sets and the creation of AI systems that prioritize fairness as a core design principle.

On a broader scale, AI's role in society raises questions about human autonomy and the potential for AI to reshape social structures. As AI continues to evolve, it will likely impact everything from politics and governance to the arts and culture. The advent of AI-generated content, from artwork to literature, challenges long-standing notions of authorship and creativity. AI's ability to generate human-like text and images is already blurring the line between human and machine-made works, raising profound ques-



tions about the value of creativity and the role of artists in an AI-driven world. While some argue that AI can augment human creativity, others fear that it could ultimately diminish the importance of human input in creative endeavors.

The increasing pervasiveness of AI also poses a threat to individual privacy. With AI systems collecting vast amounts of personal data, including behavioral patterns, preferences, and even biometric information, the risk of surveillance and data breaches is heightened. Concerns about data security are compounded by the use of AI in mass surveillance by governments and private corporations, prompting calls for stronger data protection laws and regulations. Balancing innovation with privacy rights remains one of the most significant challenges as AI technologies continue to expand their reach.

As we move forward into 2024, one of the most pressing questions will be how governments, businesses, and individuals navigate the complexities of AI. While the benefits of AI are undeniable, so too are the risks. Governments must take an active role in creating regulatory frameworks that ensure AI is developed and deployed in a way that serves the public good. These regulations must focus on

promoting transparency, ensuring accountability, and protecting privacy. Moreover, governments must invest in education and retraining programs to prepare workers for the changing job landscape and to ensure that the benefits of AI are distributed equitably.

In conclusion, 2024 stands as a pivotal year in the development of artificial intelligence, marking a time when the technology moves from potential to tangible impact. Its influence on society, the economy, and global industries is undeniable, and the opportunities it presents are vast. However, the challenges it poses, from employment disruption to ethical dilemmas and privacy concerns, are equally significant. As we embrace the potential of AI, we must do so with a clear-eyed awareness of its complexities, ensuring that its deployment enhances human well-being and fosters a future where technology serves humanity in the most responsible and equitable way possible. The decisions we make in 2024 will shape the trajectory of AI for years to come, and how we address these challenges will determine whether AI becomes a force for good or a source of division and disruption. (The author can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com or 9954812261, 9864000260)

## A Year Gone, A Year Ahead

By: Satyabrata Borah

As the clock strikes midnight, the world collectively holds its breath for a moment before erupting into jubilant celebrations. Fireworks light up the skies, wishes are exchanged, and resolutions are made. But amidst the cheer and festivities, the new year is also a time for reflection, for introspection, and for acknowledging the fleeting nature of time.

Another year has passed, and as we stand on the threshold of a new beginning, we are reminded of just how fast time seems to fly. The days turn into weeks, weeks into months, and before we know it, a year has slipped by, leaving behind memories, achievements, and perhaps a few regrets.

It often feels like time is running faster than ever. This sensation isn't just a fleeting thought; it is a sentiment shared universally. Psychologists attribute this feeling to our ever-busy lives. As we grow older, routine sets in, and our brains process fewer novel experiences. Consequently, the days blur into one another, creating the illusion of time speeding up.

In our childhood, each day seemed endless, filled with discovery and wonder. The joy of learning something new, the excitement of playing with friends, or even the anticipation of a holiday made time feel abundant. As adults, however, the responsibilities of life—work, family, and societal obligations—consume us, leaving little room to truly savor the moments.

Modern life exacerbates this feeling. We are perpetually busy, juggling professional commitments with personal aspirations. In our quest to achieve more, we often lose sight of the present. Days are spent working towards deadlines, chasing goals, and striving for perfection, while evenings dissolve into screens and schedules.

Technology, meant to save us time, paradoxically consumes it. Social media, instant messaging, and endless notifications pull us away from meaningful interactions and moments of solitude. We find ourselves scrolling endlessly, watching life go by, instead of actively participating in it.

The pandemic years further highlighted how easily time can slip through our fingers. Days spent in isolation blurred together, emphasizing the need to cherish every moment we have.

The end of the year offers a unique opportunity to pause, reflect, and recalibrate. It's a moment to take stock of what we've accomplished, what we've lost, and what we hope to



achieve. Reflection helps us find meaning in the passing of time.

Think about the milestones you've crossed this year. Perhaps you secured a promotion, learned a new skill, or rekindled an old friendship. Maybe you faced challenges and emerged stronger. Every experience, whether joyful or painful, has contributed to your growth.

The new year is also a time to assess our priorities. Are we spending our time on things that truly matter? Are we investing in relationships, personal growth, and health, or are we caught in the whirlwind of work and obligations?

Resolutions are a hallmark of the new year. They symbolize hope and the belief in our ability to change for the better. Whether it's adopting healthier habits, learning something new, or giving back to society, resolutions reflect our aspirations.

However, it's essential to set realistic and meaningful goals. Instead of vague resolutions like "exercise more," aim for specific ones like "exercise three times a week." Celebrate small victories along the way, as they pave the path for larger successes.

While resolutions are important, it's equally vital to forgive ourselves when we falter. Change is a gradual process, and setbacks are a natural part of growth.

As we step into another year, let us remind ourselves to slow down and live in the moment. The past, with its joys and sorrows, is gone, and the future remains uncertain. The present is all we truly have, and it is where life unfolds.

Mindfulness can help us savor the present. Simple practices like taking a few minutes each day to breathe deeply, expressing gratitude, or simply observing the world around us can make a profound difference.

Spend time with loved ones, for relationships are the essence of life. Share stories, laugh together, and create memories that will last a lifetime. Put away distractions when engaging with others; genuine connection is a gift that enriches both giver and receiver.

The dawn of a new year also

brings hope—a chance to create a better tomorrow. While individual growth is important, collective progress is equally vital. The world faces numerous challenges, from climate change to social inequality. Let us resolve to contribute in whatever small way we can, be it through conscious consumption, volunteering, or spreading awareness.

The power of small actions cannot be underestimated. A kind word, a helping hand, or an act of generosity can ripple outwards, creating positive change.

Ultimately, the passing of another year is a reminder that time is our most precious resource. Unlike money or possessions, it cannot be regained once lost. Each moment is a gift, an opportunity to learn, grow, and connect.

As we embrace the new year, let us strive to make the most of our time. Let us chase our dreams with determination, cherish our relationships with love, and face challenges with courage. Let us live with intention, finding joy in the ordinary and beauty in the mundane.

The new year is not just a marker of time; it is a celebration of life itself. So, let us welcome it with open hearts and minds, ready to embrace whatever it may bring.

Here's to a year filled with hope, happiness, and countless moments worth remembering. Happy New Year! (The author is an Educationist)

## 2024: A year of geopolitical turmoil and global challenges

By: Dipak Kurmi

The year 2024 etched itself into history as a period of unprecedented geopolitical upheaval, characterized by unyielding conflicts, technological rivalries, and climate-induced emergencies that shaped global dynamics. These interconnected events underscored the fragility of existing international mechanisms and the urgent need for adaptive strategies to navigate a world increasingly defined by unpredictability. From the battlefields of Ukraine to the contested waters of the South China Sea, the year exposed the fractures in global governance, presenting a stark reminder of humanity's collective vulnerabilities.

The persistent war between Russia and Ukraine dominated the geopolitical narrative, continuing to deepen divisions between NATO-aligned states and Russia. In 2024, the conflict reached new levels of devastation, marked by intensified missile strikes and escalating civilian casualties. Beyond the battlefield, the war rippled through the global economy, exacerbating Europe's energy crisis and disrupting global supply chains. Mediation efforts by neutral nations such as Turkey and India faltered, leaving the world polarized and disillusioned with traditional diplomacy.

Simultaneously, the Middle East grappled with the ongoing Israel-Hamas-Hezbollah conflict, a volatile struggle that redrew the region's geopolitical map. Israel's aggressive military campaigns against Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon aimed to neutralize these threats but came at a significant humanitarian cost. The involvement of Iranian proxies and retaliatory strikes further escalated tensions, underscoring the fragility of peace in the region. The humanitarian toll of these wars laid bare the limitations of existing international frameworks in mitigating such crises.

In Asia, the South China Sea emerged as a critical flashpoint, with China's assertive militarization of disputed territories heightening regional tensions. Confrontations with the Philippines and Vietnam, alongside restrictive maritime zones enforced by Beijing, underscored China's ambitions to dominate this strategic waterway. The Philippines, invoking its mutual defense treaty with the United States, sought external support, further internationalizing the conflict. The growing rift tested ASEAN's ability to present a unified front, revealing the complexities of regional politics in an era of shifting power dynamics.

The transformative power of artificial intelligence (AI) became a defining feature of 2024's geopolitical landscape. Nations raced to harness AI's potential, with the U.S. and China vying for technological supremacy. This rivalry extended beyond research and innovation, influencing defense strategies, cybersecurity, and economic competition. Europe, advocating stringent AI regulations, highlighted ethical concerns and potential misuse. The global debate on AI governance exposed the inadequacies of existing frameworks in addressing rapidly evolving technological challenges, signaling a critical juncture in humanity's relationship with technology.

Amidst these geopolitical tensions, the planet faced an intensifying climate crisis. Catastrophic events such as floods in South Asia, droughts in Africa, and record-breaking wildfires in the West emphasized the urgency of coordinated action. The surge in climate-induced migration added political and social strain, particularly for host nations grappling with resource limitations. Developing countries, demanding greater financial and technological support from wealthier nations, brought global climate policy disputes to the forefront, highlighting in-

equities in resource access and responsibility. Africa witnessed its share of turmoil, with Sudan's civil war escalating into a devastating humanitarian crisis. Rival factions decimated cities, displaced millions, and destabilized neighboring countries. Niger's political upheaval following a military coup showcased the waning influence of Western powers on the continent as Niger aligned itself with Russia and China. These events reflected the broader challenges of governance and external intervention in Africa's evolving geopolitical landscape.

In the Middle East, Iran's advancing nuclear program fueled fears of a regional arms race. Tehran's progress in uranium enrichment drew international condemnation, with Israel launching targeted strikes on Iranian facilities. Diplomatic efforts to curb Iran's ambitions faltered, intensifying the specter of a broader conflict. This development, coupled with the ongoing wars in the region, underscored the precarious balance of power in the Middle East.

The geopolitical turmoil of 2024 highlighted the inadequacies of existing international mechanisms in resolving conflicts and fostering cooperation. The US-China rivalry remained a defining feature of global politics, compelling nations to navigate alliances with increasing caution. Meanwhile, climate change and technological advancements underscored the interconnectedness of contemporary challenges, demanding collective action that transcends national borders.

The events of 2024 serve as a stark reminder of the urgent need for adaptive governance, resilient institutions, and a renewed commitment to multilateralism. As the world grapples with these complexities, the lessons of this turbulent year must inform a future where cooperation and innovation prevail over division and strife. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)

## Transform your life in 2025

By: Narvijay Yadav

Decluttering your life can bring clarity to achieve your 2025 goals. Drawing a few tips from my book Rock Solid Willpower, here's a guide to simplify your life, setting the stage for a successful year ahead.

As 2024 comes to a close, it's the perfect time to reflect and prepare for a fresh start. Transformation is deeply tied to simplifying various aspects of our lives—mentally, physically, and emotionally. When we declutter, we create space for clarity, focus, and growth. This is especially important as we enter 2025, a year full of opportunities to turn aspirations into reality.

Decluttering isn't just about getting rid of physical items. It's about shedding the unnecessary weight that holds us back. Begin by simplifying your home environment. A clutter-free living space can significantly impact your mindset, making you feel lighter and more in control. Take time to go through your wardrobe and donate what no longer serves you. In the kitchen, clear out expired items and organize your storage to ensure you only keep what you need. You'll create an environment conducive to productivity and peace of mind by eliminating distractions.

Our digital lives also require attention. The constant barrage of notifications and endless streams of content can overwhelm us, making it difficult to focus on what truly matters. Unfollow social media accounts that no longer inspire you. Clean your inbox by unsubscribing from unnecessary newsletters and organ-



izing emails into folders. Additionally, streamline your digital files; delete outdated and back up necessary data. A well-organized digital space will help you focus on meaningful tasks and limit distractions that divert your attention from your goals.

Financial clutter is another area to address. It's easy to overlook subscriptions we no longer use or unnecessary expenses that add up over time. Take a moment to review your finances, cancel unused services, and organize your financial documents. Digitizing vital records and shredding outdated ones can also reduce physical clutter. Streamlining your financial commitments gives you a clearer view of your resources, allowing you to make better decisions and save more for the future.

Perhaps the most profound decluttering takes place emotionally. Emotional baggage can weigh heavily, hindering personal growth and happiness. It's important to reflect on relationships, whether unresolved is-

sues need addressing or toxic connections that should be released. Setting boundaries or forgiving past grievances can lighten your emotional load and open space for more positive experiences. Practices like journaling, meditation, or simply taking quiet moments to process your emotions can aid in this emotional cleansing. Entering the new year with a lighter heart allows for greater resilience and an openness to new opportunities.

Equally important is decluttering your schedule. An overpacked calendar can lead to burnout, leaving little room for self-care and creativity. Assess your commitments and eliminate those that don't align with your priorities. Consider using planners or productivity apps to organize tasks effectively and make room for breaks. By simplifying your schedule, you'll have more energy to devote to what truly matters in the new year.

When we declutter, we create space for new ideas, opportunities, and personal growth. Simplifying our environment, digital world, finances, emotions, and schedules prepares us for transformation. A well-organized life is not just about order; it's a key foundation for developing willpower, discipline, and focus. As my book Rock Solid Willpower discussed, an organized life is essential to achieving long-term success. By embracing the power of decluttering, you can enter 2025 with clarity, determination, and the resilience needed to achieve your goals. Make this year your year of transformation! (The writer is a senior journalist & columnist. Views are personal. He can be reached at narvijayindia@gmail.com)



# Singapore 2024: A new prime minister in saddle, city-state elevates ties with India

**SINGAPORE, Dec 28:** After two decades, the baton changed hands in the city-state in 2024, a planned transition to the fourth generation of People's Action Party politicians. Ties with India were elevated this year.

Economist Lawrence Wong, 51, succeeded Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, 72, who relinquished his position in May after holding the office since 2004. Both belong to the ruling party that has been driving Singapore's economic progress for more than five decades.

As India and Singapore celebrate 60 years of diplomacy in 2025, the two countries elevated their bilateral relations to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership during the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in September.

Indian High Commissioner to Singapore Shilpak Ambule called 2024 an "eventful year for India-Singapore relations".

He said the elevation of bilateral ties would support India's economic growth in the years ahead.

During Modi's visit, the two sides also announced their intention to collaborate in the semiconductor industry. India is also looking at major investments from Singaporean companies.

The 2nd round of the India-Singapore Ministerial Roundtable in August was an unprecedented gathering of ministers. Four senior ministers from India and six from Singapore explored opportunities in new fields.

"This 4+6 meeting was unprecedented for both sides. The 10

senior ministers have identified digitalisation, skills development, sustainability, healthcare and medicine, advanced manufacturing and connectivity as pillars for further strengthening bilateral cooperation," Ambule said.

"We also had several other ministerial and official level visits from both sides throughout the year, signifying the importance given by both sides to the bilateral relations," he added.

During Modi's visit, the two sides decided to set up a Cyber Policy Dialogue and an inaugural dialogue was held in Singapore in October.

Wong joined Modi when India launched the Declaration on Digital Public Infrastructure, AI and Data for Governance at the G20 Summit in Brazil in November.



The Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry's engagement with India in 2024 has helped strengthen the economic links between the two nations, with SICCI providing local firms with market outreach and advice

on the Indian market, former prime minister Lee Hsien Loong said.

The chamber has participated in global investment summits, roadshows and trade missions, including key areas like

telecommunications.

SICCI sparked "India Fever", an initiative to deepen trade, investment, and diplomatic ties. "This initiative has fuelled six successful trade missions in the last 18 months, all led by SICCI Internationalising sub-committee," its chairman Neil Parekh Parekh said.

Key events in 2024 included the inaugural ASEAN-India Women Scientists Conclave, an e-workshop on digital health and medical technologies and another on the green economy.

Singaporean Minister for Home Affairs and Law K Shanmugam attended the World Tamil Diaspora Day 2024 in Chennai in January at the invitation of the Tamil Nadu government. Tamil is one of the four official languages in Singapore, reflecting the close-knit

ties between the two nations.

The 31st edition of the Singapore-India Maritime Bilateral Exercise (SIMBEX) was held in India in October. Soldiers from both countries took part in Agni Warrior, another regular military exercise. The 12th edition of Joint Military Training was held in India from October 4 to December 16.

India also hosted the expanded 4th edition of the Singapore-India-Thailand Maritime Exercise in November.

Back home, a Singapore court sentenced S Iswaran, a cabinet member for 13 years, to a year in prison for obstructing justice and receiving more than USD 300,000 worth of gifts in the city-state's first political corruption trial for nearly half a century. (PTI)

Since 2017, some 400 civilians have been killed by such accidental strikes by the military

## Airstrike on insurgents mistakenly killed 10 civilians, Nigerian military says



**DAKAR (Senegal), Dec 28:** An airstrike targeting an armed group in northwestern Nigeria mistakenly killed at least 10 civilians, the West African nation's military said Friday.

The villagers were killed on Christmas Day when the air force targeted a logistics base of the Lakurawa insurgent group in the Silame area of Sokoto state, Edward Buba, Nigerian defense spokesperson, told journalists at a press conference.

On Thursday, the Sokoto state government said the air force mistakenly shelled the villagers in the early hours of Wednesday in an attempt to dislodge the insurgents from the area.

However, on Friday, Buba said only that the Lakurawa insurgents were directly hit by munitions and that the civilians died from "secondary explosions".

The Lakurawa insurgent group began infil-

trating Africa's most populous country following a wave of coups that disrupted Nigeria's relations with neighbouring Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, hurting their ability to cooperate on transnational threats.

Initially gaining local support by helping communities defend themselves against armed cattle rustlers, the group later sought to impose strict Islamic laws across border communities of the French-speaking countries.

Airstrikes on civilians happen frequently in the country. Last year, at least 85 civilians were killed when an army drone attack erroneously targeted a religious gathering in northwest Nigeria.

Since 2017, some 400 civilians have been killed by such accidental strikes by the military, according to the Lagos-based SBM Intelligence security firm.

Before the Lakurawa insurgents, Nigeria had been battling Boko Haram in the northeastern part of the country. Boko Haram launched an insurgency in 2009 to establish its radical interpretation of Islamic law, or Sharia, in the region.

The group has since splintered into different factions, together accounting for the deaths of at least 35,000 people and the displacement of more than 2 million, as well as a humanitarian crisis with millions of people in dire need of foreign aid. (AP)

## Israeli airstrikes hit Yemen airport as jet with hundreds onboard was landing, UN official says

**UNITED NATIONS, Dec 28:** Israeli airstrikes hit Yemen's main airport as a civilian Airbus 320 with hundreds of passengers on board was landing and a UN delegation was waiting to leave, the UN's top humanitarian official in Yemen said Friday.

Julien Harneis told UN reporters that the most frightening thing about the two airstrikes on Thursday wasn't their effect on him and about 15 others in the VIP lounge at the international airport in Yemen's capital, Sanaa, including the head of the UN World Health Organisation.

Rather, it was the destruction of the airport control tower as a Yemenia Airways plane was taxiing in after touching down.

"Fortunately, that plane was able to land safely and the passengers were able to disembark, but it could have been far, far worse," said Harneis, who was with WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus in the lounge. He said one airstrike landed approximately 300 metres (330 yards) south of the VIP lounge and another about 300 metres to the north around 4:45 pm, while about five members of the UN team were outside the building.

"Not only obviously did we have zero indication of any potential airstrikes, but we cannot remember the last time there were airstrikes in Sanaa during daylight hours," Harneis said in a video news conference from Sanaa. The UN said at least three people were killed and dozens injured in the strike. Among the injured was a crew member from the UN Humanitarian Air Service, which was about to fly the UN delegation of some 20 people out of Sanaa.

He suffered a serious leg injury from shrapnel and lost a lot of blood, Harneis said.

Immediately after the airstrikes, Harneis said, UN security officials moved the delegation out of the VIP building and into five armoured cars where they waited for approximately 40 minutes to ascertain what happened and help the injured crew member.

He was taken to a hospital in Sanaa and underwent four hours of surgery while the rest of the delegation spent the night in a UN compound, Harneis said. The UN plane with Tedros and the UN team, including the injured crew member, was able to depart for Jordan on Friday afternoon — without an operating control tower. The United Nations said the injured crew member was taken to a hospital in Jordan, and Tedros was heading back to Geneva, where WHO is based. Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels, who control Sanaa and much of the country's north, have gone after Israel since it started attacking Gaza following the Oct 7, 2023 attacks by Gaza's Hamas militants on southern Israel. The Houthis have attacked ships in the Red Sea, disrupting one of the world's main maritime routes, and recently stepped up missile and drone attacks on Israel.

Israel has escalated its response.

The Israeli army said it wasn't aware that the WHO chief or UN delegation were at the Sanaa airport on Thursday. Israel said it bombed the airport because it is used by the Houthis and Iran. Harneis responded, stressing that the airport is civilian, not military, and is used for transporting UN and other humanitarian workers, and for one civilian flight — Yemenia to and from Amman, Jordan. The flight operates as a result of an international agreement, and thousands of Yemenis have used the flight to get advanced medical treatment abroad, he said. (AP)

## Canadian Cabinet ministers meet with Trump's nominee for commerce secretary

**TORONTO, Dec 28:** Two Canadian Cabinet ministers left a meeting at Mar-a-Lago on Friday without assurances President-elect Donald Trump will back away from threatened tariffs on all products from the major American trading partner.

The Canadians called the talks "productive" and said there would be further discussions but one official said the Americans remain fixated on the US trade deficit with Canada. Finance Minister Dominic LeBlanc and Foreign Minister Melanie Joly met with Howard Lutnick, Trump's nominee for commerce secretary, as well as North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum, Trump's pick to lead the Interior Department.

Trump has threatened to impose 25% tariffs on all Canadian products if Canada does not stem what he calls a flow of migrants and fentanyl into the United States — even though far fewer of each cross into the US from Canada than from Mexico, which Trump has also threatened.

"Minister LeBlanc and Minister Joly had a positive, productive meeting at Mar-a-Lago with Howard Lutnick and Doug Burgum, as a follow-up to the dinner between the Prime Minister and President Trump last month," said Jean-Sébastien Comeau, a spokesman for LeBlanc.

Comeau said both ministers outlined the measures in Canada's billion-dollar plan to increase security at the border and reiterated "the shared commitment to strengthen border security as well as combat the harm caused by fentanyl to save Canadian and American lives." Comeau said Lutnick and Burgum agreed to relay the information to Trump.

A senior Canadian official, however, said the Americans remain preoccupied on the US trade deficit with Canada and want it to shrink. The official spoke on condition of anonymity as they were not authorised to speak publicly on the matter. Trump has made an issue of the US trade deficit, erroneously calling it a subsidy.

Canada's ambassador to Washington, Kirsten Hillman, has said the US had a \$75 billion trade deficit with Canada last year. But she noted a third of what Canada sells into the US are energy exports and said there is a deficit when oil prices are high.

About 60% of US crude oil imports and 85% of US electricity imports are from Canada. Alberta



alone sends 4.3 million barrels of oil per day to the US which tends to consume about 20 million barrels a day. The Trump transition team did not immediately respond to a message seeking comment.

Further discussions are expected in the coming weeks. Joly will also have dinner with US Senator Lindsey Graham on Friday.

Trump has been trolling Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on social media in recent weeks by calling him the Governor of the 51st state. Trudeau has not directly responded, but did post a link Thursday to a six-minute video on YouTube from 2010 in which American NBC journalist Tom Brokaw "explains Canada to Americans." "Some information about Canada for Americans" Trudeau wrote in the post on X.

The video, which originally aired during the 2010 Vancouver Olympics, explains similarities between the two countries, the massive trading relationship and the actions of the Canadian military in World War 2 and Afghanistan.

"In our darkest hours Canada has been with us," Brokaw says in the video. "In the long history of sovereign neighbours there has never been a relationship as close, productive and peaceful as the US and Canada." Trudeau has told Trump that Americans would also suffer if the president-elect follows through on a plan to impose sweeping tariffs on Canadian products.

Nearly \$3.6 billion Canadian dollars (\$2.7 billion) worth of goods and services cross the border each day. Canada is the top export destination for 36 US states.

Flows of migrants and seizures of drugs are vastly different at the US' two land borders. US customs agents seized 43 pounds of fentanyl at the Canadian border during the last fiscal year, compared with 21,100 pounds at the Mexican border. Most of the fentanyl reaching the US — where it causes about 70,000 overdose deaths annually — is made by Mexican drug cartels using precursor chemicals smuggled from Asia. (AP)

## Janet Yellen tells Congress US could hit debt limit in mid-January

**WASHINGTON, Dec 28:** US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said her agency will need to start taking "extraordinary measures," or special accounting maneuvers intended to prevent the nation from hitting the debt ceiling, as early as January 14, in a letter sent to congressional leaders Friday afternoon.

"Treasury expects to hit the statutory debt ceiling between January 14 and January 23," Yellen wrote in a letter addressed to House and Senate leadership, at which point extraordinary measures would be used to prevent the government from breaching the nation's debt ceiling — which has been suspended until Jan 1, 2025.

The department has in the past deployed what are known as "extraordinary measures" or accounting maneuvers to keep the government operating. But once those measures run out the government risks defaulting on its debt unless lawmakers and the president agree to lift the limit on the US government's ability to borrow.

"I respectfully urge Congress to act to protect the full faith and credit of the United States," she said.

The news comes after President Joe Biden signed a bill into law last week that averted a government shutdown but did not include President-elect Donald Trump's core debt demand to raise or suspend the nation's debt limit. The bill was approved

by Congress only after fierce internal debate among Republicans over how to handle Trump's demand. "Anything else is a betrayal of our country," Trump said in a statement.

After a protracted debate in the summer of 2023 over how to fund the government, policymakers crafted the Fiscal Responsibility Act, which included suspending the nation's \$31.4 trillion borrowing authority until Jan 1, 2025.

Notably however, Yellen said, on Jan 2 the debt is projected to temporarily decrease due to a scheduled redemption of nonmarketable securities held by a federal trust fund associated with Medicare payments. As a result, "Treasury does not expect that it will be necessary to start taking extraordinary measures on January 2 to prevent the United States from defaulting on its obligations," she said.

The federal debt currently stands at roughly \$36 trillion — which ballooned across both Republican and Democratic administrations. And the spike in inflation after the coronavirus pandemic pushed up government borrowing costs such that debt service next year will exceed spending on national security.

Republicans, who will have full control of the White House, House and Senate in the new year, have big plans to extend Trump's 2017 tax cuts and other priorities but debate over how to pay for them. (AP)

## Manmohan Singh put US-India relations on 'fundamentally new footing': Condoleezza Rice

**SAN FRANCISCO, Dec 28:** Former prime minister Manmohan Singh was a great leader who helped to put US-India relations on a "fundamentally new footing" with the landmark Civilian Nuclear Agreement between the two nations, former US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has said.

Singh, who was India's prime minister for 10 years from 2004 to 2014 died in New Delhi on Thursday night. He was 92.

"I am very saddened to learn of the passing of India's former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh — a great man and a great leader who helped to put US-Indian relations on a fundamentally new footing with the landmark US-India Civilian Nuclear Agreement of 2008," Rice said in a post on X on Friday.

Rice, 70, was Secretary of State from 2005 to 2009 and before that she served as the National Security Advisor from 2001 to 2005, both under the then President George W Bush. Those eight years are seen as years that transformed the India-US relationship, in particular the

landmark civil nuclear deal that was initiated jointly by Singh and Bush.

"Prime Minister Singh risked his political future and then remade his government to gain the support needed to secure a deal that would ultimately change the geopolitical trajectory of the region and have far-reaching implications for decades to come. I extend my deepest condolences to the people of India for this great loss — may he rest in eternal peace," Rice said.

Meanwhile, Indian American Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi also mourned Singh's death.

Singh "played a key role in both modernising India's economy and strengthening ties with the United States. His vision for a better India and a better world will continue," Krishnamoorthi said in a statement.



of millions of Indians". She said Singh's visionary reforms inspired countless young economists like her.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Singh's passing is a loss for India and the world.

"As one of its longest-serving leaders, he transformed the country's economy, lifted millions out of poverty, and built strong bridges with the world — including Canada," he said.

USA India Chamber of Commerce (USAIC), which holds the annual India-US Health Care Summit in Boston, said that it had received a letter from Singh in 2007 ahead of its first such meeting and noted that the former prime minister was a strong supporter of global partnerships and innovation in biopharmaceutical.

"His message of encouragement for USAIC's inaugural BioPharma Summit in Boston 18 years ago

continues to inspire us. He was a great human being, a visionary, an outstanding leader and a statesman. Dr Singh laid a strong foundation for taking the US-India relationship to the next level. He was one of the greatest champions of the US-India strategic partnership. His loss is deeply felt, but his legacy will endure," said USAIC president Karun Rishi. Ronak D Desai, partner and a leading Indian practitioner at Paul Hastings law firm, said Singh's passing is not merely the end of a remarkable life but the conclusion of a pivotal chapter in modern Indian history.

The Indian Embassy in Washington DC on Friday announced that a condolence book for the departed dignity will be kept open at the embassy premises on December 30 and 31.

"Members of the public are invited to sign the book and add brief written condolences from 1000 — 1700 hrs on December 30 and 31 at the Embassy of India, 2107 Massachusetts Avenue, Washington DC," a media release said. (PTI)



## 7 acres of illegal poppy cultivation destroyed in Manipur



**IMPHAL, Dec 28:** Seven acres of illegal poppy cultivation was destroyed by a combined team of security forces and forest department officials in Manipur's Churachandpur district, police said on Saturday.

"A joint team of Manipur Police, Assam Rifles, Forest department and executive magistrate conducted poppy destruction on Friday in T Lhanghoimol area of Churachandpur district and destroyed 7 acres of poppy cultivation," the police said.

An FIR has been registered and efforts are on to identify and book the cultivators, the police added. (PTI)

# Manipur CM condemns firing by militants in Imphal East

*Video journalist was injured in firing by armed men from the hills*

**IMPHAL, Dec 28:** Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Saturday strongly condemned the indiscriminate firing by militants in Thamnepokpi and Sanasabi areas of Imphal East district in which four persons were injured.

The CM in a post on X said, "Strongly condemn the indiscriminate firing by Kuki militants at Sanasabi and Thamnepokpi in Imphal East, which injured civilians and security personnel. This cowardly and unprovoked attack on innocent lives is an assault on peace and harmony."

Singh said additional security forces have been rushed to the affected areas and called for calm and unity in the wake of such challenges.

"Adequate security personnel have been rushed to the affected areas. The injured are receiving



necessary medical assistance, and the government calls for calm and unity in the face of such challenges. Central forces and state police should have proper

coordination and understanding when dealing with such situations," Singh added.

A video journalist was injured in firing by armed men from the hills

in Manipur's Imphal East district on Saturday morning, police said.

L Kabichandra, a video journalist of a private TV channel, sustained bullet injuries on his left thigh and was rushed to a hospital, they said, adding that he was hit by a bullet fired likely by a sniper.

Kabichandra was reporting the attack by armed men at Thamnepokpi village since Friday.

Security forces also retaliated the fire, they said.

On Friday night firing by militants towards Thamnepokpi in Imphal East district from the surrounding hills of Kangpokpi district an elderly woman was injured. She was rushed to Yaingangpokpi Primary Health Centre for treatment and is out of danger.

Earlier on Friday, two persons including a security personnel were injured in firing at Sanasabi. (PTI)

## Massive search underway in Imphal East for armed men



**IMPHAL/ CHURACHANDPUR, Dec 28:** A massive search was started in Manipur's Imphal East district on Saturday evening for the armed men who were involved in the recent incidents of shooting at Thamnepokpi and Sanasabi, police said.

Combined teams of police, Army, CRPF and BSF were conducting the search in Yaingangpokpi and the surrounding hill areas, they said. "The operations will continue till the area is clear of armed miscreants," they said in a statement. However, a team of security forces was stopped near Sai-

bol village by tribal women and asked to go back. They had to return from there, officials said.

Meanwhile, a huge cache of arms and ammunition was recovered from near Muallum village in Kuki-dominated Churachandpur district, officials said.

Among the items seized were an INSAS rifle with a magazine, a 9 mm country-made pistol with a magazine, and a single-barrel rifle with a magazine, they said.

The recovered items were handed over to the Singhat police station for further legal procedures, they added. (PTI)

## Mizoram in 2024 sees ZPM govt prioritising reforms

*Mizoram faces brunt of Manipur violence, refugee influx*

**AIZAWL, Dec 28:** A series of administrative reforms, the passage of a record 46 Bills in the assembly within the first year of the ZPM dispensation and strong opposition to the central government's decision to fence the Myanmar border and scrap the free movement regime took centre stage in Mizoram in 2024.

The ripple effect of the ethnic violence in neighbouring Manipur and the boundary dispute with Assam remained a matter of concern for the Christian-majority Mizoram. The northeastern state continued to bear the brunt of refugee influx from Myanmar, Bangladesh and Manipur due to crises in the neighbouring countries and the state.

Soon after the Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) assumed charge in December 2023, Chief Minister Lalduhoma decided to deal with an illegal and decades-long practice of hiring proxies by government employees with an iron fist.

"In June, the government identified over 3,600 employees, who hired proxies on their behalf to work at their places of posting. The government directed them to be present at their places of posting and warned them of action if they violated the order," an official said.

A performance revision exercise, announced by the chief minister, also sparked reactions among government employees.

"The CM had recently announced that in a bid to improve service quality and productivity,

the performance of government employees is being reviewed and the administration would take steps to release those who are no longer worth employing and not fit to continue, through voluntary retirement," the official said.

Lalduhoma claimed that his government has brought "significant administrative and moral reforms in just a year" in office by introducing several changes in the system.

He said that the ZPM government "legislated 46 laws within one year to bring reforms in several sectors".

The decision of the Centre to fence the India-Myanmar border received stiff opposition from the Mizoram government and civil society organisations since the beginning of the year.

Mizoram shares a 510-km-long international border with Myanmar. In February, the state assembly adopted a resolution opposing the plan to fence the India-Myanmar border and scrap the free movement regime (FMR) with the neighbouring country.

Thousands of people held massive rallies in the Mizoram-Myanmar border villages in May, protesting the Centre's decision to fence the international boundary and lift the FMR with the neighbouring country.

The relationship between Mizoram and Manipur deteriorated with Lalduhoma and Rajya Sabha member K Vanlalvena advocating the imposition of the President's rule

in the neighbouring state to curb the conflict.

Both of them came in for a lot of flak from the Manipur government for their comments.

Vanlalvena had said that new administrative units should be created separately for the warring Meitei community and Kuki-Zo people to bring a lasting solution to the conflict as the divide between the two communities is very 'deep'.

Several political parties, including the ruling ZPM, came out with strong condemnation when a Mizo woman was allegedly raped and killed by miscreants at Zairawn village in Manipur's Jiribam district on November 7 as well as when 10 Hmar-Mizo people were gunned down by security forces in Jakuradhor area in the same district on November 11.

The security forces claimed that they were militants.

The border dispute with neighbouring Assam continued to be a pressing concern but a series of talks and a slew of decisions in these meetings to resolve the issue were a silver lining.

During the fourth round of talks held in Aizawl on August 9, delegations of both states agreed to promote and maintain peace along the inter-state border in efforts to resolve the long pending boundary dispute.

The delegations had decided that administrative authorities of concerned border districts of both states would organise joint cultural and sports festivals commencing

before March 31 next year to improve relations.

Both sides had also reaffirmed their commitment to continue with a zero-tolerance policy towards the transportation of smuggled areca nuts from neighbouring countries.

Mizoram continued to face the influx of refugees from Myanmar, Bangladesh and Manipur due to crises in the neighbouring countries and the state.

The northeastern state now hosts 42,000 refugees from Myanmar, Bangladesh and internally displaced people from Manipur.

However, more than 500 Myanmar soldiers, who fled to Mizoram after their camps were overrun and captured by ethnic armed organisations, were repatriated to their country in January.

In electoral politics, the ruling ZPM won the lone Lok Sabha seat in June but lost the Sinlung Hills Council (SHC) polls in November to the opposition Mizo National Front (MNF).

The SHC polls were the first civic body polls after the ZPM won the state assembly elections by securing 27 out of 40 seats in November 2023.

Mizoram experienced a devastating monsoon this year, leading to the destruction of over 3,000 properties, including churches and schools.

At least 34 people were killed in several places within the state capital region due to landslides triggered by heavy rain as a fall out of cyclone Remal in May. (PTI)

## NSCN-IM condoles death of Manmohan Singh

**DIMAPUR, Dec 28:** NSCN-IM general secretary Th Muivah condoned the death of former PM of India Manmohan Singh on Saturday saying the Nagas have lost an important leader who was sincere in addressing their rights.

"Naga people have lost an important Indian leader who not only comprehended our history but was also sincere in addressing our rights," Muivah said this while issuing a condolence message this evening.

Th Muivah then said that Manmohan Singh was a leader of great vision and integrity, instrumental in advancing the Indo-Naga peace talks. According to the NSCN-IM leader, under Manmohan Singh's leadership, a team from his council of ministers was tasked with engaging the NSCN-IM leadership, reflecting his (Dr. Manmohan Singh) genuine commitment to resolving the Naga issue.

Muivah then recalled that, in the year 2010, he (Muivah) had the privilege of heading an NSCN-IM delegation to meet Manmohan Singh. "Aware of the complexities of the Naga political issue, he (Dr. Manmohan Singh) thoughtfully remarked, 'The Naga political issue can be solved outside the box', showcasing his profound understanding and willingness to explore innovative solutions", Muivah also said.

The NSCN-IM leader then expressed, "I offer my heartfelt condolences to his family and the people of India. May his soul rest in eternal peace." (NNN)

## Bandh paralyses normal life in Imphal Valley



**IMPHAL, Dec 28:** Normal life was affected in the five districts of Imphal Valley on Saturday due to a bandh called over the arrest of six armed men and the death of one in a gunfight with the police in Thoubal on December 14.

Shops and other commercial establishments were closed, while public vehicles remained off the road.

Supporters of the bandh, called by the Joint Action Committee, demonstrated in the middle of the road and burnt tyres at Lamphel Sanakeithel in Imphal West.

In Bishnupur district, bandh supporters vandalised four-wheelers that were out on the roads.

The 24-hour shutdown began at 6 pm on Friday. It was supported by the students' and women's wings of the Coordination Committee on Manipur Integrity (CO-

COMI), a conglomeration of several Meitei civil society bodies.

Police said that the six persons it arrested and the one killed in the gunfight at Salungpham in Thoubal were members of the banned outfit PREPAK who were allegedly involved in extortion activities.

A large cache of arms and ammunition, including those robbed from police armouries, were recovered from their possession, officials said.

However, the bandh supporters contended that they were 'village volunteers', protecting their neighbourhoods from armed Kuki men.

More than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo groups in Manipur since May last year. (PTI)

## Tripura minister slams former CM over report on Tourism Promo Fest

**HT Correspondent**

**AGARTALA, Dec 28:** Tourism minister Sushanta Chowdhury on Saturday criticised former Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar for allegedly spreading misinformation regarding the recently held Tripura Tourism Promo Fest. Minister Chowdhury challenged Sarkar to substantiate claims that ₹ 7 crore was misused during the event, which aimed to showcase the state's tourism potential.

The Tripura Tourism Promo Fest, held for the first time, concluded with a grand finale featuring a live performance by renowned singer Shreya Ghoshal at Swami Vivekananda Maidan in Agartala. Sarkar, however, questioned the expenditures, claiming, "₹ 7 crore was spent on music in one night. Ministers were sitting till midnight—I don't know if they were dancing."

Responding sharply, Chowdhury accused the former CM of baseless allegations and highlighted the neglect of tourism during the 20-year rule of the CPI(M). "During your tenure, the tourism department was virtually non-functional, used only to promote leftist ideology through comrade artists. You did nothing to promote destinations like Jampui, Dumbur, or Chobimura, which remained underutilized due to fear of extremism,"

Chowdhury said. He also pointed out dark incidents from the CPI(M) era, including the murders of health minister Bimal Sinha, opposition MLA Madhusudan Saha, and Sadar Sub-Divisional Magistrate Shukhrum Debbarma. "Tripura was notorious for such incidents during your time. Tourists avoided the state for security reasons," the minister added.

Chowdhury dismissed Sarkar's remarks as an attempt to downplay the success of Promo Fest-2024, which received widespread public appreciation. "Even CPI(M) MLAs took passes for their families to attend the event. Instead of criticizing the government's efforts, you should acknowledge the enthusiasm the festival generated," he said.

The minister further taunted Sarkar, suggesting he could have witnessed the public excitement from the roof of his residence or while driving through the city. Chowdhury also accused Sarkar of political irrelevance, stating, "Your criticism stems from frustration over the CPI(M)'s loss of public acceptance."

Concluding his statement, Chowdhury challenged Sarkar to provide evidence supporting his claims. "You were the chief minister for 20 years. If you can, show where and how ₹ 7 crore was spent. Speak responsibly and judge the government's achievements constructively," he said.

## Tripura CM lays stress on rare blood groups stock

**HT Correspondent**

**AGARTALA, Dec 28:** Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Saturday emphasised the need to store negative blood groups in blood banks and stressed the importance of creating awareness about blood donation.

Saha said this while addressing a blood donation camp organized by the Nine Bullets Club on Saturday.

"Nine Bullets Club is known as a football club, but after coming here, I learned that the club is engaged in various other activities, including social work. They help people by distributing clothes, assisting the poor, and more. During COVID-19, they worked tirelessly. I am glad to see that the President and Secretary of the club are women. Our government is also committed to working for the welfare of women. I feel good to be here. The government will do its best for the de-

velopment of society. Initiatives like blood donation create a healthy atmosphere," said Saha.

He mentioned that the state government has taken steps towards achieving a "Nasha Mukta Tripura," but this goal will only be possible if every club comes forward to combat the drug menace.

"We must hold healthy discussions on social awareness at least once a week. Everyone must come forward and join clubs. Whenever I receive an invitation for a blood donation camp, I generally don't miss it. There are no alternatives to blood donation. We must ensure the availability of blood in blood banks. Negative blood groups constitute around 15% of the total, and we must focus on storing them. It is crucial to encourage others to donate blood, and for that, awareness is needed. However, we must also ensure a balanced collection and storage of blood," he added.

## Huge cache of weapons recovered in Arunachal's Changlang



**HT Correspondent**

**DIBRUGARH, Dec 28:** Security forces recovered huge cache of weapons near MS 27 along Miao-Vijaynagar axis in Arunachal Pradesh's Changlang district.

The joint operation was carried out under Spear Corps by Assam Rifles, Army and local police involved extensive search efforts by specialized teams, supported by advanced technology such as high technology drones, tracker dogs and metal detectors.

"During the operation, a total of ten MQ 81 Chinese origin Assault Rifles/Type 81 Aslt Rifles were recovered from different locations around MS27, making it one of the largest recoveries in South Arunachal in recent past. The weapons were concealed inside forest area," said an official of Army.

He said, "These weapons were being searched by major insurgent groups operating in Changlang district for more than six months."

It is alleged that these weapons were buried by ENNG before their surrender last year.

The security forces utilizing their expertise and reliable intelligence have managed to uncover the hidden cache in thickly forest area.

"Prior to conduct of operation, the security personals ensured safe passage to the tourists present in Namdapha Reserve Forest for bird sighting. The operation was carried out with the utmost professionalism and precision, ensuring that huge cache of weapons didn't fall in the hands of insurgents," the official said. Numerous inputs regarding attempts by various insurgent groups, especially NSCM(IM) & NSCN (KYA) with the help of merged ENNG cadres to recover the said cache were being received in last six months.

This achievement underscores the continued dedication of our security forces to maintaining peace and security in the region.

## Students learn to measure the solar diameter using simple yet effective techniques

# USTM workshop on astronomy kindles imagination among students in Assam

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Dec 28:** Astronomy, often considered a gateway to fostering scientific temperament, took center stage at Borhat Higher Secondary School in Charaidi District of Assam as the Astro-Science Centre and Observatory (ASCO) of the University of Science & Technology Meghalaya (USTM) conducted a "One-Day Workshop on Day Time Astronomy." The programme commenced with an inaugural session led by the school's Principal, Jitu Moni Bhuyan, who outlined the objectives of the workshop in the presence of all faculty members. Nitu Borgohain, assistant professor of Physics at USTM, delivered a popular talk titled "Our Position in the Cosmos," which provided a broader perspective of humanity's place in the universe. This was followed by an engaging hands-on activity where students learned to measure the solar diameter using simple yet effective techniques.

Over 600 students enthusiastically participated, immersing themselves in the activities that



combined theoretical knowledge with practical application. Both students and teachers expressed gratitude to USTM for bringing such an enriching experience to their remote locality.

"The workshop was not only informative but also deeply inspiring," said a participating student. Teachers echoed similar sentiments, emphasizing the importance

of such programs in fostering scientific awareness. They urged USTM to organize more such events in the future.

Borgohain lauded the students' enthusiasm, noting, "Their eagerness to learn is a testament to the universal appeal of astronomy. We hope to continue nurturing such curiosity through our outreach initiatives."

Designed to ignite curiosity and enhance understanding of celestial phenomena, the workshop introduced students to the wonders of the universe through hands-on activities. While nighttime skies often captivate budding astronomers, the event emphasized daytime activities that help students explore celestial objects, their sizes, and their trajectories.

## ACHIEVEMENT



Researcher in the Department of English, Tezpur University, Sonali Singha was awarded her PhD by the University of Tezpur for her research entitled 'Representations of Africa in Contemporary Black British Fiction by Women'. She was under the supervision of Dr. Sanjib Sahoo. Sonali Singha is the daughter of Indrajit Singha and Rajani Terangpi, residents of Dokmoka town in Karbi Anglong.

She was conferred the PhD by the University of Tezpur at the Convocation held at Tezpur College on 27 December. She is a Professor at Assam Don Bosco University, Azara, Guwahati.



The inquiry was ordered based on a complaint by Congress leader

# AAP's 'Mahila Samman' scheme faces probe over 'illegal data collection' charge

**NEW DELHI, Dec 28:** Delhi Lt Governor V K Saxena has ordered an inquiry against private persons allegedly gathering personal details of women in the name of Mahila Samman Yojana, his office said on Saturday.

The AAP alleged that the BJP wanted to stop its scheme and is afraid of a defeat in the Assembly polls scheduled in February.

The LG also said that the chief secretary of the Delhi government may bring the matter to the knowledge of the Election Commission of India through the chief electoral officer given that such canvassing is happening ahead of the election.

The inquiry was ordered based on a complaint by Congress leader and party's New Delhi Assembly seat candidate Sandeep Dikshit, who recently met Saxena at Raj Niwas.



In a letter addressed to the chief secretary and police commissioner, LG's principal secretary said, "Hon'ble Lieutenant Governor has desired the Chief Secretary to get an inquiry conducted through Divisional Commissioner

in the matter of collection of personal details and forms by non-government people."

It said the police commissioner may direct the field officers to take action as per law against any person found breaching the pri-

vacy of citizens by collecting their personal details in the name of enrolling them for "benefits."

On Wednesday, Dikshit met Saxena and expressed his apprehensions about the Mahila Samman Yojana, under which the Delhi government has promised to give every woman in the city, aged above 18, ₹ 1,000 per month.

The AAP said if it gets elected again, the government will raise the amount to ₹ 2,100 per month.

Dikshit, according to the letter, alleged that the AAP workers were going door-to-door meeting women, and making them sign some forms.

"Dikshit has requested that because of the clarification submitted by the Women and Child Development Department, GNCTD, it is clear that this is a fraud being perpetrated by the

AAP and has requested to institute a high-level inquiry into the matter," the letter read.

The WCD Department earlier this week published a public notice in newspapers saying it would launch a digital portal for the collection of forms as and when the scheme is notified.

The department advised people not to fill out forms handed to them by unauthorised persons.

The AAP, in response, has alleged that the inquiry came not from the Delhi LG but from the "office" of BJP leader Amit Shah.

The ruling party in Delhi charged that the BJP did not respect the women and claimed that the Mahila Samman Yojana was getting the full support of the women of the city.

The party claimed that more than 22 lakh women were already registered for the scheme. (PTI)

## Sarpanch's murder: Huge protest in Beed; even Mahayuti MLAs demand Dhananjay Munde's ouster



**BEED, Dec 28:** Thousands of people gathered in Maharashtra's Beed city on Saturday to protest against the brutal murder of Massajog sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh as even MLAs from ruling parties demanded the sacking of NCP minister Dhananjay Munde.

Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange, Chhatrapati Sambhaji of the Kolhapur royal family, local BJP MLAs Suresh Dhas, Abhimanyu Pawar; NCP MLA Prakash Solanke and NCP (SP) MLAs Jitendra Awhad and Sandeep Kshirsagar participated in the 'aakrosh morcha' or protest march.

The protesters demanded arrest of Walmik Karad, an associate of Dhananjay Munde, a politician from Beed district.

Santosh Deshmukh was abducted and tortured to death on December 9. While four persons have been arrested, Opposition leaders claimed in the state legislature during the winter session that Walmik Karad was the mastermind of the murder.

Karad, named as an accused in a related case of extortion, is still at large.

Vaibhavi Deshmukh, the daughter of the deceased sarpanch, demanded justice for her father during the protest. He lost his life while saving a person from the Dalit community, she said.

Abhimanyu Pawar, who was earlier an aide of chief minister Devendra Fadnis before he became MLA from Ausa in neighbouring Latur district, said the pain caused by Deshmukh's murder was felt in different parts of Maharashtra.

"Even if I am part of the (ruling) dispensation, I want to tell the government that if the accused are not arrested, protests will reach other parts of the state. We want justice for the family of Santosh Deshmukh," he said.

BJP MLA Dhas alleged that Munde, the Food and Civil Supplies Minister, won assembly election from Parli in Beed district with the help of bogus votes.

The Nationalist Congress Party to which Munde belongs is part of the ruling BJP-led Mahayuti coalition. NCP MLA Prakash Solanke said some of the accused were still at large even 19 days after the murder, and Walmik Karad too had not been arrested.

"Dhananjay Munde was the guardian minister of Beed for four of the last five years. Munde needs to be sacked. Until the accused are convicted, Munde should be sacked so that there is an impartial probe," Solanke said.

The Majalgaon constituency which he represents has collected ₹ 40 lakh for the Deshmukh family, he informed.

Quota activist Jarange said the Maratha community will not keep quiet till the deceased, who belonged to the Maratha community, got justice.

"If the CM does not want this protest to spread to other parts of the state, the accused should be arrested and action should be taken against those who are supporting them. There is suspicion that the government is shielding the accused," Jarange said.

The Shiv Sena (UBT) demanded resignations of both Dhananjay Munde and his cousin, BJP minister Pankaja Munde.

According to police, Deshmukh was prima facie killed because he opposed an extortion bid targeting a windmill company in Beed district.

Local NCP leader Vishnu Chate allegedly demanded ₹ 2 crore from the company. Deshmukh tried to intervene, leading to his abduction, torture and murder. Chate is among the four arrested accused. (PTI)

## Political leaders who attack govt officials will not be spared: Andhra Dy CM

**KADAPA (ANDHRA PRADESH), Dec 28:** Andhra Pradesh deputy chief minister Pawan Kalyan on Saturday warned that any political leader who "attacks" or "obstructs" a government official on duty will face stern action.

He issued this warning after visiting a Dalit government official who was allegedly attacked by a local YSRCP leader C Sudarshan Reddy.

"If you (political leaders) attack officials with arrogance, we will ensure you receive fitting punishment," Kalyan told reporters outside Kadapa RIMS Hospital.

According to Kalyan, Sudarshan Reddy, along with several others, allegedly attacked and abused Gaalivedu Mandal Parishad Development Officer (MPDO) Jawahar Babu in Annamayya district, for refusing to hand



over the keys to an official room.

Besides locking Babu in a room and thrashing him, casteist slurs were hurled at him, along with 'death threats', Kalyan said.

He claimed that Sudarshan Reddy has a history of attacking officials, mentioning that he had targeted officials like Sekhar Naik, Pratap, and Srinivas Reddy, in the past.

Castigating the YSRCP,

Kalyan said the party leaders' arrogance had not diminished even after being reduced to 11 seats and urged YS Jagan Mohan Reddy to rein them in.

The deputy chief minister further warned YSRCP leaders and other political figures that attacks on government officials would not be tolerated. Kalyan instructed senior district officials to ensure that such incidents do not recur. (PTI)

## J&K CM Omar Abdullah visits Ganderbal to assess situation after snowfall

**SRINAGAR, Dec 28:** Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah visited his Assembly constituency, Ganderbal, on Saturday to take stock of the situation in the aftermath of snowfall, officials said.

Abdullah visited his constituency to assess the situation first-hand and monitor the district administration's efforts to provide relief to people, they added.

The officials said the chief minister paid an unannounced visit to the district hospital to assess its preparedness in providing healthcare services. He interacted with the hospital staff as well as patients and their attendants, and emphasised the importance of ensuring uninterrupted medical services, the officials said.

They said the chief minister also enquired about the heating arrangements at the hospital, and the availability of staff, essential medicines and other facilities.

Later, he visited the mini-secretariat complex and took stock of the situation across the Union Territory from the deputy commissioner's office at Ganderbal, the officials said.

They said Abdullah chaired a crucial meeting with divisional commissioners of Jammu and Kashmir and all deputy commissioners to review the snow-clearance and power and water supply scenarios.

He directed the officers to take swift action to ensure uninterrupted essential services after the snowfall, the officials said.



Talking to reporters in Ganderbal, Abdullah said he visited Ganderbal to ensure that people do not face much hardships due to the snow.

"I wanted to ensure that the snow-clearance operations on roads were sped up and electricity was restored wherever the lines were snapped. I also wanted to take stock of hospital and essential services," he said.

The chief minister said he is monitoring the situation in other districts of the valley as well. "There are places where electricity has been affected due to snowfall and that would be restored by Saturday evening. Efforts are also on to clear the roads that are blocked due to snow," he said.

Asked about the restoration of water supply in certain areas, the chief minister said wherever the supply can be restored immediately, it would be done, and wherever it would take time, water tankers would be made available. (PTI)

## Close aides holding Nitish captive, calling shots: Tejashwi

**PATNA, Dec 28:** RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav on Saturday claimed that Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar was no longer able to function normally and has become "captive" to a handful of close aides.

Yadav, who had served as Kumar's deputy until the JD(U) supremo's abrupt return to the BJP-led NDA, made the remark in response to queries from journalists here about speculations of yet another volte face by the septuagenarian leader.

"All these rumours have no substance. Nitish Kumar is no longer in his senses. He is unable to run Bihar," he said.

"Kumar is not taking decisions on his own. He has been held captive by four leaders of his party, two in Delhi and the rest here, who are calling the shots," claimed Yadav, who is now the Leader of the Opposition in the state assembly.

To buttress his point, the RJD leader, whose party is a part of INDIA bloc, cited the example of the reply to a letter recently written by former Delhi chief minister and Aam Aadmi Party

supremo Arvind Kejriwal, who had urged Kumar to "rethink" the support to the BJP, in the backdrop of Babasaheb Ambedkar's alleged denigration by Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

"The letter was clearly addressed to Nitish Kumar in his capacity as the chief minister of Bihar and national president of JD(U). But the response came from Sanjay Jha. Who is he?" Yadav said.

Jha, who is the JD(U)'s working president, had come out with a lengthy response to the one-and-a-half-page letter by Kejriwal.

The Rajya Sabha MP had defended Shah and slammed Kejriwal, venting spleen over the treatment given to Bihar migrants in Delhi during the Covid pandemic.

When Yadav was asked whether he thought the state of affairs in the JD(U) was causing resentment among other senior leaders, he replied, "It is for that party to manage its affairs. My concern is that Bihar is being made to suffer". (PTI)

## NDA govt created 'unnecessary controversy' over Manmohan Singh's cremation, memorial: Ashok

**JAIPUR, Dec 28:** Former Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot on Saturday accused the NDA government of creating an "unnecessary controversy" over the cremation and memorial of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

Gehlot claimed that it was under public pressure that the BJP government announced plans to build a memorial for Singh in the future.

Singh, the architect of India's economic reforms, died at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences on Thursday night. He was 92.

"The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government has created an unnecessary controversy over the cremation and memorial of a great personality like Dr Manmohan Singh," Gehlot said on X.

He further stated, "The people of the country have expressed their displeasure over this step of the government, and then, under the pressure of public sentiment, the BJP government announced to build a memorial in the future."

He added that the Government of India is conducting the crema-

tion of a respected personality at Nigam Bodhi Ghat instead of at any special place.

"In 2010, after the death of former Vice President Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, without any demand from the BJP, the Congress government spoke to his family and immediately allotted a special place for his last rites in Jaipur, and a memorial was built there," Gehlot said.

After the death of Bal Thackeray in Maharashtra in 2012, the Congress government allotted a special place in Mumbai's Shivaji Park for his last rites, he noted.

The former CM said that while Congress has always given respectful farewells to leaders of all parties, such behavior by the BJP toward Manmohan Singh is "unfortunate".

The mortal remains of Manmohan Singh reached Delhi's Nighambodhi Ghat crematorium for last rites on Saturday. The procession carrying Singh's mortal remains reached the crematorium at around 11.30 am, where the last rites will be performed shortly. (PTI)

## ABVP's Kashi unit passes resolution on education, environmental conservation during state conference



**LUCKNOW, Dec 28:** The 64th state conference of the Kashi unit of ABVP, the student wing of BJP, concluded in Sultanpur on Saturday, during which four significant resolutions were passed, including "Imposing a ban on the commercialisation and unethical practices in education by coaching institutes."

During this four-day conference, a new executive committee was formed and four major resolutions were passed, including "Imposing a ban on the commercialisation and unethical practices in education by coaching institutes," "Making educational campuses centers for environmental conservation activities," and "A welcoming resolution for the devotees visiting the Mahakumbh 2025."

Around 1,200 student and teacher volunteers from Kashi participated in the conference in Sultanpur which the ABVP also refers to as 'Kushbhavanpur' (the city of Lord Ram's son, Kush).

While Professor Suchita Tripathi was re-elected as president and Abhay Pratap Singh was re-elected as secretary, a statement by the Akhil Bhartiya Vidya Parishad (ABVP) said.

A key resolution emphasised the need for immediate steps by all stakeholders to curb the increasing commercialisation of education and unethical practices by coaching institutes, while promoting human sensitivity and moral values in these institutions.

Another resolution focused on the significant role of campuses in addressing the global environmental crisis, calling for educational campuses to become hubs of environmental conservation activities.

Additionally, a resolution was passed to welcome the devotees and saints arriving from across the world for the upcoming Mahakumbh in Prayagraj.

Apart from these, a resolution hailed the Uttar Pradesh government's "Swami Vivekananda Youth Empowerment Scheme," which is playing a crucial role in empowering the youth of the state.

These resolutions were proposed by regional president Abhay Pratap Singh, national executive council member Abhinav Mishra, and regional joint secretaries Kartikeya Pati Tripathi and Naman Srivastava.

After soliciting suggestions from all delegates, regional president Suchita Tripathi incorporated their feedback and passed these significant resolutions.

ABVP Zonal Organizing Secretary of East UP, Ghanshyam Shahi, who was a keynote speaker, stated in his speech that the youth are the foundation of India and will determine the future course and direction of the nation.

The Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad serves as a nursery for youth personality development, planting the seeds for them to progress with a "Nation First" sentiment.

An ABVP volunteer fulfills not only their academic responsibilities but also their social duties, which distinguishes the organisation from other student groups.

Today, ABVP has emerged as the largest student organisation in the world, a testament to the unwavering dedication and struggles of its members.

ABVP national secretary Ankit Shukla emphasised that ABVP volunteers are committed to re-establishing India on the global stage.

The dream of a developed India can only be realized through the wisdom and knowledge of our ancient traditions. "If we look at history, we see that Indian culture has been far more advanced than any other civilisation," he said. (PTI)

## CPI(M) demands govt immediately start talks with farmer groups

**NEW DELHI, Dec 28:** Pointing to the deteriorating health of farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who has been sitting on an indefinite hunger strike, the CPI(M) on Saturday said the government should immediately start talks with farmer organisations. Dallewal has been sitting on a hunger strike at the Khanauri border point since November 26 to press the Centre to accept farmers' demands, including legal guarantee for minimum support price (MSP) and farm loan waiver.

On Saturday, the Supreme Court gave the Punjab government time till December 31 to persuade Dallewal to shift to hospital.

The CPI(M) said in a statement, "The health condition of senior farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who has been on a hunger strike since November 26, is extremely critical. The protest is for the legitimate demand of the kisan (farmers') movement for a legal backing to the MSP and waiver of loans." (PTI)

**PROVISION OF SUPPLY AND ERECTION OF ANTI BIRD DISC IN LUMDING DIVISION**

Tender Notice No.: TRD/MLG/16 of 2024-25, Dated: 26-12-2024; E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work; Tender No.: EL-TRD-NFR-LMG-OHE-MOD-28; Name of Work: Provision of supply and erection of Anti bird disc made from polycarbonate material suitable for porcelain type Bracket/ Stay/9 tonne insulator as per RDSO drawing under Lumding Division.

Advised Value: ₹19,93,820/-; Earnest Money: ₹39,900/-; Date & time of closing of tender at 15:00 hrs. on 23-01-2025. For complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available in website [www.irps.gov.in](http://www.irps.gov.in)

Sr. DEET/RD, Lumding  
**NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY**  
 Serving Customers With A Smile

**ANNUAL MAINTENANCE FOR BIU**

E-Tender Notice No. DCBL/17/2024/MLG, dated: 26-12-2024. Open E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: Tender No.: DCBL/392024/MLG; Name of works: Annual Maintenance for BIU 1 & 2 at Bogibeel near Dibrugarh for 06 (Six) years. Approximate Tender Value: ₹48,87,500/-; Bid Security: ₹97,400/-; Date of closing of Tender: 17-01-2025 at 15:00 hrs. Date of Opening of Tenders: 17-01-2025 at 15:05 hrs. at office of the Deputy Chief Engineer/Bridge-Line/Malligaon, Guwahati- 781011 (Assam). For Details please visit [www.irps.gov.in](http://www.irps.gov.in)

Dy. CE/Bridge-Line/Malligaon  
**NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY**  
 Serving Customers with a smile

## Gadkari visits Andamans to review highway projects

**PORT BLAIR, Dec 28:** Union minister Nitin Gadkari is on a tour to Andaman and Nicobar Islands to review various national highway projects in the archipelago, a senior official said on Saturday.

The Union minister for Road, Transport and Highways arrived in Port Blair on Friday and held a meeting with Lieutenant Governor Admiral (Retd) D K Joshi and later reviewed national highway projects, he said.

On Saturday, he interacted with BJP workers and discussed various issues related to the development of the archipelago.

"We requested his intervention for the completion of various pending work, including those related to land conversion, medical facilities, higher education, and roads," a senior BJP worker in Port Blair said.

Later, he visited Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Island (previously known as Ross Island), another of-



ficial said.

Ross Island, once the base for the British administrator of the penal colony in Port Blair, is a 20-30 minutes boat journey from Port Blair.

In Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Island, Gadkari visited a World War II-era Japanese bunker,

Smritika Museum built by the Indian Navy in 1993, and several other monuments, the official said.

A senior official of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation Limited (ANIDCO) briefed him about the proposed national memorial dedicated to Netaji Sub-

hash Chandra Bose.

In the evening, Gadkari will visit the Cellular Jail National Memorial in Port Blair, an official said.

The Cellular Jail, entirely made up of individual cells for solitary confinement of prisoners, has been preserved as a national memorial and attracts visitors round the year.

At the Cellular Jail National Memorial, he will visit Martyrs' Column and lay a wreath on the memorial of freedom fighters.

He will also visit 'Swatantraya Jyoti', a tribute to thousands of freedom fighters who suffered in incarceration in the prison during the freedom struggle.

On December 29, the Union minister will visit Swaraj Dweep (previously known as Havelock Island) and stay there till December 30.

Sources said he would leave the archipelago on January 1. (PTI)



# Farmers resisting Dallewal's hospitalisation not well-wishers, says SC

**NEW DELHI, Dec 28:** The Supreme Court on Saturday came down heavily on the Punjab government for not shifting farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who has been fasting for over a month, to a hospital even as it doubted the intention of the agitating farmers for resisting availability of medical aid to their septuagenarian leader.

In an unprecedented hearing, a vacation bench of Justices Surya Kant and Sudhanshu Dhulia, however, gave the Punjab government time till December 31 to persuade Dallewal to shift to a hospital, giving it the liberty to seek logistical support from the Centre, if the situation warrants.

Expressing helplessness, the Punjab government said it is facing huge resistance from the protesting farmers who have encircled Dallewal and are preventing him from being taken to a hospital.

The bench told Punjab Advocate General Gurinder Singh, "Who has allowed all this to happen? Who has allowed this fort to be constructed? How did this manpower reach the protest site periodically and systematically? We don't want to say much as it will aggravate the situation. So long as the gathering is there for the purpose of demands raised by farmers, it is understandable."

Justice Surya Kant added, "Peaceful agitation for the purpose of raising their demands, and voicing their grievances in a democratic manner is understandable. But gathering of farmers to prevent a person from shifting to the hospital, who requires immediate medical aid, is something which is completely unheard of."

Singh told the bench that a team of experts visited the protest site and tried to persuade Dallewal to shift to a hospital and take medical



help. "He (Dallewal) has refused any kind of medical aid, including (IV) drips, saying it will undermine the cause of the movement," he said, adding that any kind of forceful eviction from the protest site may lead to collateral damage, including casualties from both farmers and police.

The bench said the Punjab government did not do enough to contain the situation and pointed out that the farmer leaders who are not allowing Dallewal to be taken to a hospital are involved in the criminal offence of abetment to suicide.

Justice Kant told Singh perhaps it appears to the court that the state government itself does not want Dallewal to receive any medical aid.

"If there is resistance to a lawful action, you will have to deal with it the way the law enforcement agencies normally do. What appears to be the scenario is that Dallewal is refusing despite the fact that his health is not supporting him as he appears to be under some kind of peer pressure."

"There are some farmers leaders, we don't want to comment on their conduct. What kind of leaders are they if they are allowing him to die

there? Please try to read in between the lines. Who are these people? Are they interested in Dallewal's life or do they want him to die there on the spot? Their intention is questionable," Justice Kant said.

The bench also termed the conduct of some farmer leaders accompanying Dallewal surprising and questionable.

"We don't want to comment on what kind of conduct they are exhibiting. Dallewal is one of the top farmer leaders of the state. Convince him (Dallewal) that even if you shift him to the hospital, you will not allow him to break his fast," the bench told Singh.

Coming down heavily on the farmers resisting to shift Dallewal to hospital, Justice Kant told the Punjab's top law officer that he needed to communicate to those resisting the shifting that they are not his well-wishers.

"They are actually depriving the leadership of a very precious farmer leader who has acted completely non-political and appears to be the undisputed leader of farmers' cause. Why are they resisting the providing of basic treatment to him?"

"God forbid, if anything happens, who will be responsible? Have you ever seen a group of

farmers which says if one of their colleagues requires medical aid, they will not allow him to be shifted (to hospital)," Justice Kant asked.

The bench also spoke to Punjab chief secretary and director general of police and said the court does not expect the state government to use unwanted force on the protesting farmers, but the officers on the ground are a better judge of the situation and they need to see what strategy needs to be adopted.

When Justice Dhulia sought suggestions on possible solutions to the issue, Singh said, "There is either conciliation or confrontation. Conciliation we have suggested. We have placed the letter of Dallewal that in case the Central government negotiates with the farmers, he will be persuaded to take medical intervention."

Justice Kant said the court also understands the political equation between the state government and the Centre, but right now the priority of the court is to provide medical aid to Dallewal.

"Don't try to put words in our mouth. We are aware of the political situation. This is a constitutional court and no pre-condition is acceptable to us," Justice Kant told the Punjab advocate general.

Dallewal has been on an indefinite fast at the Khanauri border point between Punjab and Haryana since November 26 to press the Centre to accept farmers' demands, including a legal guarantee of minimum support price for crops.

Farmers under the banner of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha have been camping at Shambhu and Khanauri border points between Punjab and Haryana since February 13 after their march to Delhi was stopped by security forces. (PTI)

## Heavy snowfall disrupts life in Kashmir

Flights, rail services suspended, Jammu-Srinagar highway closed

**SRINAGAR, Dec 28:** Normal life was thrown out of gear in Kashmir on Saturday as most areas of the valley received snowfall, disrupting flight and railway operations and also leading to the closure of the Srinagar-Jammu National Highway, officials said.

Moderate to heavy snowfall was recorded across Kashmir since Friday, including the season's first snowfall in Srinagar city and other plain areas of the valley.

In south Kashmir, heavy to very heavy snowfall was recorded in the plains, while central Kashmir's plains received moderate snowfall.

The plains of north Kashmir received light to moderate snowfall, the officials said.

Srinagar recorded about eight inches of snow, while neighbouring Ganderbal recorded about seven inches. Sonamarg, a famous tourist destination, recorded around eight inches of snow, the officials added.

The Zojila axis along the Srinagar-Leh highway received about 15 inches of snow, they said. Areas in Budgam district received 7-10 inches of snow, while the plains in Anantnag district recorded around 17 inches.

The upper areas of the south Kashmir district received over two feet of snow, the officials said.

The tourist town of Pahalgam recorded 18 inches of fresh snowfall.

Areas in Pulwama district recorded 10-15 inches of snow, while neighbouring Kulgam received 18-25 inches and Shopian recorded around 18 inches of snowfall, the officials added.

In Bandipora district of north Kashmir, the plains recorded four inches of snow, while the higher reaches, including Gurez, received 6 to 10 inches of snowfall.

Areas in Baramulla district recorded 4-9 inches of snow, while the famous ski resort of Gulmarg received about 15 inches of snow,



the officials said.

Kupwara plains received 1-2 inches of snow, and its upper reaches recorded 2-3 inches.

Even though the snowfall was welcomed by locals and tourists, it threw normal life out of gear.

The Jammu-Srinagar National Highway (NH-44) was closed for traffic due to snow, the Traffic Department officials said.

They added that clearance work was being hampered due to heavy snowfall at the Navyug Tunnel.

Men and machinery are on the job, and commuters are advised to avoid travel until the weather improves and the road is cleared, the officials said.

Train services on the Banihal-Baramulla section were suspended due to heavy snow accumulation on the track, the railway officials said. Efforts to clear the track are underway, they added.

Air traffic to and from Srinagar was also affected as flight operations at the airport were suspended due to snowfall, the airport officials said.

"Due to bad weather conditions, all flights at Srinagar Airport have been cancelled. No flight operations could take place at the airport since the morning owing to the inclement weather," officials added.

Passengers are advised to contact their airlines for updates, they said.

Clearance operations are ongoing.

ing, the runway has been cleared, and operations can resume only after the weather improves, the officials said.

Flight operations have been affected at the airport since Friday evening.

While authorities launched snow clearance operations at the respective district headquarters, most of the main roads and roads to hospitals were cleared of snow, but many interior roads were still blocked, the officials said.

Due to slippery conditions, motorists were facing difficulties in driving, they added.

The snowfall also affected power supply in several areas of the valley, the officials said. Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah was monitoring the situation.

"In Kashmir region, 41 feeders at the 33 KV level and 739 feeders at the 132 KV or 220 KV levels. Restoration work is underway, and more than 90 per cent of feeders are expected to be up and functional by evening today. I'm in regular touch with the PDD team to monitor the situation," Abdullah said in a post on X.

Kashmir University postponed all its examinations scheduled for Saturday due to the inclement weather. Fresh dates for the postponed exams will be notified separately, the University said. (PTI)

## Patna administration offers to facilitate protestors' meeting with BPSC



**PATNA, Dec 28:** The Patna district administration on Saturday said it has made an offer to the candidates, demanding cancellation of the Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) examination held on December 13, to facilitate a meeting with it so that they could put forth their grievances.

The candidates, seeking cancellation of the 70th Integrated Combined Competitive Examination (CCE), 2024, under the BPSC over allegations of question paper leak have been protesting for more than a week.

The protestors would be required to nominate five of their representatives for talks after which the BPSC would take a decision "within a reasonable time", Patna District Magistrate (DM) Chandrasekar Singh said.

"The district administration has offered the protesting aspirants to give a list of the representatives (all of them examinees) so that we can facilitate their meeting with the BPSC authorities over the issue," the DM told PTI on Saturday.

"They can apprise the commission's officials of their grievances in the meeting. The district administration also assures the protesting aspirants that the commission would take appropriate decisions or a stand within a reasonable time," Singh said.

The commission is an independent body and it is free to make decisions on its own, he said. The BPSC had decided to cancel the preliminary examination held at Bapu Pariksha Parisar centre only

due to disruption created by a group of unruly aspirants. The re-examination will be held on January 4 at some other centre in the city.

The protestors have been sitting on dharna at Gardani Bagh for several days. They contend that cancellation should be ordered across the board since re-examination for just one centre would go against the principle of "level playing field".

Meanwhile, the Patna Police have issued notices to certain people, associated with coaching institutes, and sought clarification over allegedly instigating the protesting aspirants and delivering provocative speeches while addressing students at Gardani Bagh, the dedicated site for organising protests in the city.

"Yes, notices have been served to them by the Patna Police in this regard. They have been asked to appear before the police at Gardani Bagh police station today... they need to produce evidence regarding the allegations they levelled against government authorities while addressing protesting aspirants," the DM said.

"The police have already registered an FIR in this regard," he said.

The DM, however, refused to divulge the names of those people who have been asked to appear before the police. (PTI)

## Transperson appointed as guest lecturer in Karnataka varsity



**BALLARI (KARNATAKA), Dec 28:** With her appointment to Vijayanagara Sri Krishnadevaraya University, 27-year-old K N Renuka Pujar has likely become the first transgender person to be appointed as a guest lecturer at a university in Karnataka.

Pujar, who completed her post-graduation in Kannada at the University, joined its Kannada department at the Nandihalli campus (PG centre) earlier this month as a guest lecturer, varsity officials said.

"I'm very happy. After a lot of struggle, I have reached this stage. The university has helped me a lot. I completed my degree in 2018 and became transgender in 2017 when I was in my second year. I completed my MA in 2022 and am working as a guest lecturer," the resident of Kurugodu in Ballari district, told PTI.

Noting that she received support from her parents, which helped her reach this stage, Pujar said her family comes from an agricultural background, and her parents educated her to achieve in life.

"The faculty at the university also supported me when I was admitted and studying for my MA. I like teaching and want to pursue a PhD and become a professor. I want transgenders to pursue education," Pujar said.

According to university officials, out of the thirty candidates who applied for the post, she had the necessary qualifications and good marks, and she performed well in the lecture, which led to her selection by the committee. This, they said, is likely the first such appointment at a university in the state, with Pujar serving as an inspiration for more trans persons to get educated and reach prominent positions in society. (PTI)

## Stranded tourists find shelter in mosque amid heavy snowfall in Kashmir

**SRINAGAR, Dec 28:** In a heartwarming display of Kashmiri hospitality, locals in Gund, on the Srinagar-Sonamarg highway, opened the doors of a mosque to shelter a group of travellers stranded due to heavy snowfall. A dozen tourists from Punjab found themselves caught in the snowfall on Friday while returning from the Sonamarg area, officials said.

Their vehicles became stuck in the snow and with no nearby hotels and local houses too small to accommodate the group, Gund residents opened the doors of the Jamia Masjid, allowing the tourists to stay there for the night, officials added.

"It was the best possible solution as the mosque has a hamaam, which stays warm throughout the night," said Bashir Ahmad, a local resident.

The Jamia Masjid at Gund is located less than 10 kilometers from the site of a terrorist attack in Gagangir, where six people -- five non-local labourers and a local doctor -- were killed in October this year.

A video of the tourists spending the night inside the mosque has since gone viral.

The tourists expressed their gratitude to the locals for their help. "We were stuck in the snow, and you came to our rescue. We are extremely thankful to all of you," one of them said.

Another tourist added, "Everyone should visit Kashmir to experience its hospitality. Everyone here is kind and it is safe to visit. Please come to this paradise on earth."

Hurriyat Conference chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq praised the gesture and said it was heartening to see Kashmiris open their mosques and homes to stranded tourists amidst heavy snowfall.

"This gesture of warmth and humanity reflects our longstanding tradition of hospitality and helping others in times of need," he

said on X.

PDP leader Iltija Mufti also took to social media to praise the "humane" gestures extended by locals to stranded tourists.

"Stranded tourists in Ganderbal found an unexpected yet warm refuge at a mosque last night. Kashmiris aren't only human, but humane too. I wish the media would stop perpetuating stereotypes that grab eyeballs and instead highlight how hospitable Kashmiris truly are," Mufti posted on X.

PDP leader Khurshid Alam also commended the people for their generosity in assisting stranded tourists during the ongoing snowfall, which has disrupted daily life across the region.

"It is heartening to witness that Kashmir's long-standing tradition of hospitality is alive and thriving. Despite the challenges posed by snowfall, including water and electricity shortages, the people of Kashmir have shown remarkable generosity, making the region proud once again," he said in a statement.

Another video circulating on social media shows several tourist families comprising of men, women and children being hosted by a local family in the Kangan area of Ganderbal district after they were stranded due to snowfall.

The tourists were full of praise for their hosts, saying, "They helped us in this difficult time. They are like gods to us."

Elsewhere, heavy snowfall also left many tourists stranded along the Srinagar-Jammu highway and at tourist destinations like Doodhpathri.

However, not all the stranded tourists were complaining. "The car ignition isn't working due to the cold, and we have to push it. But it's fine; we're enjoying it," said a tourist from Haryana as he waited for clearance at Qazigund to head home. (PTI)

## Gadkari visits Andamans to review highway projects

**PORT BLAIR, Dec 28:** Union minister Nitin Gadkari is on a tour to Andaman and Nicobar Islands to review various national highway projects in the archipelago, a senior official said on Saturday.

The Union Minister for Road, Transport and Highways arrived in Port Blair on Friday and held a meeting with Lieutenant Governor Admiral (Retd) D K Joshi and later reviewed national highway projects, he said.

On Saturday, he interacted with BJP workers and discussed various issues related to the development of the archipelago.

"We requested his intervention for the completion of various pending work, including those related to land conversion, medical facilities, higher education, and roads," a senior BJP worker in Port Blair said.

Later, he visited Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Island (previously known as Ross Island), another official said.

Ross Island, once the base for the British administrator of the penal colony in Port Blair, is a 20-30 minutes boat journey from Port Blair.

In Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Island, Gadkari visited a World

War II-era Japanese bunker, Smritika Museum built by the Indian Navy in 1993, and several other monuments, the official said.

A senior official of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation Limited (ANIIDCO) briefed him about the proposed national memorial dedicated to Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose.

In the evening, Gadkari will visit the Cellular Jail National Memorial in Port Blair, an official said.

The Cellular Jail, entirely made up of individual cells for solitary confinement of prisoners, has been preserved as a national memorial and attracts visitors round the year. At the Cellular Jail National Memorial, he will visit Martyrs' Column and lay a wreath on the memorial of freedom fighters.

He will also visit 'Swatantraya Jyoti', a tribute to thousands of freedom fighters who suffered incarceration in the prison during the freedom struggle.

On December 29, the Union minister will visit Swaraj Dweep (previously known as Havelock Island) and stay there till December 30.

Sources said he would leave the archipelago on January 1. (PTI)

## Six hurt in Delhi namkeen factory blast

**NEW DELHI, Dec 28:** Six workers were injured in a blast triggered by a fire at a namkeen factory in southwest Delhi's Najafgarh area on Saturday, officials said.

A call was received at 8:16 am about a fire and 17 water tenders were pressed into service, a Delhi Fire Services (DFS) official said.

The blaze had erupted on the ground floor of the two-storey manufacturing unit run by Manu Namkeen Factory, he said.

Six workers who were inside the factory were injured in a blast triggered by the fire. They were taken to Deen Dayal Upadhyay Hospital, he added.

The fire was brought under control at 11:30 am.

"The injured have been identified as Shivam (23), Amit (35), Amit Singh (26), Chandan (22), Jaipal (40), and Vasudev (50). They were later shifted to Safdarjung Hospital," a senior police officer said.

The workers were baking biscuits in an oven on the ground floor at the time. Gas cylinders were being used and a burst pipe might have caused the fire and subsequent explosion, the officer said.

An investigation is underway, he added. (PTI)

## Over 2,000 drones to light up the sky over Sangam during Mahakumbh 2025

**MAHAKUMBH NAGAR, Dec 28:** Pilgrims visiting the 2025 Mahakumbh can look forward to a divine visual spectacle as the Uttar Pradesh Tourism is planning to organise a drone show at the Sangam area depicting events of religious and spiritual significance including the 'Samudra Manthan'.

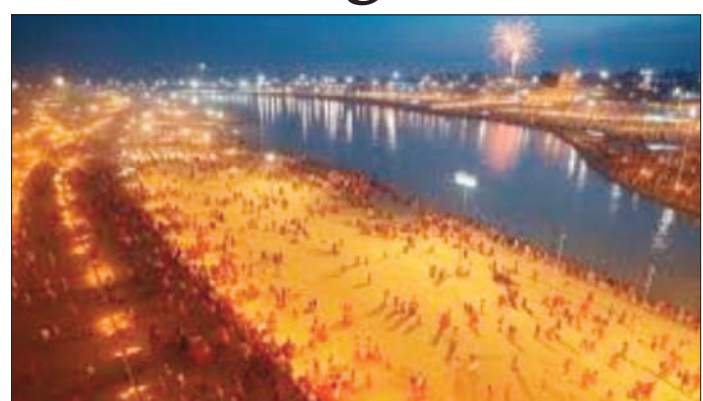
The Mahakumbh, held every twelve years, will take place from January 13 to February 26, 2025 in Prayagraj.

The drone show will be organised above the Sangam Nose area during the evening, the state government said in a statement.

The Sangam nose is the exact point of confluence of three holy rivers: the Ganga, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati.

According to District Tourism Officer Aparajita Singh, the show will be held during the opening and closing of the event.

"A fleet of around 2,000 illuminated drones will bring to life the



legendary tales of 'Prayag Mahatmyam' and the Mahakumbh. The spectacular show will depict iconic events like the mythical Samudra Manthan (ocean churning) and the emergence of the Amrit Kalash (nectar pot), creating a magical visual narrative in the evening skies," said District Tourism Officer Aparajita Singh.

The show will also highlight the

religious and spiritual significance of Prayagraj, providing a unique experience for pilgrims and locals.

Mahakumbh 2025 is gearing up to be a global cultural spectacle. Preparations are in full swing, reflecting CM Yogi Adityanath's vision of a grand and spiritually elevating Mahakumbh, according to the statement.

Development and beautification work is underway across temples, Ganga ghats, parks, roads, and flyovers in Prayagraj, it said.

Additionally, visitors and pilgrims will experience several new and unique attractions during this iconic festival, it added.

The event will feature floating restaurants, water activities, hot air balloons, and laser light shows. The Uttar Pradesh Tourism Department is introducing innovative attractions to enhance the experience for visitors.

Starting in the first week of January, a musical fountain laser show on the Yamuna River at Kali Ghat will provide a mesmerising experience for tourists visiting Prayagraj.

Moreover, the spectacular lighting drone show will be a highlight during the Mahakumbh, offering a memorable experience for both visitors and residents of Prayagraj. (PTI)



# MANOJ BAJPAYEE CONCLUDES SHOOTING FOR 'FAMILY MAN' SEASON THREE



**NEW DELHI, Dec 28:** Actor Manoj Bajpayee on Saturday said he has completed shooting for the third season of his critically-acclaimed series "The Family Man".

The actor shared the news in a post on his Instagram Stories where he posted a photo of a clapperboard.

"Shooting wrapped!! For 'Family Man 3'! Aur thoda intezaar....," he captioned the photo. Created and directed by Raj Nidimoru and Krishna DK, the Prime Video action thriller series will bring back original cast members, including Bajpayee, Priyamani, Sharib Hashmi, Ashlesha Thakur, and Vedant Sinha.

Written by Suman Kumar and Raj & DK, "The Family Man" season three will see Bajpayee reprise his character of Srikant Tiwari, a "middle class guy and a world-class spy".

In the forthcoming third season, Srikant will expertly confront the looming threat to national security, while balancing the demands of family life and desperately working to mend his relationship with his wife Suchitra, played by Priyamani. "As Srikant races against time, the stakes escalate as he needs to outmaneuver a formidable adversary and protect his country and its sovereignty," read the official logline for season three. The first season of "The Family Man", which debuted on Prime Video in late 2019, received glowing reviews. The second season, also starring Samantha Ruth Prabhu, premiered in 2021 and was also praised by the critics. (PTI)

# Tom Cruise's upcoming movie with Alejandro G Inarritu to come out in October 2026

**LOS ANGELES, Dec 28:** Hollywood star Tom Cruise's upcoming film with Oscar-winning director Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu will open in American theatres on October 2, 2026, studio Warner Bros has announced.

The film marks Inarritu's first English-language film since the Leonardo DiCaprio-starrer "The Revenant" in 2015, reported entertainment news outlet Deadline.

The untitled project is about the "most powerful man in the world" who embarks on a "frantic mission to prove he is humanity's savior before the disaster he's unleashed destroys everything", according to the official logline.

For the movie, Inarritu is once again collaborating with his "Birdman" co-writers Alexander Dinelaris and Nicolas Giacobone, with Sabina Berman also sharing a screenwriting credit.

In addition to Cruise, the movie will feature Sandra Huller, John Goodman, Michael Stuhlbarg, Jesse Plemons, Sophie Wilde and Riz Ahmed. Warner Bros has also announced new release dates for a host of major films, including Matt Reeves' "The Batman 2", which will now open in theatres on October 1, 2027. The film, which will see Robert Pattinson returning as the caped crusader, was earlier scheduled to be released on October 2, 2026.

The studio has swapped the openings of Bong Joon Ho's "Mickey 17" and Ryan Coogler's "Sinners".

"Mickey 17", also starring Pattinson, moves from April 18, 2025, to March 7, 2025. "Sinners", which reunites Hollywood star Michael B Jordan, has taken the slot of April 18. (PTI)



# TIM ALLEN SAYS 'TOY STORY 5' HAS A 'REALLY CLEVER STORY'

**LOS ANGELES, Dec 28:** Hollywood veteran Tim Allen says the upcoming fifth chapter of the "Toy Story" franchise has a "clever story" and he recently completed recording his first session for the movie. Allen, known for voicing the fan-favourite character of Buzz Lightyear in the animated franchise, said he is confident that "Toy Story 5" will be another successful entry. "I just did the first five-hour session for Buzz, probably a week ago. It's really, really weird to get back in it. I can't tell you anything," the 71-year-old actor told Collider during an interview.

"It's a very, very clever story. I don't really believe it's about the money. I'm sure they want it to be a success, but that's not why they did it. Had they not come up with a brilliant script, they wouldn't have done it and they wouldn't have called me and Tom (Hanks). It's really clever," he added. Allen has been a part of the franchise since the 1995 movie "Toy Story", which revolved around a diverse group of toys, led by Sheriff Woody, a classic cowboy doll, and Buzz Lightyear, a futuristic spaceman action figure.

Veteran actor Tom Hanks voices Woody in the movie series, which also includes "Toy Story 2" (1999), "Toy Story 3" (2010), "Toy Story 4" (2019), and the 2022 spin-off film "Lightyear". Allen said voicing Buzz Lightyear has been nothing short of a blessing for him.

"It's gonna be fun. I think we're a year out. I've gotten up to the third act. We'll do the third act. And then, we'll go back and clean it. And then, I'll do it about five more times. It's a really good story, guys. It's really good," he added.

Produced by Pixar Animation Studios for Disney, "Toy Story 5" is written and directed by Andrew Stanton, who worked as a writer on the previous four films. The film will be released in US theatres on June 19, 2026. (PTI)

# ANUPAM KHER, HANSAL MEHTA CLASH OVER 'THE ACCIDENTAL PRIME MINISTER' POST MANMOHAN SINGH'S DEATH



**NEW DELHI, Dec 28:** Veteran actor Anupam Kher and Hansal Mehta got into a war of words over their movie "The Accidental Prime Minister" after the filmmaker agreed with a journalist that the 2019 political drama was filled with "lies" about former PM Manmohan Singh.

Singh, the architect behind India's economic reforms, passed away on Thursday night at Delhi's All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) at the age of 92. He served as the prime minister from 2004 to 2014.

It all started with a post by senior journalist Vir Sanghvi, who on Friday labelled "The Accidental Prime Minister", which was based on the memoir of Singh's former media advisor Sanjay Baru, as "one of the worst Hindi movies ever made".

Featuring Kher as former PM Singh and actor Akshaye Khanna as Baru, the movie was directed by Vijay Gutte and depicted political events and decisions during Singh's leadership, focusing on his challenges as the prime minister and influence of the Congress party on his administration.

"If you want to remember the lies that were told about Manmohan Singh you should rewatch 'The Accidental Prime Minister'. It is not only one of the worst Hindi movies ever made but is an example of how media was used to tarnish the name of a good man," Sanghvi wrote on X.

Mehta, 56, shared Sanghvi's post and captioned it, "+100."

In an earlier post, the filmmaker had condoled Singh's demise and said the nation "owes him an apology".

"More than anybody else, I owe him one. Whatever the compulsion or intent, it is a regret I will carry with a very heavy heart. Sorry, sir. Besides your achievements as an economist, Finance Minister, and Prime Minister, you were an honorable man—a rare gentleman in a vocation dominated by ruffians," Mehta had posted.

However, Mehta's endorsement of Sanghvi's post irked Kher, who called the filmmaker a "hypocrite". He also pointed out Mehta served as the creative director of the movie.

"The HYPOCRITE in this thread is NOT @virsanghvi. He has the freedom to not like a film. But @mehtahansal was the #CreativeDirector of #TheAccidentalPrimeMinister. Who was present at the entire shoot of the film in England! Giving his creative inputs and must have taken the fee also for it."

"So for him to say 100% to #VirSanghvi's comment is so messed up and full of double standards!" the 69-year-old actor wrote.

Kher said though he doesn't agree with Sanghvi's opinion, he believes artists are "capable of doing bad or indifferent work".

"But we should OWN it. Not like #HansalMehta trying to earn some brownies from certain section of people. Common Hansal!! Grow up! I still have all our videos and pics of the shoot together!" he added.

Besides, Kher dug up Mehta's old posts where the filmmaker congratulated him and Khanna as well as Gutte for their work on the movie. He shared the posts and wrote, "Without comments."

Mehta, who also had a cameo appearance as former Odisha chief minister Naveen Patnaik in "The Accidental Prime Minister", responded, saying that he always owned up to his mistakes.

"And I can admit that I made a mistake. Can't I sir? I did my job as professionally as I was allowed to. Can you deny that? But it doesn't mean I have to keep defending the film or that it makes me lose objectivity about my error of judgement."

"About brownie points and hypocrisy I respectfully submit that you seem to be evaluating people by the same yardstick you evaluate yourself," he said.

In another post, the director apologised to the actor for inadvertently hurting him and said he can clear the air with Kher at any appropriate moment. (PTI)

# Bollywood 2024: When Hindi cinema failed to deliver at box office and Telugu pan-Indian films ruled

**NEW DELHI, Dec 28:** With its formulaic stories and action dramas biting the dust at the box office, the dream factory of Bollywood failed to deliver on the expectations of the audiences who turned to Telugu blockbusters like "Pushpa 2" and "Kalki 2898 AD" for larger-than-life stories.

For the Hindi film industry, which banked mostly on nostalgia of re-releases like "Laila Majnu", "Tumbbad", "Veer Zaira" and many others to bring viewers to theatres, the one big success was "Stree 2", a horror comedy that made ₹ 597 crore nett.

Except for "Stree 2", no other Hindi film reached near the ₹ 500 crore mark at the box office in 2024. "Pushpa 2", starring Allu Arjun in the titular role and released on December 5, has earned over ₹ 700 crore in Hindi alone at

the box office whereas its worldwide gross is more than ₹ 1,700 crore, according to figures shared by its producers.

In a novel promotional strategy, Arjun travelled all the way to Patna for the trailer launch of the movie, an indication that the makers were projecting it as a pan-India movie and not a Telugu film. "Pushpa 1", released in 2021, had done surprisingly good business in the Hindi belt. Malayalam superstar Mohanlal said the success of films like "Pushpa 2" are important for the Indian film industry.

"To make an entertainer and bring out a big success is not an easy thing. It requires a lot of patience and many other factors. It is a magic recipe and nobody knows the formula. 'Pushpa' and films like that are turning the wheel of the Indian film industry," the actor told

PTI. Like "Pushpa 2", Nag Ashwin's futuristic retelling of Mahabharata in "Kalki", starring Telugu superstar Prabhas with prominent roles by Amitabh Bachchan and Deepika Padukone, made over ₹ 290 crore just in Hindi language in June this year, according to trade website Sacnilk.

It is in stark contrast to 2023 when Bollywood registered four blockbusters in "Pathaan" and "Jawan", which raked in over ₹ 1,000 crore each at the worldwide box office, as well as Sunny Deol's "Gadar 2" and Ranbir Kapoor's "Animal".

"I would not call it a bad year for Bollywood but yes if you compare to last year, we had four films crossing ₹ 400 crore at the box office. This year has not been that great except for 'Stree 2' and 'Pushpa 2', which is a Telugu re-

lease. "Box office can be unpredictable and there are phases. But there are lessons to be learned, we need to make films that cater to pan-India audiences. Bollywood will, hopefully, bounce back in a big way next year," trade analyst Taran Adarsh told PTI. According to Amit Sharma, MD, Miraj Entertainment Ltd, 2024 was "disastrous" for Hindi cinema.

"The business is down by at least 30 per cent compared to 2023 where we had 'Pathaan', 'Gadar 2', 'Jawan', 'Animal', 'Dunki', 'Fukrey' and 'Dream Girl 2'... When it comes to Bollywood in 2024, you can't really speak about anything apart from 'Stree 2' and to an extent 'Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3' and 'Singham' and films like 'Laapata Ladies' and 'Shaitaan'. But commercially there is no comparison between 2024 and 2023," he told PTI.

Horror-comedy seemed to be the most successful genre in Bollywood as not just "Stree 2" but Karthik Aaryan's "Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3" and Maddock Films' "Munjya" also did decent business at the box office. But the Hindi cinema's big bet on action movies, starting the year with "Fighter" failed to yield good results.

Directed by Siddharth Anand of "Pathaan" fame, "Fighter", starring Hrithik Roshan and Deepika Padukone, couldn't replicate the success of the 2023 Shah Rukh Khan starrer.

The movie, made on a big budget, reportedly to be around ₹ 250 crore, and featuring high octane action sequences, underperformed at the box office, earning ₹ 212 crore in nett at the Indian box office, according to Sacnilk. Ajay Devgn-starrer "Singham

Again", the latest entry in filmmaker Rohit Shetty's cop universe, amassed just ₹ 247 crore nett, did decent business but fell short of being a blockbuster.

The fact that the movie clashed with "Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3" in Diwali this year may have also impacted the business of the two movies. The films registered great opening day numbers but ran out of steam in just two weeks.

Other major disappointments at the ticket window were "Yodha" starring Sidharth Malhotra, Akshay Kumar's "Bade Miyan Chote Miyan", Devgn's "Maidaan" and Aaryan's "Chandu Champion" and Alia Bhatt-starrer "Jigra".

The dry run of Akshay's films at the box office continued after "Bade Miyan Chote Miyan" with both "Sarfire" and "Khel Khel Mein" not doing too well. (PTI)



# CHHETRI FAREWELL SIGNALS END OF AN ERA IN FORGETTABLE YEAR FOR INDIAN FOOTBALL

**KOLKATA, Dec 28:** Indian football found itself in the throes of despair throughout 2024 with the senior men's team failing to register a single win in a year when the long-serving Sunil Chhetri finally decided to hang up his boots internationally after 19 years of yeoman service.

The familiar sight of the diminutive No. 11 running into the box, deftly chipping the ball into the back of the net, bringing out his trademark 'namaste' celebration, and looking skywards with his fingers pointing to the heavens will forever be etched in the hearts of Indian football fans.

With his record 151 appearances and 94 goals for India, Chhetri became synonymous

with the sport in the country, inspiring millions while leading the team with distinction.

The talisman's retirement, at 39, marked a poignant end in a year of more lows than highs with the men's national team facing transitional challenges and failing to notch a single win across 12 months for the first time in a decade.

"You don't wish to stop playing for the country. But one day you have to, and you will be fine. Finally, I reached this decision. And I think I made the right decision," an emotional Chhetri had said after his decision to retire.

India's FIFA World Cup qualifier against Kuwait was his last

appearance for the country.

On June 6, in his final match at Salt Lake Stadium, 58,921 fans gathered to bid farewell to the legend but the game ended in a goalless draw, much to the disappointment of his supporters.

It was a night heavy with emotion, as Indian football lost its torchbearer, the unifying figure who had carried the sport on his shoulders for nearly two decades. The national team has never been the same since his retirement.

The disappointing exit from the second round of FIFA World Cup Qualifiers was followed by the acrimonious sacking of head coach Igor Stimac, a year before his contract expired.

Stimac initially demanded USD 920,000 (Rs 7.72 crore) as compensation and approached the game's governing body FIFA after rejecting the All India Football Federation's (AIFF) offer of first three, then five, and finally 10 months' salary as settlement. The matter escalated before both parties reached an agreement, setting the national federation back by USD 400,000.

Stimac was earlier given an extension until 2026 on the condition of reaching the quarterfinals of the AFC Asian Cup but India finished last in their group after failing to win a single match.

Manolo Marquez, a familiar face in Indian football having led Hyderabad FC to an ISL title in 2022, was appointed as the new head coach in July while keeping his job at FC Goa till the end of the ongoing season.

But his appointment failed to turn around India's fortunes as the team lost once and drew

thrice under the Spaniard.

The Indian team ended the year with a 1-1 draw against Malaysia. In all, the side played 11 matches and suffered six losses in a forgettable year. The lack of results reflected in their rankings as the team slipped to 126 in the FIFA chart from 102 in December last year.

At club level, Mohun Bagan and Mumbai City FC continued their dominance with the two teams winning the Shield and ISL title respectively.

There was, however, also a setback for Mohun Bagan who were considered 'withdrawn' from the AFC Champions League 2 after refusing to travel to Iran for their match against

Tractor SC on October 2, citing security concerns amid political unrest in that part of the world.

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) cancelled all of Mohun Bagan's matches in the competition, considering them null and void. This followed the club's goalless draw against Ravshan Kulob in their opening Group A match at Salt Lake Stadium.

The year proved to be a historic one for Odisha FC who secured a spot in the AFC Women's Champions League Group Stage after topping their preliminary stage group with two wins, including a 4-1 victory over Lion City Sailors and a 2-1 win against Etihad Club. (PTI)



## Paralympian Kathuniya questions panel for overlooking him for Khel Ratna

**NEW DELHI, Dec 28:** Two-time Paralympic silver medalist Yogesh Kathuniya on Saturday voiced his disappointment over not being nominated for the prestigious Khel Ratna Award despite his "consistent" performances on the world stage.

Kathuniya expressed frustration at what he perceived as favouritism and a lack of transparency in the award selection process. "I don't know what criteria they have set. I even filled the form. It's not like I didn't fill the form. I did everything, but even after getting the highest aggregate marks, I was not nominated this time as well," Kathuniya told PTI videos in an exclusive interview.

"If you look at 2016-2020, there was no favouritism," he said. "Last time, I remember well, I did not even fill the form for the Arjuna Award, yet I was nominated. There was a policy that if you played in the Paralympics or Olympics and won a medal, you would be directly considered. Why can't you do it this time?"

"If you could do it before, why can't you do it now? What is the use of playing if we must ask for the awards? What value does an award hold if we are begging for it?" he added.



Kathuniya, who has won six medals at the world level, including two silver in two Paralympics, two silver and a bronze in the World Championship, and a silver in the Asian Games, is baffled by the lack of recognition. "People say it doesn't matter, but why doesn't it matter? It affects me. The first thing I heard from people was,

'You didn't have a gold medal.' I said, fine, I don't have a gold medal. When there are three positions -- gold, silver, and bronze -- why is only gold valued?"

"Silver and bronze have been recognised before. Why not now? Are they not medals too?" he questioned.

"If you leave my 245 points

aside, I have won six medals. Even after all that, if I don't get it, what is the guarantee I'll get it next year?"

Kathuniya's plea is not just for himself but for all deserving athletes. "Give it to everyone who deserves it," he urged.

"I want it, Praveen wants it, Manu wants it, Harvinder wants it. Those who have already got

the Arjuna Award and have repeated their medals this time deserve it. Why differentiate? Count our achievements, not our social media reach."

"The one with more name on social media gets it. Decisions are taken based on favouritism. Otherwise, why hasn't our voice reached them till now? I've said it so many times, but nothing has come of it," he said.

Kathuniya described the Khel Ratna Award as more than just another accolade, terming it a source of inspiration.

"The award is for motivation. It's a goal, a dream. When the President gives you that award, it inspires you to do better. That's what we are asking from the government -- not favours, just recognition."

"I don't want to become a celebrity. I want to play for the country. I'll continue to play. But at least give us the recognition we deserve." He also criticised the delay in announcing the list of winners.

"The list was finalised on December 15. Why hasn't the list been announced yet? Are they afraid because people are filing court cases? If this continues, the National Sports Awards for 2024 will be given in 2025, and the 2025 awards in 2026," he said. (PTI)

## Shreyanka nominated for ICC women's emerging cricketer of the year

**DUBAI, Dec 28:** Young spinner Shreyanka Patil has been nominated for the ICC Women's Emerging Cricketer of the Year award, following an excellent year in international cricket.

Patil is joined by South Africa's Annerie Dercksen, Scotland's Saskia Horley, and Ireland's Freya Sargent on the list of nominees.

The 22-year-old off-spinner from Karnataka made history as the first Indian to play in the Women's Caribbean Premier League in December 2023 and has since impressed in all formats. In the 13 T20Is she has played since making her debut in December 2023, Patil has claimed 15 wickets. She has also taken four wickets in the two ODIs she has played.

Patil has been a consistent presence in India's line-up this year, playing in bilateral series against Australia, Bangladesh,

and South Africa, in addition to participating in major tournaments like the Women's T20 Asia Cup and the T20 World Cup.

One of her standout performances came in the World Cup T20, where she finished with figures of 2/14, including the key dismissals of Muneeba Ali and Tuba Hassan. Hassan was removed in a wicket- maiden.

Patil's effort helped restrict Pakistan to 105/8 in a must-win group-stage game, allowing India to chase down the target in 19 overs and keep their World Cup hopes alive after an opening loss to New Zealand.

While primarily known for her bowling, Patil is also a capable lower-order batter.

Though her batting skills have not yet been fully showcased, it remains an important part of her game, and she is ready to shine when the opportunity arises. (PTI)

## Ronaldo backs Amorim at Man United, picks Vinicius over Rodri at soccer awards

**DUBAI, Dec 28:** Cristiano Ronaldo backed Manchester United coach Ruben Amorim on Friday, saying "the storm will finish" after his Portuguese countryman's difficult start to life in the Premier League.

The former Manchester United star, and five-time Ballon d'Or winner, currently plays for Saudi Arabia's Al-Nassr. Ronaldo spoke after being named the best player in the Middle East at the Globe Soccer Awards in Dubai.

Amorim — who was hired after Erik ten Hag was fired — has lost five of his first 10 games at United in all competitions. Approaching the Premier League's halfway point, the team is 14th and eight points above the relegation zone.

"(Amorim) did a fantastic job in Portugal with my (club) Sporting," the 39-year-old Ronaldo said. "But the Premier League is a different beast, the most competitive league in the world."

"I knew that it would be tough and they will continue the storm.

But the storm will finish and the sun will rise," he added.

Ronaldo's second spell at United ended in November 2022, with disagreements between him and Ten Hag.

"I say this one year and half ago and I will continue to say, the problem is not the coaches," Ronaldo added. "It's like the aquarium and you have the fish inside and it's sick, and you take him out and fix the problem. If you put it back in the aquarium it will be sick again."

Real Madrid's all-time top scorer Ronaldo also said Vinicius Junior had deserved to win the prestigious Ballon d'Or award rather than Spain midfielder Rodri. The Brazilian won the best player in the world award on Friday in Dubai. Earlier this month, Vinicius was also named men's player of the year at FIFA's "The Best" awards. "Vinicius deserved the Ballon d'Or," Ronaldo said. "It was unfair (to lose it). I say it in front of everyone." (AP)

## Carlsen disqualified from top chess meet for violating dress code

**NEW YORK, Dec 28:** Five-time world champion Magnus Carlsen was first fined and then disqualified from the World Rapid and Blitz Chess Championship here for his refusal to comply with FIDE's dress code after turning up in jeans.

Defending champion Carlsen was fined USD 200 for wearing jeans, which are "explicitly prohibited" under tournament regulations and when he refused the request to change his attire immediately by chief arbiter Alex Holowczak, he was disqualified and was not paired for Round 9 of the Rapid championship taking place at Wall Street.

One of the game's greatest players, the Norwegian ace had agreed to follow the dress from the next day but was not ready to do it immediately, resulting in his disqualification.

In a statement, the game's global governing body FIDE emphasised that the dress code rules are well-communicated to all participants and designed to ensure professionalism.

"The dress code regulations are drafted by members of the FIDE Athletes Commission, which is composed of professional players and experts. These rules have been in place for years and are well-known to all participants and are communicated to them ahead of each event," FIDE said in the statement which was posted on X.

"FIDE has also ensured that the players' accommodation is within a short walking distance from the playing venue, making

adherence to the rules more convenient."

It added, "Today, Mr. Magnus Carlsen breached the dress code by wearing jeans, which are explicitly prohibited under longstanding regulations for this event. The Chief Arbiter informed Mr. Carlsen of the breach, issued a USD 200 fine, and requested that he change his attire."

"Unfortunately, Mr. Carlsen declined, and as a result, he was not paired for round nine. This decision was made impartially and applies equally to all players."

Earlier, Russian Grandmaster Ian Nepomniachtchi was also penalised for a similar violation but he complied by changing his attire, allowing him to continue in the event.

Meanwhile, "upset" with the turn of events, Carlsen said he won't participate in the Blitz section of the championship as he is "pretty tired" of FIDE's dress code policies.

"I am pretty tired of FIDE, so I want no more of this. I don't want anything to do with them. I am sorry to everyone at home, maybe it's a stupid principle, but I don't think it's any fun," Carlsen told Norwegian broadcasting channel NRK.

"I said I don't want to bother changing now, but I can change until tomorrow, that's fine. But they didn't want to compromise. I've reached a point where I am pretty upset with FIDE, so I didn't want to either. Then that's how it goes," he added. (PTI)

## Arjun in joint lead in World rapid and blitz chess

**NEW YORK, Dec 28:** Indian grandmaster Arjun Erigaisi emerged as one of the four co-leaders after another impressive day of skill display at the ongoing World rapid and blitz chess championship here.

Russians Volodar Murzin and Alexander Grischuk along with Duda Jan-Krzysztof of Poland share the lead with Arjun on seven points after the end of the second day and round 9 of the championship, which will decide the best player of the planet after 13 games.

The day was marred by fine and disqualification of five-time world champion Magnus Carlsen for his refusal to comply with FIDE's dress code after turning up in jeans.

Defending champion Carlsen was fined USD 200 for wearing

jeans, which are "explicitly prohibited" under tournament regulations and when he refused the request to change his attire immediately by chief arbiter Alex Holowczak, he was disqualified and was not paired for Round 9 of the Rapid championship taking place at Wall Street.

With Carlsen's withdrawal, Arjun's chances have increased dramatically as the Norwegian is known to win anything and everything that comes under the faster version. In the 10th round the Indian will take on Grischuk.

The Indian scope of a medal seems brighter in the women's section as well, where Koneru Humpy put aside her first-round loss and won four games on the trot to find herself in lead on 6.5 points with compatriot D Harika and Wenjun Ju of China.

However, the day belonged to Arjun who defeated Robson Ray of the United States and later won against Shant Sargsyan of Armenia. His two draws against Murzin and Duda earned him the spot to be on top with just four rounds to go. Humpy gave lessons to her opponents while Harika was at her best.

With just three rounds remaining, much will be known post Humpy-Ju clash in the next match-up and Harika has her task cut out to surge ahead of the field.

Standings after round 8 women: 1-3: Wenjun Ju (Chn), D Harika, K Humpy (both India) 6.5 each; 4-8: Katerya Lagno (Fid); Carissa Yip (USA) Alexandra Kosteniuk (Sui) Elizabeth Paetz (Ger) Stavroula Tsolakidou (Gre) 6 each. (PTI)

**MELBOURNE, Dec 28:** Sam Konstas's competitive nature aligns with that of Virat Kohli and it would not be surprising if the two share a laugh about the shoulder-barging episode before posing for a photo after the Boxing Day Test, reckoned former Australia pacer Stuart Clark.

Kohli had intentionally bumped Konstas during the ongoing fourth Test at Melbourne, an act for which he copped a 20 percent fine from the ICC, besides getting booed by the Australian fans.

But Clark, who played 28 Tests for Australia, said these two ultra-competitive sportspersons will get well with each other eventually.

"He's (Konstas) a competitor. He wants to compete. He wants to do well. So, from that point of view, I think that incident (shoulder-barging) that happened in history, I think what you'll find is, I wouldn't be surprised if (Virat) Kohli takes him under his wing," Clark told PTI.

"And there'll be a photo of them after the game, smiling and laughing about it. He won't take a backward step. No one expects Kohli to either. No one expects anyone to take a backward step. It was just not a great incident," he added.

Having seen Konstas from his early teens in Sydney, Clark found his debut knock a bit "out of character".

"He is an aggressive player and that innings was a bit out of character. I am more interested to see how he plays in the second innings whether he attacks or plays a traditional game."



"Or goes out and plays flamboyant cricket. (David) Warner is special in his own way and Sam will be special in his own way," he said.

"He has loads of time at the crease and has got good bat speed. He has confidence and all good players have that."

## Wouldn't be surprised if Kohli and Konstas share a smiling photo post-match: Stuart Clark

The chat soon veered towards the careless run out involving Kohli and Yashasvi Jaiswal, which saw the latter getting out for 82. "There are two sides to the story. Firstly, I don't know if there was a run there and I don't have a problem with Kohli running back in. It was a genuine mix-up and you can't blame Kohli for that," he said.

Clark, who won Man of the Series award in his debut in South Africa for getting 20 wickets, said it is unfair to crucify Rishabh Pant for playing that falling lap-pull shot, which eventually led to his doom against Scott Boland.

"I think you've got to be careful with Rishabh Pant because he plays those (shots) and we all sit here and sing how good a shot it actually was. So, the fact he got

it wrong, I think, it's more the timing of when he played the shot, which is the issue."

"We've seen him play it so many times and been so successful at it. We don't want to crucify him for getting it wrong occasionally because he's a world-class player but just the moment in the game, didn't call for it and he got it wrong," he gave a different perspective.

The 49-year-old was also confident that India can save the Melbourne Test as the pitch has nothing in it for the bowlers.

"The pitch is a lot better (for batting) than it used to be. Yes, the odd ball is keeping low but it is fairly flat and true. It would not be a surprise that a quality batting side like India India bat out a whole day in their second innings," he added. (PTI)



# The second new ball did very little for Australian bowlers and the Indian duo ran very well between the wickets

## Gutsy Reddy's maiden ton keeps India afloat

MELBOURNE, Dec 28: Nitish Reddy, an unknown entity in red ball cricket before the start of Border-Gavaskar series, virtually bailed India out with his dogged maiden Test century here on Saturday, severely denting Australia's hopes of winning the Boxing Day contest.

Reddy's unbeaten 105 took India to 358 for nine, still 116 runs short of Australia's first innings score of 474 as rain brought an early end to the third day's play.

With the flat MCG deck not offering much to the bowlers, saving the Test match shouldn't be a big deal for India. Reddy, easily India's 'find of the series', played a pivotal role in visitors' fightback.

Reddy's combative spirit and the invaluable 127-run stand he shared with Washington Sundar (50 off 162 balls) proved to be the turning point for the hosts.

Reddy's innings was termed as one of greatest Test knocks by the legendary Sunil Gavaskar given the situation as India were in a precarious position after Rishabh Pant's dismissal courtesy a rash shot had left India tottering at 191 for six.

The young Andhra batter could have been stranded on 99 when Jasprit Bumrah got dismissed, leaving Reddy with last-man in Mohammed Siraj, who walked in to another round of boos and faced three deliveries from home skipper Pat Cummins.

Both Reddy and his father Muthyala's expressions changed with each ball but Siraj survived to allow Reddy savour the moment he must have dreamt a thousand times.

A picture-perfect straight drive off Scott Boland was the moment of the series for India as Reddy balanced his helmet with the bat and took a knee, expressing his gratitude towards the Indian dug-out which gave him a standing ovation.

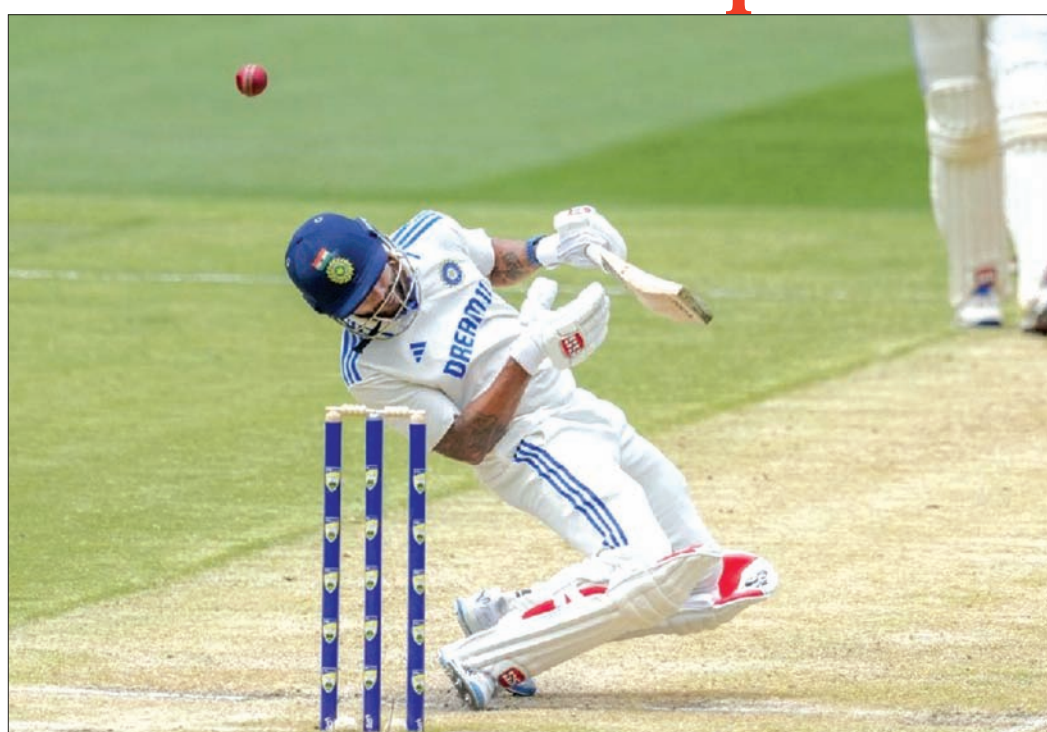
The 21-year-old struck the 'Pushpa' pose after completing his fifty and aced the dramatic 'Bahubali' pose to celebrate the century.

A decade back, when his father Muthyala left a secured job to open a micro-finance (lending) business and incurred losses, the Reddy family was advised not to give wings to young Reddy's cricketing dreams but they were unrelenting.

Sitting in the stands near the boundary, Reddy's father broke down when his son achieved the milestone.

As Indian fans clicked selfies with him it must have reminded of the day when his son received the best U-16 cricketer award from the BCCI in 2017, and an impressionable Reddy was seen clicking selfie with his idol Virat Kohli and his wife Anushka Sharma while leaving the hotel premises.

Reddy's batting was based on



stable core, playing the ball late and only going for the drive when the ball was pitched up. He wasn't defending unnecessarily and 10 fours and a six was a testimony to that. If the morning was more about Rishabh Pant's inexplicable shot selection, the afternoon session belonged to Reddy, whose attacking game put the pressure right back on Australia.

There were plenty of boundaries and a six off Nathan Lyon but none more gorgeous than the off-drive off Cummins. Reddy has been by far India's most consistent batter in the series and the maiden Test century couldn't have come at a more opportune time and that too at an iconic venue.

Washington, at the other end, grew in confidence and trusted his

defence apart from punishing the loose deliveries. It did help that the drop-in surface at the MCG has got better for batting as the match progressed.

The second new ball did very little for Australian bowlers and the Indian duo ran very well between the wickets. With Mitchell Starc's back acting up a little, the two batters looked to reduce the deficit

further. In the morning it was all about Pant's shot selection that hurt India.

The third day's MCG track is perhaps the best to bat on with green grass making way for a brownish tinge and an old Kookaburra hardly doing anything.

Had Pant stuck around, there was no way he wouldn't have scored big.

Pant did start well and got a few boundaries but then the urge to play the falling lap pull over long-leg brought about his dismissal.

When he tried it for the first time off Scott Boland, who came round the wicket, Pant was hit in the naval area and seemed to be in pain. He got up but didn't realise that Cummins had placed one fielder at deep fine-leg and one at deep third man for both the conventional and reverse lap shot.

Without learning his lessons or caring about success percentage, Pant tried a similar shot but the extra bounce meant that the top edge flew to third man for a regulation catch.

"If there was a word called 'worstest', then this was one such shot," former India skipper Sunil Gavaskar said on air.

But Reddy showed steely resolve as he started with a punchy off-drive off Lyon and also jumped down the track to loft him over for a straight six during a splendid recovery act. (PTI)

### New Zealand fight back to beat Sri Lanka by 8 runs in first T20I



MOUNT MAUNGANUNI (New Zealand), Dec 28: Daryl Mitchell and Michael Bracewell made half-centuries in a 105-run sixth wicket partnership to help lead New Zealand to an eight-run win over Sri Lanka on Saturday in the first of three T20 Internationals.

Outstanding bowling at the death also turned the match in New Zealand's favor as Sri Lanka slumped from 121-0 to 164-8 in reply to New Zealand's 172-8.

Mitchell made 62 and Bracewell 59 in a partnership lasting only 60 balls, after coming together with New Zealand in trouble at 65-5 when Wanindu Hasaranga dismissed Glenn Phillips and Mitchell Hay with consecutive deliveries in the 10th over.

New Zealand's total looked inadequate as Pathum Nissanka made 90 in 60 balls and shared a 121-run opening stand with Kusal Mendis which seemed to have set up Sri Lanka for a comfortable win. Mendis contributed 46 to Sri Lanka's first century opening partnership in T20s in 122 innings over eight years. He was out in the 14th over, an over where Jacob Duffy took three wickets for one run, marking the point at which Sri Lanka's run chase began to unravel. Kamindu Mendis and Kusal Perera were also out in the same over. "They're class batters, particularly those two at the top," Duffy said. "We know these conditions well with a bit of bounce and swing up top." Nissanka was dismissed with the total 153-5 in the 19th over and only 20 runs needed for victory. (PTI)

## I could have got Konstas out 6-7 times in first 2 overs: Bumrah

MELBOURNE, Dec 28: Jasprit Bumrah said on Saturday he "never felt" he was far away from a wicket even as Australia's 19-year-old Test debutant Sam Konstas went after India's champion pacer in what is a rare sight in international cricket.

Bumrah said it was an interesting battle against Konstas on the opening day of the fourth Test but believed he could have got the batter out six-seven times in the first two overs.

Konstas, who played some unconventional shots on way to an impressive 60 off 65 balls, hit Bumrah for two sixes during his knock. This was the first time in three years that Bumrah was hit for a six in Test cricket.

"I don't look at things that way. Yes, I have felt good and the results have been in my favour

but I have bowled better in different places. This is how cricket goes, some days your execution might be off and you get wickets but some days your execution could be perfect but you don't get wickets. So I think it all evenly balances out," Bumrah told Channel 7.

"I have experienced heaps of it. I have played T20 cricket a lot, more than 12 years of T20 cricket," Bumrah, who has so far taken 24 wickets in the Border Gavaskar Trophy 2024-25, added, "Interesting batsman (Konstas) as well and I always felt I was in the game, I never felt I am far away from a wicket."

"Initially I felt I could have got him out 6-7 times in the first two overs but that's how cricket goes, some days it pays off, it looks good, some days if it doesn't you might be crit-

icising the same person.

"I love different challenges, always looking forward to a new challenge," Bumrah, who made his ODI debut Down Under, said Australia always brings the best out of him.

"It always brings the best in you. I came here on my first Test tour in 2018, I made my ODI debut here in 2016 as well, so it brings out a lot of challenges because the wickets are very flat, the Kookaburra ball does a bit with the new ball and then doesn't do anything. "So your accuracy is tested, the weather sometimes can test your fitness, your patience, so everything is tested. So once you come out on top after that it really leaves you in a good space and you can become a better cricketer," said Bumrah, who returned figures of 4 for 99 in the first innings, here. (PTI)

## Young guy from India got every shot in book: Boland lauds Nitish Reddy

MELBOURNE, Dec 28: Nitish Reddy's straight drive off Scott Boland that carried him past his maiden Test hundred has convinced the Australian pacer about the young Indian batter's potential with the bat.

Reddy made an unbeaten 105 as India reached 358 for nine in their first innings, and more importantly gave the side a chance to salvage the fourth Test here. "Yeah, obviously he's playing really nicely. Coming in down the middle, it's a lower-order, but he's sort of trying to put the pressure back on us. And he's playing nicely," Boland replied to a query from PTI after the day's play. "He played really well. He's been a young guy from India who's come through and strikes the ball really well. It looks like he's got pretty much every shot in the book," he added. Boland first had a glimpse of Reddy during the Pink Ball match between India and the PM XI in Canberra. (PTI)



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