

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI TUESDAY 10 DECEMBER 2024



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RNI No. 57290/94, Regd No: DL-SW-05/4189/15-17

Vol. 31 No. 295 | 16 PAGES | ₹5.00

WINDOWS



Janhvi Kapoor during an event in Mumbai on Sunday. — PTI

South Korea imposes overseas travel ban on its President Yoon

Seoul: South Korea's Justice Ministry on Monday imposed an overseas travel ban on President Yoon Suk Yeol as authorities investigate allegations of rebellion and other charges in connection with his short-lived declaration of martial law last week. Mr Yoon's martial law decree on Dec. 3, which brought special forces troops onto Seoul's streets, plunged South Korea into political turmoil and caused worry among its key diplomatic partners and neighbors. On Saturday, Mr Yoon avoided an Opposition-led bid to impeach him, with most governing party lawmakers boycotting a parliamentary vote. — AP

J'Khand man held for ransom threat to MoS

New Delhi: Delhi police arrested a 46-year-old man from Jharkhand for allegedly sending a ransom threat message to Union minister of state for defence Sanjay Seth. The accused, a resident of Ranchi, was arrested on Sunday and is currently under further interrogation. Full report on Page 3

At 8.2°C, Delhi sees season's coldest day

New Delhi: Delhi's coldest day of the season saw a minimum temperature of 8.2°C on Monday, 1.4°C below normal. The city also recorded its highest number of "moderate" air quality days in December, with AQI improving to 186, after fluctuating between "very poor" and "moderate." Full report on Page 2

COUNTERPOINT



It's very unfortunate. Farmers are spending more time at the borders than in their fields!

WEATHER

Max: 21°C
Min: 6°C
RH: 52%
Rain: Nil
Forecast: Sunny

ASTROGUIDE

Krodhi: Dakshinayana
Tithi: Margasira Shuddha Dasami till 3.42 am
Star: Uttarabhadra till 1.27 pm
Varyyam: 12.36 am to 2.06 am
Durmuhrtham: 8.51 am to 9.35 am
Rahukalam: 3 pm to 4.30 pm
SUNSET TODAY 5.24 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 7.04 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 1.27 PM
MOONSET TODAY 1.20 AM

Govt appoints revenue secy Malhotra new RBI governor

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO
NEW DELHI, DEC. 9



The government on Monday appointed revenue secretary Sanjay Malhotra as the 28th governor of the Reserve Bank of India for a three-year term beginning from Wednesday. Mr Malhotra will replace Shaktikanta Das, the second longest-serving RBI governor, after Sir Benegal Rama Rau's seven-year-plus tenure.

The decision on the appointment of a new RBI governor was announced after the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) cleared Mr Malhotra's name. Mr Malhotra is a 1990-batch Rajasthan cadre IAS officer and will replace Shaktikanta Das, whose tenure ends on Tuesday, December 10.

Mr Malhotra, an engineering graduate in computer science from IIT Kanpur, has a master's in public policy from Princeton University in the US. He has experience of over 33 years in multiple sectors including power, finance and taxation, information technology, mines, etc. He is now secretary, department of revenue, in the finance ministry. He earlier served as secretary in the department of financial services. In his current assignment, he plays a crucial role in tax policy formulation in respect of direct and indirect taxes. It had been speculated that Mr Das might get an extension as governor for a third term, extending his tenure till December 2026. More on Page 7



The first test flight being accorded a ceremonial water cannon salute upon its landing at Noida International Airport amid the ongoing trials at Jewar in Gautam Buddha Nagar district of Uttar Pradesh on Monday. The airport announced the "successful" completion of its validation flight. The validation flight was conducted by an IndiGo A320 passenger aircraft in the presence of civil aviation minister Kinjarapu Rammohan Naidu. Report on Page 2

Both Houses stalled amidst row over Cong-Soros issue

RS Chair calls both sides to meet today

AGE CORRESPONDENTS
NEW DELHI, DEC. 9

The Opposition and the treasury benches engaged in a war of words in both Houses of Parliament on Monday, a day after the BJP alleged that former Congress president Sonia Gandhi has links to an organisation financed by billionaire investor George Soros, a longtime critic of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. While the government urged all political parties, including the Congress, to unite against "anti-India forces" and raise their voice if they find their leaders working against the nation's interest, the Congress-led Opposition charged the government and the ruling BJP with trying to divert attention from the Adani issue to protect the top businessman. Both Houses saw multiple adjournments before being adjourned



Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and other MPs stages a protest during the Winter Session of Parliament in New Delhi on Monday.

amidst the ruckus, some Congress members were heard saying they had submitted notices to move a privilege motion against a BJP member for attempts to link Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi and former Congress president Sonia

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AAP shifts Sisodia to Jangpura seat

20 names in 2nd list; 18 MLAs dropped

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 9

Apparently facing the prospect of a strong anti-incumbency wave on the back of two full consecutive terms and a resurgent BJP in the national capital, the Aam Aadmi Party has in a major rejig in its poll strategy, shifted former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia to Jangpura seat from his current Patparganj constituency, where he had held the seat three times.

In its second list of candidates released on Monday, the AAP announced 20 candidates for the upcoming polls, dropping 18 sitting MLAs and shifting two key faces — Mr Sisodia and deputy speaker Rakhi Bidlan — to new seats.



Manish Sisodia

Despite announcing two lists for 31 constituencies out of a total 70 seats, the party has conspicuously not named an array of top party leaders, including AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal, current Delhi chief minister Atishi and the entire council of ministers, besides Delhi AAP convener and minister Gopal Rai.

New AAP entrant Avadh Ojha, an educator, has replaced Mr Sisodia

Rift in MVA? UBT boycotts election of Maha Speaker

Mumbai: In yet another sign of differences in the Opposition MVA alliance, the Shiv Sena(UBT) MLAs on Monday boycotted BJP's Rahul Narwekar's election as the Maharashtra Vidhan Sabha Speaker, whereas their allies Congress and NCP(SP) participated in the process.

Sena(UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray said they boycotted the speaker's election because the latter had helped run an unconstitutional government. Mr Narwekar was elected unopposed as the Speaker of the Maharashtra Vidhan Sabha as the MVA alliance decided not to put up a contest.

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FS in Dhaka, meets Yunus, flags attacks on minorities

Frank, candid, constructive talks held: Misri
Hasina in fresh attack on 'fascist' Yunus govt

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, DEC. 9

Amid bilateral tensions, foreign secretary Vikram Misri on Monday held consultations in Dhaka with Bangladesh foreign secretary Muhammad Jashimuddin during his day-long visit to the volatile neighbouring country, after which he said "India desires a positive, constructive, and mutually beneficial relationship with Bangladesh". However, the foreign secretary also conveyed India's "concerns, including those related to the safety and welfare of minorities" after the relentless



Foreign secretary Vikram Misri with chief adviser of Bangladesh Muhammad Yunus during a meeting in Dhaka on Monday.

attacks by radicals on Hindus there and "also discussed some regrettable incidents of attacks on cultural, religious, and diplomatic properties, including the recent breach by protesters of the premises of the

New era begins: Syria PM says govt still functioning amid challenges

Damascus, Dec. 9: Syria's Prime Minister said Monday that most Cabinet ministers are still working from offices in Damascus after rebels entered the capital over the weekend and overthrew President Bashar al-Assad. Streams of refugees crossed in from neighbouring countries, hoping for a more peaceful future.

But there were already signs of the difficulties ahead for the rebel

alliance now in control of much of the country, which is led by a former senior al-Qaida militant who severed ties with the extremist group years ago and has promised representative government and religious tolerance.

The rebel command said Monday they would not tell women how to dress.

Need to preserve unity sovereignty of Syria, says India: Page 4



A bus arrives as people gather at the entrance of Aleppo city waiting for the return of relatives after the release of detainees from Syrian government prisons on Monday.

Struck chemical weapons, rockets, long-range missiles in Syria: Israel

Jerusalem, Dec. 9: Israeli foreign minister Gideon Saar said Monday that his country had struck "chemical weapons" in neighbouring Syria, where rebel forces ousted president Bashar al-Assad over the weekend.

Speaking at a press conference, Mr Saar said "we attacked strategic weapon systems like, for example,

remaining chemical weapons or long-range missiles and rockets in order that they will not fall in the hands of extremists". Mr Saar said Israel was monitoring the actions of the rebels, adding: "The steps we took, the only interest we have is the security of Israel and its citizens."

More on Page 6

40 schools sent bomb threat in Delhi, all a hoax; \$30K demanded

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 9

Around 40 schools in Delhi received a bomb threat mail Monday morning with the sender demanding \$30,000, prompting a multi-agency search of the premises but "nothing suspicious was found". The threat was sent in a single e-mail marked to the some of the city's prominent schools including DPS RK Puram; G.D. Goenka, Paschim Vihar; The British School, Chanakyapuri; The Mother's International, Aurobindo Marg; Modern School, Mandi House; DPS Vasant Kunj; Delhi Police Public School, Safdarjung; DPS East of Kailash and Salwan Public Schools.

Most schools that received the threat suspended classes and sent students back home. Officials said the schools that received the threat were thoroughly checked and nothing suspicious was found.

Officials said bomb detection teams, fire officials, local police and dog squads responded immediately and conducted searches at the schools.

More on Page 2

SHORT TAKES

SC to hear Sisodia's bail plea tomorrow

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Monday said it would hear on Wednesday AAP leader Manish Sisodia's pleas seeking relaxation of bail conditions which require him to report to the investigating officer twice a week in the corruption and money laundering cases related to the Delhi excise policy. Mr Sisodia's counsel Abhishek Singhvi mentioned the matter before a bench of Justices B.R. Gavi and K.V. Viswanathan. "Day after tomorrow," the bench said, while agreeing to list the matter on December 11. The top court on November 22 agreed to hear Mr Sisodia's pleas and issued notices to the CBI and ED seeking their responses. On August 9, the SC had granted him bail in the corruption and money laundering cases linked to the alleged Delhi excise policy scam, saying long incarceration for 17 months without trial had deprived him of his right to speedy trial.

IYC launches 'Young India ke Bol' phase 5

New Delhi: The Indian Youth Congress (IYC) on Monday launched the fifth phase of its "Young India ke Bol" programme, focusing on two of the most pressing problems in the country — unemployment and drug abuse. IYC president Uday Bhanu Chib and All India Congress Committee in-charge of National Students' Union of India Kanhaiya Kumar launched the poster of the programme and urged the youth to join it. Mr Chib said that they had started a drive "Naukri Do, Nasha Nah", aimed at raising awareness against drug abuse among youngsters. "We want to engage youth. Young India ke Bol has been launched where we will give a platform to youth who will speak up against unemployment and drug menace," he said.

2 held, heroin worth ₹2.5cr seized: Police

New Delhi: The Delhi police has arrested two people, including a woman drug peddler, and seized 402 grams of heroin with an estimated market value of ₹2.5 crore, officials said on Monday. The operation was conducted on December 7 and 8 based on a tip off. The police launched targeted raids and apprehended a 41-year-old woman from Narela with 102 grams of heroin in her possession, DCP (Outer North) Nidhin Valsan said. She was previously arrested in 2023 along with her husband for a similar offense and is currently out on bail, he said. Another accused, Jilani (30), hailing from Uttar Pradesh, was held in Bawana with 300 grams of heroin, the officer said. Jilani has a criminal record, including cases under the Uttar Pradesh Anti-Social Activities Prevention Act.

NMC UNVEILS NORMS TO SPOT 'FAKE PATIENTS'

The National Medical Commission (NMC) has issued guidelines for identifying "fake patients" in medical colleges and facilities seeking approval for setting up new institutes or for increasing the number of UG and PG seats. This is the first time that the commission has come up with such norms. The guidelines come after instances of some medical institutions or colleges admitting fake patients (person who does not require any treatment or in-patient treatment) to fulfill the requirement of bed occupancy and investigation. The commission said "fake patient practice" will be considered as a serious violation and will invite punishment. As per the guidelines, admission of large numbers of patients on the day of inspection or the previous day, admission of multiple patients from the same family or the admitted patients having no or minor problems could be a parameter for identifying "fake patients". Patients, who are admitted without any evidence of investigations like X-ray, blood tests etc. or treatment which is done for admitted patients like intravenous fluid, catheterisation, giving medicines etc can also be an indication.

Panic, fear grip parents as schools receive threats in Delhi
Bomb hoax in 40 schools, demand for \$30K ransom

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 9

Panic and fear gripped after around 40 schools in Delhi received a bomb threat mail on Monday morning with the sender demanding \$30,000. The threat was sent in a single email marked to the city's prominent schools including DPS R.K. Puram; G.D. Goenka, Paschim Vihar; The British School, Chanakyapuri; The Mother's International, Aurobindo Marg; Modern School, Mandi House; DPS Vasant Kunj; Delhi Police Public School, Safdarjung; DPS east of Kailash and Salwan Public Schools.

Most schools that received the threat suspended their classes and sent students back home. A Delhi Fire Service (DFS) official said they received the first alerts about the bomb threats from DPS R.K. Puram (7.06 am) and G.D. Goenka Paschim Vihar (6.15 am). He said bomb detection teams, fire officials, local police, and dog squads responded immediately and conducted searches at the schools.

Law & order is getting worse every day: AAP

New Delhi: The ruling AAP on Monday voiced concern over the bomb threats received by several schools in Delhi and accused the BJP-led Centre of failing to ensure the safety of residents in the national capital. AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal said in a press conference, "The situation of law and order in Delhi is getting worse every day. Now our children are not safe, as bomb threats are received in many schools and this is not the first time." There has been a blast outside a CRPF school in Rohini, so it is not that only threats are being received, he added.

Nothing suspicious has been found yet, a police official said around 9.30 am. He further said that operations are underway. Sources said the email was delivered to the schools' id at 11.38 pm on Sunday — when the schools were closed — from scottielanza@gmail.com.

"I planted multiple bombs inside the building. The bombs are small and hidden very well. It will not cause very much damage to the building, but many people will be injured when the bombs detonate," the email read.

In a message to parents, Mother Mary's School in Mayur Vihar, said, "An email was received this morning regarding a bomb threat in school. As such, the students are being dispersed immediately as a precautionary measure. You are requested to kindly collect your wards from your respective bus stops."



Students return after schools in Delhi received a bomb threat mail in New Delhi on Monday. — PTI

Earlier in May, more than 200 schools, hospitals, and other important government installations in the city received a similar kind of bomb threat but the case is yet to be solved as the mail was sent using a virtual private network (VPN). Emergency teams, including bomb squads, police, and fire officials, combed through the premises. Authorities later confirmed that no suspicious items were found.

2 students jump to death from PG facility in Rohini

'Nothing suspicious found' 'Duo were roommates'

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 9

Two BBA students died after falling from the fourth floor of their paying guest accommodation in Rohini on Monday, an official said. The police had earlier said the duo — Ishaan, a resident of Rajasthan's Bharatpur and Harsh of Delhi's Palam Colony — had jumped to their death. They were pursuing BBA from Delhi Technological University (DTU) and Bhagwan Parshuram Institute of Technology (BPIT), he said. "A PCR call was received at 1.10 am at the KNK Marg police station informing that two boys had fallen from the terrace of a building. The police team immediately visited the scene," a senior police officer said. "Upon local enquiry, it

was found that the two individuals, who were in a room on the fourth floor of a PG accommodation, had fallen through the window," he added. DCP (Rohini) Amit Goel, in a statement, said the spot was visited by a forensic department team and the cause of the fall was found to be accidental. A source said both the students were roommates and they shifted to the PG facility two months ago. On Sunday night, a few of their common friends had come to meet the duo. The police also

checked if they were partying or if any scuffle had taken place. "Other witnesses were also examined and they said the students indulged in a friendly scuffle which led to their fall from the window," the officer added.

The CCTV footage near the spot was scanned but nothing suspicious has been found, the officer said, adding that the bodies have been sent for a post-mortem. According to BPIT principal Payal Pahwa, Ishaan was a first-year BBA student at the private institute affiliated with the IP University. "We received the information about Ishaan's death from the police. We are looking into the records of the student and will be able to make any comments accordingly," Ms Pahwa said.

At 4, city has highest no. of 'moderate' air quality days this Dec

Delhi braces for coldwave & records its lowest daytime temperature so far

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 9

Delhi's air quality returned to "moderate" category on Monday, marking the highest number of moderate air quality days — four — ever recorded in December. The city also recorded its lowest daytime temperature this winter season so far, with maximum temperature settling at 21.6 degrees Celsius, 3.2 notches below normal, according to the weather department. The second-lowest maximum temperature was recorded on November 18 at 23.5 degrees Celsius, as per the data.

Signaling a welcome improvement after the recent fluctuations in pollution levels, the Air Quality Index (AQI), which was in the "very poor" category on Sunday at 302, improved to 186 by 4 pm on Monday, placing it in the "moderate" category. According to the data, Monday marked the fourth moderate air quality day this month, the highest number of such days recorded in December so far. Data showed that the highest record was set in 2022, 2019, and 2015 when December had three days

DPCG fines MCD and DDA ₹2L for env violations

New Delhi: The Delhi Pollution Control Committee on Monday informed the National Green Tribunal that the MCD and the DDA were fined a lakh each for reportedly failing to prevent environmental damages. The NGT previously directed the DPCG to impose the compensation for environmental damages on both authorities, after noting their liability to pay fines for violation of green norms.

Of moderate air quality. In contrast, no moderate air quality days were reported in December 2023. Of the 38 air quality monitoring stations in the national capital, only Shadipur recorded air quality in the "very poor" category on Monday, marking a drop from the "poor" category recorded on Sunday. Thirteen stations recorded air quality in the "poor" category, while the remaining reported "moderate" AQI, according to the Sameer app.

AAP conceded defeat by dropping over a dozen of its sitting MLAs: Congress
Kejriwal, Atishi may also desert their seats: BJP

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 9

The BJP and the Congress on Monday took a dig at the ruling Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) second list of 20 candidates. Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva said, just as the fugitive Manish Sisodia has fled from Patparganj, Atishi and Arvind Kejriwal will also be forced to leave their constituencies. Congress Delhi president Devender Yadav said the AAP has

conceded defeat even before the polls have been announced by dropping over a dozen of its sitting MLAs out of 31 candidates announced. During a media briefing, Mr Sachdeva along with Union minister and East Delhi MP Harsh Malhotra and BJP media head Praveen Shankar Kapoor, claimed that Mr Kejriwal, who criticises nepotism, has been compelled to allot tickets to the sons of two sitting MLAs and has further requested Matia

THE DPCC chief said, the AAP's desperate gambit to drop sitting MLAs will not remove stains of his corruption as Arvind Kejriwal too will desert his Assembly seat fearing defeat. Mahal AAP MLA Shoab Iqbal for a safer sit for himself. Delhi BJP secretary Impreet Singh Bakshi, who contested from Jangpura in 2020, said, "People know Mr Sisodia

as a liquor mafia as he is known for opening alcohol shops instead of opening schools." The DPCC chief said, the AAP's desperate gambit to drop sitting MLAs will not remove stains of his corruption as Mr Kejriwal too will desert his Assembly seat fearing defeat. Mr Yadav said, "The AAP is an abject failure on all fronts, which was clear from the fact that Mr Sisodia, who held 18 portfolios, has to flee. The

AAP, which spoke against "parivardwad", had no pangs of conscience in giving tickets to sons and relatives of AAP leaders, and fielding the corrupt who had been jailed shows their double standard. Delhi Congress chief said that he witnessed the angry public mood against the corrupt AAP during his month-long "Delhi Nyay Yatra", as people spoke out loudly that they want change, and the Congress was the only option before them.

BJP to hold 3,891 nukkad sabhas to woo city voters

Saffron party to launch outreach drive tomorrow

SHASHI BHUSHAN and BHASKAR HARI SHARMA NEW DELHI, DEC. 9

The Delhi BJP unit is launching an outreach overdrive in the run-up to the crucial Assembly polls and has decided to hold 3,891 micro public meetings (nukkad sabhas) for 12 days beginning Wednesday covering all 70 constituencies.

The party has also lined up a similar number of "yuva chaupal" and "women drawing room meetings" in its make-or-buy poll strategy to enlist a sectional support base amongst the youth and women to magnify its winning prospects in the national capital which has remained a thorn in the BJP's winning streak at the national level.

The Delhi unit of the BJP will be launching Jan Samvad Nukkad Sabhas from December 11 (Wednesday) at the shakti kendra level, well-placed sources in the BJP said. Starting from Wednesday it will continue till December 22 and will be holding such sabhas at kendras across all the 70 Assembly segments. In each of these meetings, a senior party leader

will interact and address the people, they said. Under BJP's organisational structure, three-four polling booths constitute a shakti kendra. "Over 300 meetings will be held every day and each meeting will consist of 150-200 people which will help us in making a direct connection with the voter," a leader said, adding, "The idea is to hold targeted meetings with a limited audience for effective communication and establish direct connect with the electorates."

The successful poll strategy of the party in Haryana during the October Assembly polls is being replicated by the Delhi BJP unit in order to reap political dividends. In the neighbouring agrarian state, the saffron party held thousands of Nukkad Sabhas and managed not only to beat 10 years of anti-incumbency but emerged with a brute majority.

"Following the Haryana model which was also used during the Maharashtra polls, we will incorporate a similar strategy to take on the rival AAP and its 11 years of anti-incumbency," BJP insiders claimed. The BJP, meanwhile, has

made elaborate plans to target women, youths, and first-time voters through separate meetings. The state unit of BJP's yuva morcha and mahila morcha will carry out 3,891 meetings respectively at the shakti kendras from Tuesday.

Delhi BJP yuva morcha president Sagar Tyagi told this newspaper, "Senior party leaders including state co-in-charge Dr Alka Gurjar, state party chief Virendra Sachdeva, and national yuva morcha president and MP Tejasvi Surya will be launching yuva chaupal on Tuesday and in the coming weeks the youth wing will interact with the young voters at all the shakti kendras."

Mahila morcha Delhi chief Richa Pandey Mishra, on her part, said the women's wing will conduct the drawing room meetings similarly to reach out and garner the support of women voters in all 70 seats. After shakti kendras it will be further held at the booth levels as well.

The BJP, which is hoping to end its 26 years of exile from the Delhi Assembly, has drawn up an elaborate plan for next year's polls to counter the ruling AAP.

Atishi promises salary hike and electric bus training
Govt accepts DTC workers' demands

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 9

Delhi chief minister Atishi announced on Monday that all Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) drivers will be trained to operate electric buses as part of the city's plan to transition its entire bus fleet to electric vehicles. She also assured that senior drivers, particularly assistant ticket inspectors, would be given priority for employment in the new electric bus fleet.

Addressing a press conference, the chief minister stated that the Delhi government has agreed to several key demands made by DTC workers. "There are 4,500 contractual drivers and 17,850 contractual conductors in DTC. Recently, they went on strike. We listened to their demands, which are justified," she said.

One of the primary issues raised by the workers was the transfer of female DTC employees stationed at the Sarojini Nagar Pink Bus Depot. Ms



Delhi chief minister Atishi addresses a press conference in New Delhi on Monday. — PTI

Atishi said the government had resolved this issue by transferring the workers back to their original depots, addressing a major point of contention that led to the strike. Ms Atishi explained that the Delhi government had introduced a new policy aimed at rationalising duty stations for drivers and conductors. "An online form will be created so that all drivers can provide their details, and an online list will be released to make the process more transparent," she said. In response to the workers' demand for improved

compensation, the Delhi government has given in-principle approval for a proposal to increase the salaries of contractual drivers and conductors, the CM said.

"Contractual drivers currently receive a daily wage of ₹843, totalling ₹21,918 per month. They have requested a consolidated amount instead of daily wages," she added. The government has approved the proposal, and within the next one to two months, workers will begin receiving salaries according to their grade pay, Atishi said.

Atishi unveils 68th National School Sports

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 9

Delhi chief minister Atishi inaugurated the 68th National School Sports on Monday, emphasising the role of sports in fostering unity and patriotism and said that sports bring us together and instill a sense of national pride. The directorate of education, sports branch of Delhi is hosting the 68th National School Sports 2024-25 in 11 different sports.

Addressing the event at the Tyagraj Stadium, Ms Atishi recalled the moment when Neeraj Chopra won the gold, and said, "I don't think there was any Indian whose eyes didn't well up with tears when the national flag was raised and the anthem played."

Noida airport starts validation flight in step to starting its ops

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 9

Noida International Airport (NIA) on Monday achieved a significant milestone with the successful completion of its first validation flight, a vital element of the aerodrome licensing process. The airport is expected to become operational from April 2025 with cargo flights operating in the beginning.

The flight conducted by IndiGo — the launch carrier for the airport — verified the airport's approach procedures, confirming the accuracy and functionality of its navigational aids

and air traffic control systems. The validation flight was conducted on an Airbus A-320 to test the RNP (required navigation performance) procedures and ILS approach procedures. RNP is a set of navigation specifications that allow aircraft to fly precise flight paths with high accuracy. "This crucial step demonstrates NIA's adherence to the stringent safety and operational standards required for commercial operations," NIA said in a statement.

Following the validation flight, NIA will finalise the required doc-

umentation for aerodrome certification and submit it to the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA). Speaking at the event, Union minister for civil aviation Kinjarapu Rammohan Naidu said, "With the validation flight happening today, we are committed to finishing the airport project before the end of April. Today marks a very important occasion in the progress of the airport and definitely whatever support is required from the ministry of civil aviation we will continuously provide so that the early operations from the airport can begin," he said.

INDIAN RAILWAYS
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS
(RAILWAY BOARD)

No. 2024/Track-III/MC/4 New Delhi, dated 09.12.2024
E-Tender No. TM-2403 for procurement of 15 nos. Switch Rail Grinding Machine (SRGM).

1. Electronic bids are invited for and on behalf of the President of India for procurement of **Switch Rail Grinding Machine (SRGM)**.
2. The interested tenderers are advised to visit the website <http://trecps.gov.in> for details, downloading of the tender document and submission of their e-bids.

Executive Director, Track (M&M)
Railway Board

3783/24 SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

NORTHERN RAILWAY
OPEN TENDER NOTICE

The Sr. Divisional Engineer/C, Northern Railway, DRM Office, Delhi Division, State Entry Road, New Delhi-110055, for and on behalf of the President of India invites sealed open envelope-tenders for under noted work:-

Name of the Work	Provision of VHF-Based Approaching Train Warning System (Rakshak) for staff between ANDI-PNP Section under ADEN/PNP jurisdiction over DLI-Division.
Approximate Cost of work	₹80,65,905/-
Earnest Money to be deposited	₹1,61,300/-
Completion Period	36 Months
Date of Opening	03.01.2025

The e-tender is to be submitted through railway website '<http://trecps.gov.in>'. The tender can be submitted on website up to 15.00 hrs. on 03.01.2025 and shall be opened thereafter.

No.: 128-W/Sr.DEN-CEN/IT-28-24-25-WC Dated : 09.12.2024 3784/2024
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

SHORT TAKES

SC seeks CBI reply on Indrani petition

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Monday sought response from the CBI on former media executive Indrani Mukerjea's plea challenging a Bombay high court order denying her permission to travel abroad as she is accused in a case of killing her daughter Sheena Bora. The travel restriction plea came up before the apex court following a July 19 order by a special court allowing Ms Mukerjea to visit Spain and the United Kingdom for 10 days over the next three months. The CBI approached the high court challenging the order passed by the special court. The high court quashed the special court's order on September 27. Subsequently, Ms Mukerjea moved the apex court challenging this high court order. A bench of Justices M.M. Sundresh and Arvind Kumar issued a notice to the agency and sought its response on the appeal filed by Ms Mukerjea against the high court order.

Farm stir: SC junks plea on blockades

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Monday dismissed a plea seeking directions to the Centre and other authorities to immediately clear blockades on national and state highways in Punjab due to ongoing farmers' protests. A bench of Justices Surya Kant and Manmohan said, "We are already examining the larger issue. You are not the only conscience keeper of society. Don't file repetitive petitions. Some are filing for publicity interest and some are filing to play to the gallery. We cannot entertain repetitive petitions on the same issue." The apex court refused to tag the petition moved by Gaurav Luthra with the pending matter. Mr Luthra has claimed himself to be a social activist in Punjab.

Aaditya demands UT status for Belagavi

Mumbai: Maharashtra-Karnataka border dispute had its reversion in the Winter Session of the Maharashtra Assembly as Shiv Sena(UBT) MLA Aaditya Thackeray on Monday demanded that the Centre should declare Belagavi in Karnataka a Union territory, alleging injustice was being meted out to Marathi-speaking people there. "Marathi-speaking people in Belagavi are being suppressed. There is a sharp decline in the rights and freedoms of the Marathi-speaking people living there," Mr Thackeray said in the Vidhan Bhavan complex. His remarks came against the backdrop of the Karnataka government denying permission to Maharashtra Ekikaran Samiti (MES) — a pro-Marathi organisation — to hold its annual convention in Belagavi and also banning leaders from Maharashtra from entering the state.

J'KHAND MAN ARRESTED OVER THREAT TO MOS

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 9

The Delhi police has arrested a 46-year-old man from Jharkhand for allegedly sending a ransom threat message to Union minister of state for defence Sanjay Seth, officials said on Monday. The accused, a resident of Ranchi, was arrested on Sunday and is currently under further interrogation, the officials added. Mr Seth, a member of Parliament for Ranchi, received a threat message demanding a ransom of 50 lakhs from an unknown number on his mobile phone last Friday, officials said. The sender allegedly also issued a death threat. Upon receiving the message, Seth immediately informed the Delhi police and the Jharkhand DGP. Senior officers from the Delhi police, including a deputy commissioner of police, visited Mr Seth to ensure swift action was taken in the case, another official said. According to the police, the suspect used someone else's mobile phone to send the threatening message to Mr Seth.

INDIA camp alleges V-P biased against it, backing ruling party
Opp bloc mulls no-trust motion for removal of Dhankhar as V-P

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 9

The Opposition INDIA bloc is set to bring a no-confidence motion against Rajya Sabha Chairman and vice-president Jagdeep Dhankhar under Article 67(B) of the Indian Constitution.

The Opposition had gathered signatures from its MPs in August during the Monsoon Session of Parliament, but chose not to act on it at the time. However, the INDIA bloc is now expressing dissatisfaction with Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar, accusing him of showing "bias" towards certain MPs in the Rajya Sabha.

The motion has already garnered 70 signatures from MPs across various



Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar conducts proceedings in the House during the Winter session of Parliament in New Delhi on Monday.

parties in the bloc. INDIA bloc MPs have frequently accused the Rajya Sabha Chairman of being biased towards the ruling members in the Upper House. They have accused him of frequently interrupting their speeches, refusing to allow adequate debate on critical issues, and favouring the ruling party during contentious discussions. They argued that parliamentary convention mandated that the Leader of the Opposition be granted

the floor when he rose to speak. A major point of contention was the frequent disruption of Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge's speeches, with his microphone allegedly being turned off on multiple occasions.

The Opposition also accused Mr Dhankhar of making personal remarks against members, which they said violates parliamentary rules.

The Rajya Sabha was disrupted on Monday after the BJP accused top Congress leaders of conspiring with billionaire investor George Soros to destabilise the country. The allegations sparked intense uproar from both the treasury and Opposition benches.

Rift out in open: Sena-UBT boycotts Maha Speaker poll

'Rahul Narwekar had helped run unconstitutional govt'

BHAGWAN PARAB MUMBAI, DEC. 9

In yet another sign of differences in the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi alliance, Shiv Sena(UBT) MLAs on Monday boycotted BJP's Rahul Narwekar's election as the Maharashtra Assembly Speaker, whereas their allies — the Congress and the NCP(SP) — participated in the process.

Shiv Sena(UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray said that they boycotted the Speaker's election because the latter had helped run an unconstitutional government during his previous tenure. It is only on the premises of the Maharashtra Assembly that there is a celebration and not anywhere else in the state.

WHILE SHIV Sena(UBT) MLAs decided to skip the poll, the other partners of the MVA alliance — the Congress and the NCP (SP) — attended it

"Everyone knows the ministers in this government. This is an EVM government. While he was the Maharashtra Vidhan Sabha Speaker Rahul Narwekar did an injustice to us (our party). He insulted the Indian Constitution. It is still fresh in our minds how he gave a ruling which affected Shiv Sena and NCP. We need to be assured that such things will not happen (in the future)," Mr Thackeray said.

However, while Shiv Sena(UBT) MLAs decided

to skip the election, the other partners of the MVA alliance — the Congress and the NCP (SP) — were notably present. Senior Congress MLA Nana Patole and Jayant Patil from the NCP(SP) also greeted Mr Narwekar on this occasion.

Mr Narwekar, during his tenure as Speaker of the 14th Maharashtra Assembly for two and a half years, had ruled that the party led by Eknath Shinde was the legitimate and the real Shiv Sena after a split in the Uddhav Thackeray-led party. He also held that the faction under Ajit Pawar was the real NCP.

Mr Narwekar was elected unopposed as the Speaker of the 15th Maharashtra Vidhan Sabha.

Rahul takes dig at Modi and Adani with mock 'interview'

New Delhi, Dec. 9: Leaders of some INDIA bloc parties on Monday protested in Parliament complex over the indictment of industrialist Gautam Adani by the US, with Rahul Gandhi conducting a mock "interview" over the issue and Congress members wearing masks of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and industrialist Gautam Adani.

Standing outside the Makar Dwar of Parliament, Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, along with MPs of other Opposition parties, raised slogans of "Modi, Adani ek hain" and "we want justice".

After sloganeering, Mr Gandhi conducted the mock "interview" with Congress leaders wearing masks of Modi and Adani. Mr Gandhi asked the



Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi with Congress MPs Manickam Tagore and Saptagiri Sankar Ulaka, wearing face masks of PM Narendra Modi and Adani Group chairman Gautam Adani, during the Winter Session of Parliament in New Delhi on Monday.

party member sporting masks of Adani as to why Parliament was not being allowed to function to which the Congress MP (posing as Adani) said "we'll have to ask Amit bhai...That man is missing".

Asked by Mr Gandhi about the relationship between the two, the

Congress MP said, "We are together."

The Congress leader sporting mask of Adani also said, "He does whatever I say and want...Be it airport or anything else."

On why Mr Modi was silent, the Congress MP posing as Adani said, "this man is in tension these days".

'Farmers have been betrayed by Modi govt'

New Delhi, Dec. 9: Slamming the Centre, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Monday said farmers are pleading for justice because the Modi government "betrayed them again and again", and asserted that the tillers' right to raise their voice should not be taken away from them.

Mr Kharge asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi as to why farmers have to come to Delhi's doorstep again and again for justice. "Today, when you will be on a tour to Haryana and Rajasthan, I hope that you will definitely try to understand the struggle of the farmer who provides food to the nation. Farmers are pleading for justice because your government has betrayed them again and again," Mr Kharge said on a X post.

Amid protests, Manipur govt lifts Internet ban in 9 districts

MANOJ ANAND GUWAHATI, DEC. 9

Amid the protest and opposition by civil society groups, the Manipur government on Monday decided to lift the temporary suspension of Internet services in nine districts of the state.

Commissioner (home) N. Ashok Kumar in a statement said that the state government has reviewed the prevailing law and order situation and decided to lift the Internet suspension, which was imposed in the nine districts of Manipur on November 16, 2024, as a preventive measure in the public interest.

The districts where the Internet ban was lifted included Imphal West, Imphal East, Bishnupur, Thoubal, Kakching, K a n g p o k p i, Churachandpur, Jiribam, and Pherzawl.

Give info on arson, property encroachments: SC to state

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 9

The Supreme Court on Monday directed the Manipur government to submit a detailed report in a sealed cover on the number of properties that were fully or partially burnt, looted or encroached upon during the ongoing ethnic violence in the state.

Stressing the need for the state to address the

grievances of the displaced persons and take steps to restore their properties, a bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar said, "We also direct the state government to provide the following details: 1. Buildings burnt and partially burnt, 2. Buildings which are looted; and (3) the buildings trespassed and encroached upon."

An order issued by the home department of Manipur said, "The state government has decided to lift any form of Internet suspension in the state of Manipur, which was in good faith imposed

as preventive measures in public interests in view of violence in the state."

The order also cautioned Internet users to refrain from activities that could lead to future Internet suspensions.

Govt was confused on farmers' march, says Punjab Kisan neta

'No jatha will march to Delhi today'

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 9

Punjab farmers leader Sarwan Singh Pandher said no "jatha" (group) of farmers will resume the foot march to Delhi on Tuesday, and accused the Centre of being confused on how the protesters should proceed to the national capital.

Mr Pandher said they will decide their next course of action in a meeting of Samyukta Kisan

Morcha (non-political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha on Tuesday and till then "No 'jatha'" will be going tomorrow," he said.

Addressing the media, Mr Pandher claimed that the BJP-led Centre was "confused" after farmers decided to march on foot to the national capital.

"Now Central minister Manohar Lal Khattar is saying farmers should come by other vehicles. When Mr Khattar was the

chief minister of Haryana, he used to say that farmers should come on foot... Earlier, the entire BJP was objecting to farmers going by tractor trolleys to Delhi. The government is confused on what to say and what not to say. This is lowering the credibility of the government among people," Mr Pandher said.

In Karnal on Monday, Mr Khattar, when asked about the farmers' protest, said, "Nobody is stopping them from going to Delhi but there is a way."

Referring to farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal's fast unto death which entered 14th day on Monday, Mr Pandher said "I have met Dallewal ji today...He will continue his fast till farmers' demands are met." He cautioned the Punjab police not try to repeat the November 26 incident when they forcibly removed Mr Dallewal from the Khanauri border.

PM: India's progress visible in every field

Continued from Page 1

doubled in the last 10 years," he said, adding that even Foreign Direct Investment had increased more than two times in the last decade in comparison with the decade before 2014.

The PM noted that the infrastructure expenditure of India had increased to ₹11 trillion from nearly ₹2 trillion. "India's success showcases the true power of democracy, demography, digital data and delivery," he said.

Mr Modi noted the success and empowerment of democracy in a diverse country like India was a great achievement in itself.

He remarked that welfare of humanity while being a democratic nation was at the core of the philosophy of India. Mr Modi hailed the demography, that is youth power, for taking forward these ancient traditions of India, and remarked that India was going to be among the youngest countries in the world for many years to come and it will have the largest pool of youth as well as the largest skilled youth group.

Later, launching the "Bima Sakhi Yojana" of the Life Insurance Corporation in Panipat, the PM assured the women of

Haryana that the state would develop rapidly and that the governments at the Centre and the state will work three times faster in their third term. He expressed confidence that the role of women power in Haryana would continue to grow stronger.

Mr Modi said that to empower women it was very important that they get ample opportunities to move forward and every obstacle was removed from in front of them. He added that for a long time, there were many jobs in the country that were barred for women, but the BJP government has resolved to remove every obstacle coming their way.

Mr Modi informed the gathering that over 10 crore women across the country were associated with self-help groups and the government has provided assistance of more than ₹8 lakh crores to women-led self-help groups.

Listing the initiatives taken by the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre, the PM took a dig at the Opposition, saying those who weigh everything on the scale of the vote bank have failed to understand why he was increasingly getting the support of women in the country.

100 days in office: MP CM to launch campaign to unveil ₹18,354cr projects

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY BHOPAL, DEC. 9

Madhya Pradesh chief minister Mohan Yadav on Monday announced that a 40-day campaign would be launched on December 11 to unveil various development projects worth ₹18354 crore across the state to mark his government's one year in office.

Foundation for various other projects would also be laid in different parts of the state during the campaign, which is scheduled to end on January 26, he said.

Besides, a fortnight-long campaign would be launched on December 11 to include the eligible beneficiaries across the state, left out in the 56 different welfare schemes of the state government.

Mr Yadav was elected leader of the BJP Legislature Party in Madhya Pradesh on December 11 last year and assumed office as chief minister two days later on December 13.

"My government has done significant works for the welfare of the people, including women, farmers, youths and under privileged sections

of the society, besides wooing investments worth ₹2.45 lakh crore for the state by conducting regional industry conclaves in the state," he said.

The CM said that all the welfare schemes including the "Ladli Behna Yojana" providing beneficiary women a monthly incentive of ₹1,250 have been continuing in the state despite the apprehensions by the Opposition of their discontinuance.

He said he has coined the new concept of inclusive industrial development in the state.

Chd cops file charges in 245 cases under new laws

AMRESH SRIVASTAVA NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH, DEC. 9

Soon after the implementation of the three new criminals laws on July 1, the Chandigarh police has filed chargesheets in 245 cases and also secured four convictions out of 1179 FIRs registered so far. The police officials also said that "trials in absentia" would be initiated against nearly 1500

absconders, hiding abroad to avoid legal proceedings. Briefing the media persons on Sunday, the Chandigarh DGP S.S. Yadav said that "foolproof" technologies are being used and prescribed protocols are strictly followed right from call to police stations to filing charge sheets in the courts.

Under the new laws, it is compulsory to video recording of every step during the probe, right

THE OFFICIALS also informed that seized properties like vehicles will not be left long at police stations and the list of evidence has to be prepared within 14 days to send it to the court

from receiving a distress call on Emergency Response number 112 to the collection of evidence, photography of the crime scene and to get it digitally

uploaded on the special application E-Sakshya, a cloud-based service operated by the National Informatics Centre.

The officials also informed that seized properties like vehicles will not be left long at police stations and the list of evidence has to be prepared within 14 days to send it to the court.

The laws also provide the use of various applications such as Nafis

(National Automated Fingerprint Identification System) and face recognition system "Chitra Khoji" apps developed by the government.

On December 3, Prime Minister Narendra Modi dedicated the implementation of the three laws: Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023 to the nation.

SHORT TAKES

4 students among 7 killed in Raj mishap

Junagadh: Seven persons, including four college students, headed to a village to appear for an exam, were killed when two cars collided in Gujarat's Junagadh district on Monday, police said. The incident occurred on the Junagadh-Veraval High-way around 8 AM when a car jumped the road divider at high speed and crashed into another car coming from the opposite direction near Bhanduri village, said deputy superintendent of police, Dinesh Kodyiyatar. "Due to an unknown reason, the car veered off the road and hit the road divider at high speed. The vehicle then crashed into another car coming from the opposite direction. All the seven passengers in both the cars died on the spot due to the collision," Kodyiyatar said. The car coming from Keshod and heading towards Gadu village which jumped the road divider was carrying five persons, including four college students, while another car had two passengers. — PTI

Rape-murder case: SC upholds HC order

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Monday upheld an order of the Bombay high court which commuted the death penalty of two convicts in the 2007 Pune BPO employee gang-rape and murder case to "life term for a period of 35 years" on the grounds of an inordinate delay in executing them. A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka, Ahsanuddin Amanullah and Augustine George Masih dismissed the appeal filed by the Maharashtra government challenging the Bombay high court judgment. The convicts — Purushottam Borate and Pradeep Kokade — were to be executed on June 24, 2019 but the high court said on June 21, 2019 that the execution should not take place until further orders. The high court on July 29, 2019 had allowed the convicts' petitions to stay the execution of their death warrant.

Bomb explodes in Murshidabad, 3 die

Berhampore: Three youths were killed in a bomb explosion near the India-Bangladesh border in Murshidabad of West Bengal late on Sunday night. At around 11 pm, villagers of Khayertala in Sagarpura woke up to a deafening sound when several bombs exploded at 30-year-old Mamun Mollah's two-storied house, leaving it badly damaged. At least four youths, who were making crude bombs inside, suffered fatal injuries with deep burns on their hands and faces. One of them, Mustakin Sheikh (28), died at the spot. Two others, Mamun and Sakirul Islam (32), succumbed to injuries at the Murshidabad Medical College and Hospital. The bodies were sent for post mortem. The fourth injured was rushed to a private hospital for treatment. A police team with a bomb squad later cordoned off the damaged house.

'Absurd': Didi hits out at B'desh leaders for 'occupy WB remark'

'Will we have lollipop while you come to occupy our land?' says CM

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, DEC. 9

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday reacted strongly to reported statements by some Bangladeshi leaders that Bangladesh could occupy Bengal along with two other neighbouring states, calling them "absurd". She also warned them that Indians would not sit and have a "lollipop" to their claim to occupy the state within days. Her swipe to the Bangladeshi leaders comes on a day when foreign secretary Vikram Misri visited Dhaka and held meetings with Bangladesh interim government chief adviser Muhammad Yunus and other officials in the wake of the attacks on the



— Mamata Banerjee, West Bengal CM

Hindu community in the neighbouring country. The Trinamul Congress supremo, speaking at the state Assembly during the Winter Session, also mocked the Bangladeshi leaders saying, "Stay calm and healthy and have peace of mind." Recently, a Bangladesh Nationalist Party leader threatened at a rally in Dhaka to occupy Bengal, Bihar and Odisha. Reacting to provocative

statements, Ms Banerjee told the House, "When you reach here to take over, will we have lollipops? Don't think we will remain seated. We should not comment in such a way that would instigate communal violence." Regarding the issue of Bangladesh nationals attempting to cross the border into West Bengal, MS Banerjee stated that

the Border Security Force (BSF) was monitoring the situation. "Many are trying to come to India from Bangladesh. The BSF is monitoring this. I would not comment on this. It is not our area. Our foreign secretary is there. The BSF is keeping a watch on our borders." The West Bengal CM also called upon the media to be cautious in their coverage of the Bangladesh issue, particularly regarding the spread of fake videos. "We are not taking it well. Miscreants are trying to instigate riots. We do not need riots, we need peace. What a section of the media is doing is not right. We can't ban them like Uttar Pradesh. We are appealing that they should not do this."

Monitoring developments in Arab nation: MEA India calls for preserving unity, sovereignty of Syria

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 9

A day after rebel forces overthrew President Bashar al-Assad's authoritarian government in Syria, New Delhi on Monday said that the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria should be preserved and battled for an inclusive Syrian-led process to establish peace there in a post-Assad scenario. "We are monitoring the situation in Syria in the light of ongoing developments. We underline the need for all parties to work towards preserving the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. We advocate a peaceful and inclusive Syrian-led political process respecting the interests and aspirations of all sections of Syrian society," the ministry of exter-

WE UNDERLINE the need for all parties to work towards preserving the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, says MEA. The MEA added that the Indian embassy in Damascus is in contact with the Syrian community for their safety and security. Sources had said earlier on Sunday that the Indian embassy in Damascus remains operational and that all Indians there are safe. New Delhi had said last week that "there are about 90 Indian nationals in Syria, including 14 who are working in various UN organizations" and that "our mission remains in close contact with our nationals for their safety and security."

India had also issued an advisory last week, before the fall of the Assad government, and urged Indian citizens not to travel to Syria while asking those already there to leave by the earliest possible commercial flight. As per media reports, the Syrian President resigned and fled to Russia, which was one of the main backers of his now-erstwhile government along with Iran. In a statement on Monday, Moscow said, "We are monitoring the dramatic developments in Syria with extreme concern. Following his talks with a number of participants in the armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, Bashar al-Assad decided to step down as the Syrian President and leave the country, instructing the government to transfer power peacefully."

Infiltrators to be identified & deported: C'garh dy CM

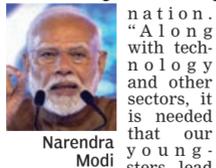
RABINDRA NATH CHOUHDURY
RAIPUR, DEC 9

The Chhattisgarh government has intensified its efforts to identify and deport the Bangladeshi infiltrators in the state. The illegal imigrants will be identified and arrested soon, deputy chief minister Vijay Sharma said. He exhorted the Maoists to lay down arms and join the mainstream of the society. As many as 850 Bangladeshi infiltrators have been identified in the state in the last one year and steps have been taken to deport them, Mr Sharma said here on Monday.

According to him, 500 Bangladeshi infiltrators were found to staying in different parts of Bastar in the state and they have been deported. Similarly, 350 such illegal immigrants have been found to be staying in Kawardha district in the state and steps have been initiated to deport them. Mr Sharma said that 46 Bangladeshi infiltrators have been identified in Kondagaon under Bastar division and arrested. The government has begun the process of deporting them. Mr Sharma indicated that the police was working on the inputs on the infiltration of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants in some other districts such as Durg in the state.

'Youth participation crucial for development' Politics can't be left to those who only believe in dynasty, says PM

Ahmedabad, Dec. 9: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said efforts are being made to bring youth into politics because it cannot be left to those who only believe in dynasty politics and consider it as family property. Virtually addressing an event organised by Ramkrishna Math at Lekhamba village near Sanand town here, the PM said the Young Leaders' Dialogue will be organised in Delhi on the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda to "make a new beginning" towards this aim. In his address, Mr Modi said spiritual leader Swami Vivekananda, the founder of Ramkrishna Math and Ramkrishna Mission, was of the opinion that participation of youths will be crucial for the development of the



Narendra Modi

our country in politics too because we cannot leave it to those who believe only in dynasty politics. We cannot handover politics to those who consider politics as their family's property" the PM said. "That is why we are going to make a new beginning. On the occasion of Swami Vivekananda's birth anniversary, we are organising Young Leaders' Dialogue in Delhi. While 2,000 selected youths will remain present in person, crores of youths will join the event with the help of

technology," the PM said. At the event, youths will discuss India's resolve to turn the country into a developed one, he said, adding a roadmap will be prepared on how youth participation in politics can be increased. "It is our resolve to bring nearly one lakh talented and energetic youth into politics. These youngsters will become the country's future and the new face of India's politics. Our country is marching ahead in the direction of realising the dreams of Swami Vivekananda," the PM asserted. Gujarat played an important role in the life of Swami Vivekananda as he had stayed at several places in the state during his spiritual journey, the PM told the gathering. — PTI

Minister: Med colleges in all Odisha dists soon

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, DEC. 9

Odisha health minister Mukesh Mahaling announced in the state Assembly on Monday that all 30 districts of the state, including Bhadrak, will soon have their medical colleges. The move is part of the state government's efforts to strengthen healthcare infrastructure and address the acute shortage of medical professionals. "It is important to set up medical colleges and fill vacant doctor posts. We have committed to this initiative in our election manifesto," he said while addressing the Assembly. To expedite the process, the state government has introduced key amendments to the medical recruitment policy, receiving approval from CM Mohan Charan Majhi. "The recruitment process for 5,000 doctors



Mukesh Mahaling

will begin soon, along with filling 3,000 vacant paramedical staff positions," the minister added. The establishment of medical colleges has been prioritised to improve healthcare accessibility across the state. According to Mr Mahaling, the government is investing ₹250-300 crores in setting up a 100-bed medical college. At present, Odisha faces a severe shortage of healthcare professionals, with 5,014 doctor posts vacant, including 1,114 specialist positions. In at least 375 locations across the state, community health centres (CHCs) operate without a single doctor, severely impacting rural healthcare services.

In 6 yrs, over 59,000 online fraud victims in Odisha: CM

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, DEC. 9

Odisha chief minister Mohan Charan Majhi revealed on Monday that over 59,000 people in the state have fallen prey to online trading fraud in the past six years. He shared these figures in a written statement presented during the state Assembly session. Between 2019 and November 2024, the state registered 769 cases of online trading scams, affecting 59,437 individuals. The number of reported cases peaked in 2023 and 2024, with 190 cases impacting 18,994 victims in 2023 and 472 cases defrauding 40,270 people in 2024 alone. The economic offences wing (EOW) of the Odisha police also reported significant cases, with four online trading fraud incidents in 2023 involving 18,804 victims and three more in 2024 affecting 40,219 individuals. To combat the surge in cybercrime, the state launched a dedicated cybercrime unit under the crime branch in Bhubaneswar on September 5, 2023. The unit specialises in investigating identity theft, hacking, phishing and financial frauds such as ATM and online banking scams. Mr Majhi also highlighted the state's first cyber police station, established in 2004 and later moved to Cuttack in 2006.

FS flags attacks on minorities in Dhaka

Continued from Page 1 Bangladesh mission in Agartala. In a statement issued in the evening, New Delhi said Mr Misri "reiterated India's willingness to build a positive and constructive relationship with Bangladesh, based on mutual trust and respect and mutual sensitivity to each other's concerns and interests" while "highlighting India's support for a democratic, stable, peaceful, progressive and inclusive Bangladesh". During the talks, "both sides held comprehensive discussions on a wide range of issues, covering political and security matters, border management, trade, commerce and connectivity, cooperation in water, power and energy sectors, development cooperation, consular, cultural and people-to-people ties", New Delhi said, adding: "They also exchanged views on sub-regional, regional and multi-lateral issues, and agreed to enhance consultations and cooperation to advance regional integration, including under the Bimstec framework". During his visit, the foreign secretary also called on the chief adviser of the interim government (equivalent to Prime Minister) Muhammad Yunus and the foreign adviser (foreign minister) Touhid Hossain. Reminding Bangladesh that both nations have a "mutually beneficial engagement on a

whole set of issues, ranging from trade, commerce, connectivity, power, water, and energy, and development cooperation, consular cooperation and cultural cooperation", Mr Misri said "there is no reason why this mutually beneficial cooperation should not continue to deliver in the interests of both our peoples". He told the media later that India "expects, overall, a constructive approach on all these issues by the Bangladesh authorities, and we look forward to moving the relationship forward in a positive, forward-looking, and constructive direction". This visit is taking place amid bilateral tensions after the ouster of Sheikh Hasina as PM in Dhaka four months ago, as the interim government led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus is seen to be taking an anti-India stand and targeting Hindu organisations while looking the other way when religious fundamentalists are attacking Hindu temples and looting the properties of Hindus there. In a statement to the Bangladesh media after the talks, Mr Misri said: "I am here in Dhaka at the invitation of my Bangladesh colleague, Mohammad Jashimuddin, the foreign secretary of Bangladesh, for discussions and consultations on the entire gamut of issues... Since the political changes in

Bangladesh in August this year, there has of course been contact between our leaderships... Today's discussions and have given both of us the opportunity to take stock of our relations, and I appreciate the opportunity today to have had a frank, candid, and constructive exchange of views with all my interlocutors... We have seen in the past, and we continue to see in the future, this relationship as a people-centric and people-oriented relationship, one that has the benefit of all the people as its central motivational force." He added: "We had the opportunity to discuss certain recent developments and issues, and I conveyed our concerns, including those related to the safety and welfare of minorities. We also discussed some regrettable incidents of attacks on cultural, religious, and diplomatic properties... We look forward to moving the relationship forward in a positive, forward-looking, and constructive direction". Meanwhile, Bangladesh's ex-PM Sheikh Hasina, who fled to India in August this year after being deposed, launched yet another attack on the Yunus-led interim government in Dhaka and described it as "fascist". Speaking at an overseas event in virtual mode, Ms Hasina was quoted as saying: "This darkness will end, and the fascist, murderous, conspirator-

al Yunus government will learn a lesson from the people of Bangladesh. They are destroying our country, and have created terror there. Please unite and remove this fascist government so that Bangladesh's future can be secure... Now, who will you seek justice from? Anyone can enter your home and steal everything. They are filing false cases and releasing those who have killed people. Why did they loot the rooms of MPs and the Parliament building? They are looting the country. Why are they destroying the economy? Why are they doing this? Murderer Yunus and his advisers will have to answer for this." She added: "They (Yunus-led government) have tortured and assaulted religious minorities in Bangladesh. They attacked religious sites as well, including temples and churches. Several Awami League leaders have been killed... They have arrested Chinmoy Krishna Prabhu and have not allowed a lawyer for him... Yunus designed the conspiracy against our government. He accepted hatching the conspiracy. He was the mastermind... We accepted their demands, but still, Yunus did all this to rule Bangladesh... I have not handed over the government, it was occupied by the Yunus-led protesters. I fled the country as I never wanted to do politics on dead bodies."

Continued from Page 1 Gandhi with the Soros-backed outfits allegedly involved in anti-India activities. The leaders of some INDIA bloc parties protested within the Parliament complex on the Adani row, with Mr Rahul Gandhi conducting a mock "interview" over the Adani issue with Congress members wearing masks of Mr Modi and industrialist Gautam Adani. Mr Gandhi and Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge along with the MPs of other Opposition parties raised slogans of "Modi, Adani ek hain" and "we want justice". In the Rajya Sabha, Chairman Jagdeep Dhanthar warned that the "functioning of the deep state affects us more perniciously than the Covid disease" after the House witnessed repeated adjournments. As the Upper House re-assembled at 3 pm after three adjournments earlier in the day, Mr Dhanthar said that a meeting was held in his chamber between the Leader of the House and the Leader of the Opposition. "The purpose of that meeting was to ensure that the House runs smoothly. Both sides had a frank discussion and they signalled two things. One, that the

integrity and sovereignty of the nation are sacred for us. We cannot allow any forces within the country or outside to sacrilege our unity, our integrity and our sovereignty," Mr Dhanthar said, adding that the leaders have agreed to meet in his chamber again at 10.30 am on Tuesday. The Chairman appealed to all members to carefully consider the oath under the Constitution they have taken to ensure the integrity of the nation on a priority basis. "Any challenge to the unity and integrity of the nation from within or outside requires all of us to offer a united challenge... It is a challenge to our very existence. We as a nation are committed to fighting sinister forces, the forces that are inimical to India... A deep state that is evolving is required to be neutralised by all of us," he said. Mr Dhanthar further urged members to share the sentiments of the 1.4 billion people at large who are extremely concerned that "all divisive forces, all forces that are pernicious to the concept of Bharat, all forces that have a sinister design to run down our democracy, to bring down our progress, to impede our economic upsurge

have to be defeated by us". He said the sentiment shared by the people has to emanate from the House, and at this critical moment when the country is facing such challenges, it must send a united voice so that these forces are defeated. The Chairman cautioned that we cannot afford to overlook such evil designs, asserting that the "functioning of the deep state affects us more perniciously than the Covid disease", before adjourning the Upper House for the day. Earlier, when the House assembled at 11 am, Mr Dhanthar said that notices under Rule 267 have been rejected, after which some members of the treasury benches said they want to raise the media reports on a senior Congress leader from the other House and Mrs Sonia Gandhi's links with Mr Soros, which the Congress members vehemently opposed. Leader of the Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge and other Congress leaders like Jairam Ramesh and Pramod Tiwari asked how the Chairman was allowing the ruling party members to raise the issue when he had rejected their notices in this regard. Mr Kharge also read out rules whereby any member can't raise such an issue against another member, following

which the Chairman asked which member he was referring to. "We did not expect this from you," Congress' Digvijaya Singh told the Chair as Congress' Pramod Tiwari alleged that ruling party MPs were siding with Mr Adani and disturbing the House for him. BJP's Radha Mohan Das Aggarwal said party MPs have not named any party and will speak during the discussion on how Congress leaders were colluding with elements of the "deep state" and Mr Soros to destabilise the country and break it into pieces. In the Lok Sabha, a visibly agitated Speaker Om Birla asked the protesting Opposition MPs to go back to their seats and allow the House to function, when it met for the day. "Question Hour is significant. Allow the House to function properly. But you don't want to allow the House to run. The country wants the House to run. You are disrupting proceedings of the House," he told the protesting members and adjourned the House till 12 noon. The noisy protests again forced an adjournment till 2 pm and then till 3 pm, before the proceedings were called off for the day.

THE ASIAN AGE

10 DECEMBER 2024

Allies' support for Mamata wake-up call for Congress

The frustration West Bengal chief minister and Trinamul Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee aired on the rudderless voyage of the INDIA bloc, her offer to lead the Opposition alliance shows and the traction her suggestion has got among the alliance partners are at best a warning shot aimed at the Congress leadership, asking it not to take the alliance for granted and that it must be mindful of the task on hand.

INDIA bloc was formed in 2023 with the goal of what they said stopping the BJP from its series of assaults on the Constitution and its institutions and preventing the saffron alliance from coming to power again after the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, among other things.

The goal was to be attained by bringing together all those who are opposed to the Hindutva brigade.

There was no formal leader for the cause but the Congress, given its historical role and its presence across the country, was perceived to be the natural choice. But the grand old party of Indian politics chose to neglect its responsibility when it virtually ignored its allies in the elections to the Assemblies in five states held in October-November 2023. The bitter experience brought some sense to the Congress leadership which acted with a spirit of accommodation and stitched together a viable platform against the BJP in the Lok Sabha elections.

The effort was a partial success in that it was able to stop the BJP from gaining an absolute majority in the Lok Sabha; it needed its new-found allies, including the Telugu Desam and, interestingly, the Janata Dal (U), a founding member of the INDIA bloc, to survive a parliamentary vote.

However, the Congress leadership again missed the challenges and opportunities that the state Assembly elections in Haryana and Maharashtra provided. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge was only acknowledging the fact when he pointed to the factionalism within the party as a reason for the electoral drubbing. No party can afford to remain a divided house when fighting a well-oiled and well-funded cadre-based BJP machinery. That the Congress president made it known publicly is a good sign if he follows up on it.

The Congress must disabuse itself of such thoughts that it commands the leadership of the centrist forces in the country by default, that the Opposition system revolves around it and that the party centered around the Gandhi family.

Each one of the major allies, be it the Trinamul Congress, the Samajwadi Party, the DMK, the RJD or the AAP, is leading its fight against the BJP in its own right and has the wherewithal to give the saffron combine a run for its money. It is the Congress which has consistently failed their expectations, be it in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana or in Chhattisgarh.

It is for the Congress leadership to show the mettle to accept the challenge Ms Banerjee has thrown and respond to it, reflecting its responsibilities. No party is indispensable in a democracy which remains a vibrant system. Those who can't decipher the message of the times and act accordingly will be cast aside, and those who can, will seize the day. This is going to be a turning point in the life of the INDIA bloc.

Trump in Paris: Mixed signals

Donald Trump is to take office on January 20, 2025, but it appears he has had to slip into the role of a roving US President-elect quite early even as an explosive international situation confronted the world with the historic tide of change in Syria.

When he made his flamboyant entry onto the global stage in the historic Paris cathedral, Trump may have been greeted with the resounding philosophy of the Notre Dame reopening that inspired the words — "fire has not conquered stone, and despair has not conquered life".

The usually assertive Trump may, however, have been a bit nonplussed by events in Syria, speaking somewhat hastily as he did about the USA not needing to brood over a fight that was not America's. The turn in Syria is bound to be a test for American foreign policy goals as a global power in the integrated economy of today.

Trump had been at his self-confident best earlier when meeting with Macron and Zelenskyy at the Elysee Palace in Paris when he said that he was all "pumped up" about bringing an end to the war in Ukraine. Wasn't he the one who had said he could end the war in 24 hours if he became the US President?

Trump's promise to end the war quickly could, however, force Ukraine to sacrifice substantial territory as well as scale back the condition that the country should become a NATO member after any settlement. And Russia is not as keen now to come to the negotiating table as all recent war gains have been its, though its preoccupation with Ukraine may have dented its sphere of influence in the Middle East with its benefactor Bashar Al-Assad now a refugee in Moscow.

It appears Trump would be more inclined to take on the Ukraine war settlement as the first aim of his foreign policy diplomacy as he has promised to give Netanyahu and Israel a long rope in fighting their enemies in the region. If any issue becomes a security threat, the global policeman US would find the need to intervene, but right now Trump's America First and isolationist stand seem to have painted a confusing picture. But then has not Trump always taken pride in being the ultimate disrupter?

THE ASIAN AGE

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THE ASIAN AGE office is located at:
New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: (011) 23211124.

Published and Printed on behalf of and for:
Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited, Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002 at BFL Infotech Ltd., C-9, Sector-III, Noida -201301.

London: Quickmarsh Ltd, 8th Floor, Block 2, Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London, SE1 7NQ.
RNI Registration number: 57290/94

Subhani



Assad's exit an inflection point: Stability or chaos?



K.C. Singh

The 24-year-old government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad was ousted on Sunday, December 8, as rebel forces from southern Syria swamped the capital, Damascus, ahead of the main rebel thrust from the north. The sudden collapse of the Syrian military and the Ba'athist regime surprised most of the world, including the United States, which has at least 900 soldiers in northeast Syria, ostensibly to monitor Daesh, or the Islamic State.

The rebel operation began on November 27 as local retaliation and then extended to Aleppo, Syria's second largest city. That fell two days later, followed by Hama on December 5 and the third largest city Homs on December 7. A day later, the capital Damascus was "freed". Why did Syria's military and then its foreign allies, such as Russia and Iran, let this happen? Russia is distracted and even weakened by its misadventure in Ukraine. The Iranian ability was compromised by Israel's relentless attack on Hezbollah, the decapitation of its top leadership and that of Iran's Quds Force, which was training and equipping the militias of non-Arab Shias, including from Pakistan. The rapid collapse of the Syrian National Army is comparable to that of the US-trained and equipped Afghan National Army when the Americans prepared to pull out of Afghanistan just over three years ago. Both cases demonstrated that once external support weakens, then the morale of any indigenous Army units, sensing lack of support or even animus amongst the local population, begins to crack. The Assad family managed to rule for 50 years, despite belonging to the Alawite-Shia community constituting just 10 per cent of the

population, by repressive measures and brutal authoritarian control.

Mr Assad earlier faced displacement once the Arab Spring, a street-level popular uprisings in the Arab world which began in Tunisia and overthrew authoritarian rulers in Egypt and Libya, hit Syria in 2011. But Iran and Russia had helped to stabilise his government. Thus unsurprisingly, according to a BBC report, Bashar al-Assad and his family have got asylum in Russia. Meanwhile, the fate remains uncertain of the Russian naval base at Tartus as well as an airbase. Both these facilities had allowed Russia to support their militias in Africa and project Russian influence and presence across West Asia and the eastern Mediterranean. Both facilities being west of a mountain chain appear to be safe for now. Though reportedly Russia has begun withdrawing its helicopters and moved ships out of the port, ostensibly for an exercise.

The rebel coalition's main component is Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), led by Abu Mohammad al-Jilani. They controlled till now a small area around Idlib. Al-Jilani formed the Nusra Front during the early phase of the Syrian civil war but claims to have left the Islamic State, or Daesh, in 2016. Reportedly, HTS' rule in Idlib was authoritarian, conservative and intolerant of dissent, though it left the minorities alone. His latest statements preach tolerance and coexistence. Only time will tell if he maintains that, but the multi-ethnic and diverse nature of the Syrian population practising multiple faiths can only be handled either, like the Assads, by authoritarian secularism, or via tolerant democracy. Egypt provides an example.

After President Hosni Mubarak's ouster following the popular protests in

2011, an election led to a Muslim Brotherhood Islamist government. Soon popular resentment arose over its attempt to impose an Islamic framework, which in turn allowed the military to execute another coup and seize power. According to the CIA World Factbook, the Syrian population is 87 per cent Muslim, of which 74 per cent are Sunnis. The rest are Shias, dominated by the Alawis, besides some Ismailis. Christians are estimated to be 10 per cent, mostly Greek Orthodox or Catholic.

The rebels were quoted claiming that "the future is ours". However, Syria's neighbours and global leaders have voiced concern. US President Joe Biden has cautioned about the resurgence of the Islamic State or Daesh. Germany expressed relief over Mr Assad's ouster but also warned about the ascent of disruptive Islamist elements.

France, diplomatic as always, simply advocated a peaceful transition. Iran cautiously suggests that decision-making must be "solely the responsibility" of Syrians. Jordan's King Abdullah II appeared to be supporting the rebels, hoping to keep the lines of communication open.

The challenge for HTS would be to keep the disparate rebel components united. The first challenge would be the Kurdish People's Defence Units, called YPG, with about 70,000 fighters. They played an important role, with US help, to eliminate ISIS' control. Turkey and Qatar characterise them as a terrorist organisation.

Turkey and Iran fear their links to their own substantial Kurdish populations, especially Turkey's PKK. Kurds are an Iranian ethnic group scattered amongst Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria. They number around 40 million, ranging from 14.3-20 million in Turkey, 8.2-12 million in Iran, 5.6-8.5 million in Iraq and 2-3.6 million in Syria. Even in Germany, they are 1.2-1.5 million. US President-elect Donald Trump has voiced happiness over Mr Assad's ouster but strongly urged a hands-off policy regarding Syria. Does that mean that the United States will abandon the Syrian Kurds as they did Afghan allies earlier?

One obvious lesson is that Israel's blitzkrieg to weaken both the Hezbollah and Iranian influence in West Asia created a vacuum which the Syrian rebels have quickly exploited. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu now voices concern over the next regime in Damascus. Israel's military has also acted to seize the Golan Heights' areas vacated by the Syrian Army. A secular regime run by Bashar al-Assad, despite allowing Iran land access to Hezbollah, provided more regional stability than a ruling group with past links to the Islamic State and unknown future propensities. The immediate gain for Turkey and Lebanon is that Syrian refugees have begun trickling back into Syria.

Syria's Prime Minister Mohammad Ghazi al-Jalali, who refused to abandon his post, has offered to assist in the transition. If an orderly transition occurs and the new rulers quickly establish control without getting diverted by revenge against members of the Assad regime, gradually stability may be restored. The region is thus at an inflection point, with either revived Islamic radicalism spilling across the region and beyond or a new non-authoritarian model of multi-ethnic governance and growth. The latter is unlikely with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu persisting with his genocidal activities or Donald Trump with his isolationist instincts.

The writer is a former secretary in the external affairs ministry. He tweets at @ambkcsingh.

LETTERS
BRING BACK 'ODD-EVEN'

It's good to note that Delhi is seeing the cleanest air for the month since December 14, 2022. But Mother Nature can't come to the rescue every time. What is required is action to keep the air clean throughout the year. Bringing down the use of fossil fuels is the best way to reduce pollution. Congested roads and traffic also lead to increased emissions. The "odd-even" vehicle rationing scheme is thus the best solution. And usage of overage diesel vehicles older than 10 years must be scrapped.

Suresh Venkatadri
Tirupati

TOO MANY VIPs

MANY MUMBAIKARS were fuming over the swearing-in event in the city, which caused them more trouble than usual as many routes were closed to the public to facilitate the movement of the VIPs attending it. In most developed nations, this kind of inconvenience is never caused to citizens. Here, even the most minor functionary demands attention and importance. This inconvenience could be easily avoided if VIPs take a helicopter from the airport to where they want to go. In several Western democracies, one often sees a Prime Minister queueing up for groceries or riding a bicycle. Even if there are legitimate security concerns, these huge convoys and security protocols are excessive. At least citizens must not be inconvenienced!

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

YULETIDE JOY!

IF YOU ask any child about Christmas, he or she will only remember Santa Claus and the gifts offered by him to little children. As we celebrate this great festival of Christmas, we cannot but lift up our hearts to the Christ Child and thank Him for all the caring, sharing and giving of our generous hearts during the year gone by. So, we cherish these memories with gratitude during this holy season. Christmas is a time of fun and cheer. The activities of Yuletide parties, visits and hopefully even the sacraments fill us with joy and help make the season joyful and exciting. Christmas is the celebration of the ultimate love of God abandoning the glory of heaven to make His will dwell with us.

Jubel D'Cruz
Mumbai

Aakar Patel



The BJP's Ram Madhav has written an article titled "For South Asia to grow, communalism must end". It makes two points in the main. The first is that South Asia is "on track to be the fastest growing region in the world". Despite the turmoil in Bangladesh and Pakistan, the parts that once made up all of Hindustan will grow at over six per cent.

The second point that Madhav makes is for prosperity, South Asia must give up communalism. This is an accurate prescription. The question is how does one achieve that? Since this is the subject of the book I am writing, it is something that I have grappled with as well. The conclusion I have arrived at is that it is not possible for South Asia to normalise internally, meaning becoming less communal, without normalising externally with the other parts of what used to be united India.

But again, how does one normalise externally? The present situation in our region is such that cricket is not played across borders, visas are not given, we have shrunk our diplomatic presence in Bangladesh, and so on.

To find an answer to that, we have to look at other parts of the world that have had hostilities, in many instances worse and more painful than the ones historically suffered here, to see what they have done.

Germany and France fought against each other in two world wars, with millions killed. Almost the entire western front of the First World War

was fought on French soil. Under Hitler, Germany occupied France after a military humiliation. Today, the countries have normalised. They have not merged themselves and France remains France and so does Germany as an independent nation, but in terms of trade and movement they are normal.

The European Union project began, just after the Second World War with the integration of the steel and coal industries (because those were directly linked to war preparation).

Asean, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, is also one that has a history of hostilities. Singapore hanged two Indonesian Marines after they were convicted of a terror bombing inside Singapore. Today, this is one of the world's largest trading zones. It has Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, Communists and all sorts of people integrated and offering each other visa-free travel.

China had occupied Vietnam for centuries and even today this is remembered, and the Vietnamese are wary. But that has not stopped them from trading with China. Or stopped China from opening up to Japan, which had occupied it in the same decade as the subcontinent's Partition happened. In fact, Netaji's Indian National Army was allied to that same Japanese force till the fall of Singapore to the Allies.

Both Europe and Asean offer us a way forward to do what Madhav is saying is needed. His argument focuses mostly on the others and his belief

is that India is fine and does not need to do much because communalism is only the exception for us, whereas it is the rule for the others. We can argue over this but today I am not going to. We can accept the broad argument. The question is how to proceed towards a solution. Madhav does not go there, but my book does.

The World Bank says that "South Asia is one of the least integrated regions in the world in terms of trade and people-to-people contact."

Intra-regional trade between Bangladesh, India and Pakistan accounts for five per cent of our total trade, compared to Southeast Asia, where the number is five times higher. Trade annually in South Asia is \$23 billion, though it should really be over \$100 billion. Why? The problem is purely man-made.

The World Bank says that "border challenges mean it is about 20 per cent cheaper for a company in India to trade with Brazil instead of a neighbouring South Asian country". Transport and logistics costs for trade between South Asian nations is 50 per cent higher than the cost in OECD nations.

The main problem is a broad trust deficit throughout the region. "Putting aside traditional concerns and taking joint action can develop cross-border solutions to shared issues, strengthen regional institutions, improve infrastructure and connectivity, and advance trade policy," the World Bank says. What are these "traditional concerns"? They are of course the

unwillingness to integrate, the hostility that has ended movement across the borders of people and capital, the invocation of bogeymen to discourage citizens from thinking of a more united future, and above all the absence of political imagination.

The benefits are clear: "Regional cooperation has the potential to produce significant gains across all countries of South Asia."

This is the solution. We have to trade more with each other, we have to be more open to each other in terms of visitors, and we have to think of ways in which the region can work together on larger challenges such as climate change.

This will need leadership from the largest nation. We are also the one that is likely to benefit most, at least in the short term given our manufacturing base.

As I wrote last week, half of all medical tourists coming into India are from Bangladesh. Few if any Pakistanis can come because relations are frozen.

It appears that the solution is simple, but in fact it is being held back by internal nationalisms. Many do not want a solution because the problem is either not properly understood or, as in the case of some political parties, the problem of communalism is the reason for their existence.

The writer is the chair of Amnesty International India. Twitter: @aakar_patel

South Asia needs to end communalism to ensure region can grow, develop



SHORT TAKES

JUSTICE MINISTRY IMPOSES TRAVEL BAN ON SK PREZ

Seoul, Dec. 9: South Korea's justice ministry on Monday imposed an overseas travel ban on President Yoon Suk Yeol as authorities investigate allegations of rebellion and other charges in connection with his short-lived declaration of martial law last week. Yoon's martial law decree last Tuesday plunged South Korea into political turmoil and caused worry among its key diplomatic partners and neighbours. On Saturday, Yoon avoided a bid to impeach him, with most governing party lawmakers boycotting a vote.

BIBI SET TO TAKE WITNESS STAND IN GRAFT TRIAL

Jerusalem, Dec. 9: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is set to take to the witness stand on Tuesday for the first time in his trial on corruption allegations, a pivotal point in the drawn-out proceedings that comes as the leader wages war in Gaza and faces an international arrest warrant for war crimes charges. At home, Netanyahu is on trial for accusations of fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in three separate affairs. Netanyahu denies wrongdoing, but his appearance on the witness stand will be a low point in his political career.

FRENCH BYPOLL SEAT: FAR-RIGHT LOSES IN FRANCE

Paris, Dec. 9: Days after orchestrating the downfall of the French government, Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally (RN) has lost a seat in a by-election in northeastern France. RN critics pounced on Sunday's narrow defeat as a sign of voter condemnation of the party's push last week to topple former prime minister Michel Barnier's government over his 2025 budget bill. There was no immediate comment from the RN. The vote in the Ardennes left it with 124 lawmakers — a setback, though it remains the single largest party in the 577-seat Parliament.

RACIST ABUSE: INDO-U.S. FAMILY TO FILE CHARGES

New York, Dec. 9: An Indian-American family subjected to racial harassment last month plans to press charges against the woman who hurled abuses at them, emphasising the need for accountability and speaking out against hate. The incident took place in November when renowned photographer Pervez Taufiq, 50, was travelling with his wife and three kids from Mexico to Los Angeles in a bus. A fellow female passenger went on a racist diatribe against the family while it was onboard the United Airlines shuttle bus.

POLARISATION IS WEBSTER'S WORD OF THE YEAR

Washington, Dec. 9: The results of the 2024 US presidential election rattled the country and sent shockwaves across the world — or were cause for celebration, depending on who you ask. Is it any surprise then that the Merriam-Webster word of the year is "polarisation"? "Polarisation means division, but it's a very specific kind of division," said Peter Sokolowski, Merriam-Webster's editor at large. "Polarisation means that we are tending toward the extremes." Many voters went to the polls with a feeling that the opposing candidate was an existential threat to the nation.

JAY-Z, DIDDY ACCUSED OF RAPE IN CIVIL SUIT

New York, Dec. 9: Musician and producer Jay-Z was accused in a lawsuit submitted of raping a 13-year-old with hip-hop star Sean Combs in the year 2000, court documents show, claims denied by Jay-Z. An updated complaint in a civil case against Combs alleges that Jay-Z, whose name is Shawn Carter, and Combs raped the girl at an after party following the MTV Video Music Awards in September of 2000. "Another celebrity stood by and watched as Combs and Carter took turns assaulting the minor."

Rebels take US-backed Syrian town

Opposition groups take control of Manjib as Syria's PM says most Cabinet ministers are still working

Ankara, Damascus, Dec. 9: Turkey-backed Syrian opposition groups took control of the northern Syrian town of Manjib from US-backed Syrian Kurdish forces (SDF), a Turkish security source said on Monday, a day after rebels declared Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's ouster. Syria's prime minister said on Monday that most Cabinet ministers are still working from offices in Damascus after rebels entered the capital over the weekend and overthrew President Bashar Assad. Streams of refugees crossed in from neighbouring countries, hoping for a more peaceful future. But there were already signs of the difficulties ahead for the rebel alliance now in control of much of the country, which is led by a former senior al-Qaeda militant who severed ties with the extremist group years ago and has promised representative government and religious tolerance. The SDF had been holding the town in recent days amid intense fighting with the Syrian National Army (SNA) and other Turkey-backed groups. Clashes in the north continued even as the world was caught surprised by the opposition's swift successes in initially seizing Aleppo and, on Sunday, the capital Damascus. The lightning offensive took less than two weeks, after a 13-year war.



Lebanese security forces organise the crowd as people, mostly Syrians, arrive at the Masnaa border crossing on the way to Lebanon, on Monday. — AFP



Anti government forces patrol the Hamidiyeh Souq in the Syrian capital Damascus, on Monday. — AFP

Turkish state for 40 years. Abdurrahman Mustafa, head of the Turkey-backed opposition's provisional government, congratulated the troops that took Manjib. "We stand with pride and honour with our heroic forces, and we support them to complete the liberation of every inch of our land and achieve the aspirations of our people for freedom and dignity," Mustafa said. The United States said it will maintain its presence in east Syria, where the SDF is concentrated, and will take necessary steps to prevent a resurgence of Islamic State. — Agencies

Kremlin refuses to confirm if Assad given asylum in Russia

Moscow, Dec. 9: The Kremlin declined on Monday to confirm reports that toppled Syrian president Bashar al-Assad had fled to Moscow, adding that it was "surprised" by the rebel takeover. "As for Assad's whereabouts, I've got nothing to tell you," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told journalists. A Kremlin source told Russian news agencies on Sunday that Assad and his family were in Moscow, hours after he fled the country as Islamist-led rebels entered Damascus. Assad's son has been studying in the Russian capital. Peskov said on Monday that if Russia granted asylum to Assad and his family, this would be a decision taken by Russian President Vladimir Putin. "Of course such decisions cannot be taken without the head of state, and it's his decision," Peskov said. He said there was no meeting with Assad on Putin's agenda. Russia has given shelter to several ousted leaders, including former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich. In brief comments on the dramatic events in Syria, Peskov admitted the Kremlin was taken by surprise.



"This historic change in the region offers opportunities but is not without risks. Europe is ready to support safeguarding national unity and rebuilding a Syrian state." —URSULA VON DER LEYEN, European Commission President



Concrete possibilities of return of refugees cannot yet be predicted. In view of this unclear situation, we have imposed a freeze on decisions for asylum procedures." —NANCY FAESER, German interior minister

SYRIAN INSURGENTS SAY THEY WON'T INTERFERE WITH WOMEN'S DRESSING OR PERSONAL FREEDOMS Syrian insurgents said they won't impose any religious dress code on women and vowed to guarantee personal freedom for everyone. The insurgents' General Command said "it is strictly forbidden to interfere with women's dress or impose any request related to their clothing or appearance, including requests for modesty".

EU SAYS 'NOT CURRENTLY ENGAGING' WITH SYRIAN ISLAMISTS HTS The European Union said it was not in contact with Islamist group HTS, which spearheaded the ouster of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, and urged a peaceful political transition. "The European Union is not currently engaging with HTS or its leaders full stop."

UN RIGHTS CHIEF URGES ACCOUNTABILITY IN SYRIA, SEES HUGE CHANCE FOR FAIR TRANSITION UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk called on Monday for accountability for perpetrators of abuse under toppled Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, but said there was a "huge chance" for an inclusive political transition, and that early signs were promising.



Israel hits chemical arms dump in Syria

Jerusalem, Dec. 9: Israel has struck suspected chemical weapons sites and long-range rockets in Syria in order to prevent them from falling into the hands of hostile actors, the foreign minister said on Monday. Syrian rebels reached Damascus over the weekend and overthrew President Bashar Assad's government following nearly 14 years of civil war, raising hopes for a more peaceful future but also concerns about a potential security vacuum in the country, which is still split among armed groups. Israelis have welcomed the fall of Assad, who was a key ally of Iran and Lebanon's Hezbollah militant group, while expressing concern over what comes next. Israel says its forces temporarily seized a buffer zone inside Syria dating back to a 1974 agreement after Syrian troops withdrew in the chaos. "The only interest we have is the security of Israel and its citizens," Gideon Saar told reporters on Monday. "That's why we attacked strategic weapons systems, like, for example, remaining chemical weapons, or long-range missiles and rockets, in order that they will not fall in the hands of extremists." He did not provide details about when or where the strikes took place. An Associated Press journalist in Damascus reported airstrikes in the area of the Mezzeh military airport, southwest of the capital, on Sunday. The airport has previously been targeted in Israeli airstrikes, but it was not immediately clear who launched the latest strike. — AP

ZELENSKY FOR DIPLOMATIC END TO UKRAINE WAR

Kyiv, Dec. 9: President Volodymyr Zelenskyy made the case on Monday for a diplomatic settlement to Russia's war in Ukraine and raised the idea of foreign troops being deployed in his country until it could join the Nato military alliance. The remarks at a joint press conference with German opposition leader Friedrich Merz were the latest to signal Kyiv's increasing openness to war negotiations, with Donald Trump preparing to return to the White House on January 20, 2025. The US President-elect, who has said he wants to end the war quickly, called on Sunday for an immediate ceasefire and negotiations to end the "madness", after he met Zelenskyy and French President Emmanuel Macron for talks in Paris. "Ukraine wants this war to end more than anyone else. No doubt, a diplomatic resolution would save more lives. We do seek it," Zelenskyy said in Kyiv on Monday. He said he discussed a "freezing" of the lines in the war when he met Macron and Trump. Russia controls nearly a fifth of Ukrainian territory after launching the 2022 invasion that unleashed the biggest conflict in Europe since World War Two. — Reuters



2024 Nobel Peace Prize winner Nihon Hidankyo Terumi Tanaka, Shigemitsu Tanaka, Toshiyuki Mimaki. — AFP

A-bomb survivors to get Nobel today

Tokyo, Dec. 9: Survivors of the US atomic bombings of Japan will receive the Nobel Peace Prize on Tuesday but, after years of anti-nuclear campaigning and showing the world their scars, they still retain the painful memories of the discrimination they have faced. After the 1945 US bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki led to Japan's surrender and the end of World War II, many people who survived were shunned by society. Prejudice related to their exposure to radiation made it hard for them to find jobs and affected their prospects for marriage, leading one small group in Tokyo to build a communal grave where dozens were buried together. There are currently around 1,06,800 A-bomb survivors, known as "hibakusha", in Japan, according to the government. Their average age is 85. One of them is 90-year-old Reiko Yamada, who was 11 and lived in Hiroshima when the United States dropped the first atomic bomb on August 6, 1945, killing around 1,40,000 people. — AFP

Will make it easier for people to come in legally, says Trump

Washington, Dec. 9: Incoming US President Donald Trump on Sunday said he would go ahead with his plans to deport all illegal immigrants after entering the Oval Office and said at the same time he would make it easier for people to come in, a move that could be helpful to Indians who mostly enter the US legally. Trump has announced that he is appointing one of his defence attorneys in the New York hush money case as counsellor to the President. Alina Habba, 40, defended Trump earlier this year, also serving as his legal spokesperson. Habba has been spending time with the president-elect since the election at his Florida club Mar-a-Lago. "I think you have to do it," Trump told NBC News in an interview when asked if he plans to deport everyone who is here illegally over the next four years. "You have to have, rules, regulations, laws. They came in illegally. People that have been treated very unfairly are the people that have been online for 10 years to come into the country. We are going to make it very easy for people to come in terms of they have to pass the test. They have to be able to tell you what the Statue of Liberty is. They have to tell you a little bit about our country. They have to love our country," Trump said. "They can't come out of prisons. We don't want people that are in for murder. So, we had 11,000 and 13,000 different estimates, 13,099 murderers released into our country over the last three years. They're walking down the streets. They're walking next to you and your family. They're very dangerous. You don't want those people in this country," he said. — Agencies

IF SUBSIDISING CANADA, MEXICO LET THEM BECOME STATE OF U.S.: TRUMP

Washington, Dec. 9: Claiming that the US is subsidising its two neighbours Canada and Mexico to the tune of \$100 billion and \$300 billion, respectively, incoming US President Donald Trump on Sunday said that if that is the case then these two countries better be a part of America. "We're subsidising Mexico for almost \$300 billion. We shouldn't be subsidising," he said. — PTI

LARA TRUMP STEPS DOWN AS RNC CO-CHAIR, HAS EYES ON SENATE SEAT

Washington, Dec. 9: Lara Trump will step down as co-chair of the Republican National Committee as she considers a number of potential options with her father-in-law, President-elect Donald Trump, set to return to the White House. Among those possibilities is replacing Florida Sen Marco Rubio, whom Trump tapped to be the next secretary of state. If Rubio is confirmed, Florida Gov Ron DeSantis will choose who takes the seat through the remainder of Rubio's term. — AP

CLIMATE CHANGE Drylands across world expanded by approximately 4.3 mn square km 77% of Earth land drier in last 30 years: UN

New Delhi, Dec. 9: Over 77 per cent of Earth's land experienced a drier climate during the three decades leading up to 2020, compared to the previous 30-year period, according to a report released by the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) on Monday. During the same period, global drylands expanded by approximately 4.3 million square kilometres — an area nearly a third larger than India — now covering more than 40 per cent of the Earth's land. The report, launched at the 16th conference of the UNCCD in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, warned that if efforts to curb greenhouse gas emissions fail, another three per cent of the world's humid areas are projected to transform into drylands by the end of this century. Meanwhile, the number of people living in drylands has doubled to 2.3 billion over the past three decades. Models suggest that as many as 5 billion could inhabit drylands by 2100 in a worst-case climate change scenario. These billions of people face even greater threats to their lives and livelihoods from climate-related increases in aridification and desertification, the report said. Areas particularly hard-hit by the drying trend include around 96 per cent of Europe, parts of the western US, Brazil, Asia, and central Africa. South Sudan and Tanzania have the largest percentage of land transitioning to drylands, with China experiencing the largest total area shifting from non-drylands to drylands, the report said.

This analysis finally dispels an uncertainty that has long surrounded global drying trends. For the first time, the aridity crisis has been documented with scientific clarity, revealing an existential threat affecting billions around the globe. — IBRAHIM THIAW UNCCD executive secretary

About half of the world's dryland inhabitants are located in Asia and Africa. The most densely populated drylands are in California, Egypt, eastern and northern Pakistan, large parts of India, and north-eastern China. In high greenhouse gas emissions scenarios, dryland expansion is forecast for the Midwestern United States, central Mexico, northern Venezuela, north-eastern Brazil, south-eastern Argentina, the entire Mediterranean region, the Black Sea coast, large parts of southern Africa, and southern Australia. "This analysis finally dispels an uncertainty that has long surrounded global drying trends. For the first time, the aridity crisis has been documented with scientific clarity, revealing an existential threat affecting billions around the globe," said Ibrahim Thiaw, UN Convention to Combat Desertification executive secretary. "Unlike droughts, aridity represents a permanent, unrelenting transformation, he added. — PTI



Russia's President Vladimir Putin (L) makes a toast with receivers of Gold Star medal of 'Hero of Russia' during a ceremony to celebrate Heroes of the Fatherland Day in Moscow, on Monday. — AFP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	81,508.46	-0.25
Nifty 50	24,619.00	-0.24
S&P 500*	6,090.27	0.00
Dollar (₹)	84.73	-0.03
Pound Sterling (₹)	108.22	-0.14
Euro (₹)	89.56	-0.02
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	77,495,876	1.14
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	72.21	1.53
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.717	-0.023
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.164	0.011

* As of 8:30 PM IST

MapmyIndia shares rise as co. says no to split

Shares of an CE Info Systems Ltd., known as MapmyIndia, jumped after the company said it is reversing an earlier plan to carve out its consumer business. The map provider to businesses including Apple Inc. and BMW AG made the announcement in a filing Monday. The company said it will retail its brand, Mappils, along with associated apps. The company's shares surged as much as 18.4 per cent. in late trading.



Krishnapatnam Port allowed to import petroleum

The Centre has allowed Adani Krishnapatnam Port in Andhra Pradesh to import petroleum into India up to March 1, 2026, according to an official notification. The port has been allowed to import petroleum by sea from August 28, 2024, till March 1, 2026, in public interest, according to the notification by the ministry of ports, shipping and waterways. Adani Krishnapatnam Port is an all-weather deep water port on India's east coast.

Sebi cautions against dealings in unlisted cos

Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has cautioned against transaction in securities of unlisted public limited companies on electronic platforms. "It has come to the notice of Sebi that certain electronic platforms and websites are facilitating transactions in unlisted securities of public limited companies. Such activities are in violation of Securities Contract (Regulation) Act, 1956," it said.

LG to set up manufacturing unit in Andhra

LG Electronics India has plans to set up a new plant in Andhra Pradesh to boost its manufacturing capacity in the country, though it also fears competition from its South Korean parent entity. Besides, it is increasing the sourcing of raw materials from the local market, which is helping it meet consumer demands and lower its inventory and related costs, allowing the company to competitively price the products.

Printed & Published by K. Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed at BFL Infotech Ltd, C-9 Sector 3, Noida-201301. Published at 219, N D Tiwari Bhawan, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Editor: Kaushik Mitter, RNI Registration number 30074/09, Air surcharge Re 1. © All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of The Editor, Financial Chronicle is prohibited.

Retail auto sale up 11.2% in Nov. at 32 lakh units

Outlook leans towards stability with pockets of potential growth

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, DEC. 9

Retail sales of automobiles in India jumped 11.2 per cent on year to 32,08,719 units in November, riding on robust two-wheeler demand, Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations or FADA said on Monday.

The automobile industry had sold a total of 28,85,317 units in the same month last year.

Sales of two-wheelers soared 15.8 per cent to 26,15,953 units last month, as against 22,58,970 units in November 2023.

However, passenger vehicle retail declined 13.72 per cent at 3,21,943 units, as against 3,73,140 units in the year-ago month.

FADA said the passenger vehicles faced notable headwinds in the market.

"While November was initially expected to build on its prior momentum, particularly due to the marriage season, dealer feedback suggests that this segment underperformed overall expectations," said CS Vigneshwar, president at FADA.

He said although rural markets offered some support, primarily in the two-wheeler category, marriage-related sales remained subdued.

The late occurrence of Deepawali at the end of October also caused a spillover of festive regis-

MOBILITY MATTERS

AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY sold 28.8 lakh units in November last year.



SALES OF TWO-WHEELERS soar 15.8% to 26.1 lakh units last in November, as against 22.5 lakh units in November 2023.

INVENTORY LEVELS REDUCE BY ABOUT 10 DAYS, BUT REMAIN HIGH AT AROUND 65-68 DAYS.

Three-wheeler sales increased 4.23% to 1.08 LAKH UNITS

WITH PROSPECTS of a bumper Kharif harvest likely to temper food inflation, the broader macroeconomic environment appears set to improve, potentially aiding consumer sentiment in the months ahead.

— CS VIGNESHWAR, FADA president

trations into November, affecting the month's sales trajectory, Vigneshwar pointed out. "Although rural interest was present, it failed to significantly improve sentiment. Inventory levels have reduced by about 10 days, but remain high at around 65-68 days," he noted.

FADA said the commercial vehicles sales also dropped 6 per cent on year to 81,967 units last month. Vigneshwar said factors such as restricted product choices, older model issues, limited financier support, and the absence of major festivals in November following a strong October impacted

ELECTRIC VEHICLES FAST GROWING SEGMENT: REPORT

FC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 9

Electric vehicles (EVs) emerged as the fastest-growing segment, with a 26 per cent year-over-year (YoY) increase in platform traffic, driven by new launches and an expanding EV ecosystem. This trend signifies India's growing adoption of sustainable mobility solutions, according to a report by CarDekho Group's New Auto segment. The report showcases shifts in consumer preferences regarding fuel types in India's automotive market. Covering trends from April to October across 2023 and 2024, the report highlights evolving user behavior and platform traffic patterns. The CNG segment recorded a 17 per cent YoY growth.

Sanjay Malhotra set to be RBI's 26th governor

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO
NEW DELHI, DEC. 9

The government on Monday appointed Revenue Secretary Sanjay Malhotra in the Union ministry of finance as the 26th governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), for a three-year term beginning from Wednesday. Malhotra will replace Shaktikanta Das, the second longest serving RBI governor, after Sir Benergh Rama Rau's seven-year plus tenure.

The decision on a new appointment of RBI governor was announced in an official statement by the government after the appointments committee of the cabinet (ACC) cleared Malhotra's name. Malhotra is a 1990-batch Rajasthan cadre IAS officer and will replace Shaktikanta Das, whose tenure ends on Tuesday (December 10, 2024). Malhotra, an engineering graduate in computer science from the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, has a Master's in Public Policy from

CHANGE of guard

SANJAY MALHOTRA becomes 26th governor of the RBI.



● Malhotra replaces Shaktikanta Das, the second longest serving RBI governor, after Sir Benergh Rama Rau's seven-year plus tenure.

● Presently, he is secretary (revenue) in the ministry of finance

Princeton University, US. With his leadership and excellence for over 33 years in his career, Malhotra has worked in multifarious sectors including power, finance and taxation, information technology, mines etc.

Presently, he is secretary (revenue) in the ministry of finance and in his previous assignment he also held the post of secretary in the department of

financial services under the ministry of finance as well. As a part of his present assignment, he plays an instrumental role in tax policy formulation in respect of direct and indirect taxes.

Malhotra will succeed the present RBI governor Shaktikanta Das, who was touted to be given an extension as the central bank governor for a third term.

IGI looking to raise ₹4,225 crore via IPO

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, DEC. 9

Blackstone promoted International Gemmological Institute (IGI) India engaged in grading and accreditation services for diamond, gem and jewelry announced Rs 4,225 crore initial public offering opening on Dec.13. The price band for the public issue has been set at Rs 397 to Rs 417 per equity share of face value of Rs 2 each. The public issue closes on Dec. 17, 2024.

IGI is an independent certification and accreditation services provider for diamonds, studied jewelry and colored stones certifications and is part of the International Gemmological Institute (IGI) group, and operates under "IGI" brand exclusively in India and Türkiye. The IPO comprises fresh issue of Rs 1,475 crore and an offer sale of Rs 2,750 crore by promoter selling shareholder - private equity firm Blackstone's foreign

entity BCP Asia II TopCo.

The company proposes to utilize the net proceeds from the fresh issue towards payment for the acquisition of IGI Belgium Group and IGI Netherlands Group (Rs 1,300 crore) and the balance amount towards general corporate purpose. Post the acquisition of IGI Belgium Group and IGI Netherlands Group, IGI India will become the 100 per cent shareholder of IGI Belgium and IGI Netherlands, and will be

responsible for operation of the IGI business globally.

Another IPO by Inventurus Knowledge Solutions or IKS Health aiming to raise Rs 2,497.92 crore opens on Dec. 12 in the price band of Rs 1265 to Rs 1329 per share of Rs 1 face value. The public issue of Inventurus Knowledge Solutions is entirely an offer for sale by existing shareholders. The issue closes on Dec. 16, 2024.

IKS Health delivers clinical support to clinicians and care team staff so that they can focus on delivering best health care.

Airtel AI tool flags 8 bn spam calls, 0.8 bn SMSes

FC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC 9

Telecom operator Bharti Airtel on Monday said that its network flagged a staggering 8 billion spam calls and called out 0.8 billion spam SMSes within two and a half months of the launch of its spam-fighting AI-powered solution. Delhi had the dubious distinction of accounting for a maximum number of the spam calls received and originated, the company said in a statement.

The telecom major, in the last 2.5 months, has alerted close to 252 million

unique customers to these suspicious calls and has observed that there has been a 12 per cent decline in the number of customers answering them. "We observed that a staggering 35 per cent of the spammers have used landline telephones. Customers in Delhi have received the maximum number of spam calls, followed by customers in Andhra Pradesh and Western Uttar Pradesh," the company said. Leveraging an advanced algorithm, the AI-powered network has successfully identified close to 1 million spammers every day.

States get ₹6.42 lakh crore till November from GST collections

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, DEC. 9

The Centre has paid a total of Rs 6.42 lakh crore to states till November as their share of GST collections along with the compensation cess. The gross GST collections till November stood at Rs 14.56 lakh crore.

At the end of November, the gross GST collected by the Centre stood at Rs 14.56 lakh crore. Of this, domestic collections clocked Rs 11.04 lakh crore and that from imports were Rs 3.51 lakh crore. In FY24, the Centre collected gross GST of Rs 20.18 lakh crore. In FY22, the gross GST collection for the entire fiscal was Rs 14.83

lakh crore, the government informed Lok Sabha.

Till October, gross GST was Rs 12.74 lakh crore and after paying the refunds of Rs 1.46 lakh crore, the net GST was Rs 11.27 lakh crore. Of the gross GST till November, Centre distributed Rs 6.42 lakh crore to the states as their share of SGST and IGST as well as compensation. In FY24, this share of gross GST was Rs 8.74 lakh crore.

Of the net GST, which includes CGST and IGST, Rs 5.11 lakh crore has been retained by the Centre. This does not include cess collected as

compensation to states. In FY24, Centre had retained Rs 8.15 lakh crore from net GST.

CGST collection consists of CGST, SGST or IGST depending upon intra-state or inter-state supply of Goods or services. CGST collected is credited to Consolidated Fund of India (CFI) while SGST collected is credited directly to the Consolidated Fund of respective States. As far as interstate supply of goods or services including imports is concerned, IGST is being levied and collected by the Centre. The IGST is apportioned or between the Union and States/UTs monthly.

Micro loan disbursals fall 16%

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, DEC. 9

As NBFC-MFIs turned cautious of asset quality, micro loan disbursements declined 16 per cent in terms of value and 27 per cent in volume terms in Q2 FY25. However, the industry expects asset quality to improve in the next few months.

Loan amount of Rs 24,807 crore was disbursed in Q2 FY 24-25 through 50.4 lakh accounts. In the same quarter of last year, NBFC-MFIs had disbursed Rs 29,670 crore through 69 lakh accounts.

Against the Q4 FY24,

● Industry expects asset quality to improve in the next few months.

SMALL LOANS

● AUM up 11.9 per cent compared to Q2 FY24.

CONSIDERING THE ongoing challenges, the industry decided to moderate the disbursement growth, focus on strengthening underwriting as per MFN guardrails and repayment collections.

— ALOK MISRA, MFN CEO and director

when Rs 40,440 crore was disbursed through 88 lakh accounts, Q2 disbursements were down by 39 per cent. The disbursements have been coming down in Q1 as well. As a result, assets under man-

agement of NBFC-MFIs were down sequentially from Rs 1.45 lakh crore in Q1 to Rs 1.40 lakh crore in Q2 - down by 3.3 per cent. However, AUM was up 11.9 per cent compared to Q2 FY24, finds Microfinance

NEW OFFERS Large companies focus on campus hirings; recruitments boom likely next year

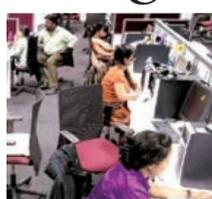
IT biz to see 15-20% growth in job opportunities

Mumbai, Dec. 9: The IT sector, which is on the path of recovery is expected to witness 15 to 20 per cent growth in job opportunities across various industries in 2025, talent solutions company NLB Services said on Monday.

The IT industry has gained back momentum in H2 2024 and is gearing up for a promising 2025 on multiple fronts, said NLB Services. In the coming year,

fresh hiring in the Indian IT sector is poised for significant growth, the talent solutions company added.

At the same time, the demand for highly specialised tech roles, including artificial intelligence, machine learning (ML), data analytics, and cloud technologies, is expected to surge by 30-35 per cent, driven by the increasing reliance on emerging technologies, it said.



This surge in demand is not limited to hiring but extends to a strategic focus on tech upskilling,

with companies investing heavily in training initiatives to equip their workforce with the necessary skills to meet the evolving technological landscape, the company noted.

NLB Services' analysis is based on the brand's view of the macro ecosystem, industry trends, and demand.

Further, the company stated that campus hiring remains the core focus for larger companies that are

looking to hire aggressively for the second half of 2024-25.

Since the 2021-22, global economic slowdown, clients have curtailed their discretionary spending due to on-demand hiring patterns and global macroeconomic challenges, this has impacted the project pipeline however, it is expected to stabilise in 2025, thus promising hopes for freshers, it said.

IT fresher hiring in 2025, is projected to increase with high demand for roles in artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), data analytics, Python, cloud technologies, and cybersecurity.

Sectors such as Global Capability Centres, manufacturing, BFSI, healthcare, and retail are also anticipated to boost their IT fresher intake by 30-35 per cent in 2025, NLB Services added. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

SA go top, India slip to 3rd in WTC

Dubai: South Africa on Monday replaced Australia at the top of the ICC World Test Championship table after their massive 109-run over Sri Lanka while India are now in the third place following their defeat in the Adelaide Test. South Africa now have 63.33 percentage points after 10 matches in the cycle and they are followed by Australia (60.71 PTC). India were leading the WTC table, heading into the Adelaide Test after their massive win in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy opener in Perth. India had 61.11 points heading into the pink ball Test in Adelaide which they lost inside three days and they now stand third with 57.29 percentage points. The best possible way for India to make a third appearance in the WTC final next year would be to win each of the three remaining Tests in Australia. Australia had 57.69 percentage points before the Adelaide Test which improved to 60.71 after their win. — PTI

9-yr Aarit youngest to beat chess GM

Bhubaneswar: Nine-year-old Delhi boy Aarit Kapil has become the youngest Indian to beat a chess Grandmaster as he emerged victorious against Raset Ziatdinov of United States in the ninth and penultimate round of the KIT International open tournament here. At 9 years, 2 months and 18 days, Aarit is the youngest Indian and third in the world to beat a GM under the classical time control. The youngest player in the world to beat a GM is Indian-origin Singapore boy Ashwath Kaushik who won against Jacek Stupa of Poland when he was just 8 years and six months old earlier this year. Ziatdinov, 66, is certainly past his prime if the game was any indication. As is usually the case when an experienced GM plays against a youngster, Ziatdinov did many things right positionally to get the upper hand thanks to his better pawn structure. To Aarit's credit, he fought on after standing slightly worse with his white pieces. It was a long-drawn endgame wherein Ziatdinov made the final mistake and lost a knight on Sunday. — PTI

India blank Lanka to win deaf series

New Delhi: The Indian deaf cricket team recorded a 5-0 win over Sri Lanka in a bilateral one-day series held here from December 2 to 8. The Indian squad was led by Virendra Singh and included 15 players from across the country. Sri Lanka were led by Gimadu Malkam. The Indian team won the fifth and final ODI by 13 runs. Having posted 289 in 49.5 overs in the first innings, India restricted Sri Lanka to 276 all-out in 48.4 overs to notch a thrilling win. India's Sai Akash was named the player of the match for the fifth game while Sri Lanka's Alanrose Kalep was adjudged the player of the series for his 12 wickets in four innings. India's Santosh Kumar Mahapatra was named the best batter of the series for scoring 325 runs in five outings with one century and two fifties. The Indian team had trained under head coach Dev Dutt and assistant coach Susheel Gupta in the national capital from November 25 to December 1. — PTI

Napoli hand lead to Atalanta

Milan, Italy: Napoli conceded top spot in Serie A to red-hot Atalanta on Sunday after falling to a 1-0 home defeat to Lazio and dropping to two points from the summit. Fiorentina earlier remained on Napoli's heels after their 1-0 home win over Cagliari in their first league match since midfielder Edoardo Bove's sudden collapse last weekend. In soaking wet Naples, Gustav Isaksen stunned the home fans with a brilliant strike, which rifled past Napoli goalkeeper Alex Meret and kept Lazio right in a crowded league title race. Marco Baroni's Lazio are fifth but only three points behind new leaders Atalanta, who sit top of the pile thanks to a club record-equalling ninth straight league win over AC Milan on Friday. "The boys showed how fired up they were and their work ethic," Baroni told DAZN. Napoli now have three teams just a point behind them, including Inter Milan and Lazio who also dumped Antonio Conte's team out of the Italian Cup on Thursday. — AFP

NEW ROSTER!

Legends urge 'subdued' Sharma to return to opener's role

Adelaide, Dec. 9: Former India players Ravi Shastri and Sunil Gavaskar want skipper Rohit Sharma to return to the opening spot so that he can be his aggressive and expressive self. Rohit, who had missed the first Test, dropped down to the number six spot in the pink ball Test after K. L. Rahul excelled at the top in the series opener in his absence.

However, the Indian skipper looked "too subdued" as he managed scores of 3 and 6 in India's 10-wicket loss here.

"That's the reason I want him at the top. That's where he can be aggressive and expressive. Just thought he was a little too subdued, just seeing his body language," Shastri told *Star Sports*.

"The fact that he didn't make runs, I don't think there was enough on the field there. I just wanted to see him more involved, and a little more animated," the former India coach added. Ahead of the Adelaide Test, Rohit stated that he didn't wish to tinker with a combination that brought the team success in the series opener which the visitors won by 295-run win at Perth. He even batted in the middle order in the warm up game in Canberra.

However, Rohit did admit it was not an easy decision for him to take personally. "Personally, it was not easy. But for the team, yes, it made a lot of sense," Rohit, batted in the middle order for the first time since

● Rohit dropped down to the number six spot in the pink ball Test after K. L. Rahul excelled at the top in the series opener in his absence.

2018, had said. Rahul, who had looked solid with scores of 26 and 77 while sharing a 201-run partnership with fellow opener and centurion Yashasvi Jaiswal in the second innings of the first Test, failed to replicate his form in the second match.

Rahul's failure to capitalise on the opportunity has prompted former India captain Gavaskar to call for Rohit's return to his opening slot. "He should return to his regular spot. We should remember why Rahul had opened. He did that because Rohit Sharma was not available for the first Test," Gavaskar said.

"I can understand why they kept him as an opener in the second Test, he had a 200-plus partnership with Jaiswal. But now that he couldn't score this Test, I feel Rahul should go back to No. 5 or No. 6 and Rohit Sharma should open. If Rohit scores quickly in the beginning, then he can score a big century also later," he added. — PTI



Rohit Sharma

Siraj, Head punished over confrontation in 2nd Test

Adelaide, Dec. 9: Indian pacer Mohammed Siraj was fined 20 per cent of his match fee, while Australian batter Travis Head was also "sanctioned" by the ICC for indulging in a heated exchange of words during the just-concluded day-night Test here. Siraj and Head were held guilty of breaching the world body's code of conduct following a disciplinary hearing on Monday.

"Siraj has been penalised 20 per cent of his match fee after being found guilty of breaching article 2.5 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel," the ICC said in a statement.

The cited rule relates to "using language, actions

● Siraj and Head also received one demerit point each on their disciplinary records, marking their first offence in the last 24 months.

or gestures which disparage or which could provoke an aggressive reaction from a batter upon dismissal."

The ICC said Head too was "sanctioned" for breaching Article 2.13 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel.

However, he escaped a fine for breaching the rule that relates to the "abuse of a player, player support personnel, umpire or match referee during an

international match." Siraj and Head also received one demerit point each on their disciplinary records, marking their first offence in the last 24 months.

"Both admitted their offences and accepted the sanctions proposed by Match Referee Ranjan Madugalle," the ICC said.

Head and Siraj had a brief showdown on day two of the match that Australia won by 10 wickets on Sunday. Head had struck a splendid 141-ball knock of 140 before being castled by Siraj, who went on to give him an aggressive send-off following an exchange of words.

The Indian endured boos from the Adelaide crowd following the confrontation. — PTI

HAZLEWOOD IS STILL NOT SURE OF THIRD TEST

Adelaide, Dec. 9: Australia pacer Josh Hazlewood, who is recovering from a side strain, bowled two full spells at Adelaide Oval on Monday and said how he "pulls up" in next 24 hours will determine his availability for the upcoming third Test against India.

On what would have been the fourth day of the pink-ball Test, which Australia won by 10 wickets, the 33-year-old Hazlewood bowled through two sessions to simulate match conditions and assess his readiness for the third Test, set to begin in Brisbane on Saturday. "I think it'll be how I pull up in the 24 hours following it really," Hazlewood, who missed the second Test, told reporters.

"It's just that repetitive (action) and obviously two spells makes a big difference. Cooling down pretty much fully and then going again in the same day, and the intensity has got to be right up there as well."

"So a few boxes to tick, but it's probably the 24 hours that follow and pulling up again the next day and then thinking 'yeah, I'd be right to go again if I had to'," he added. — PTI

PAINE PRAISES MCSWEENEY & LABUSCHAGNE

Sydney, Dec. 9: Former Australia captain Tim Paine feels Marnus Labuschagne and Nathan McSweeney's fighting performance in the face of a swinging pink ball on the opening day was a crucial effort in the often "harshly treated" home team's 10-wicket victory over India in the second Test in Adelaide.

It was a laudable effort given that Indian pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah was looking quite dangerous with the pink ball.

"I thought the last session of the first day was Test cricket at its absolute best," Paine said on *SEN*.

"You've got an absolute champion running in full steam under lights with a pink ball. You've got one of our absolute champions who's averaged 60 plus at times fighting to save his career and you've got a kid in his second Test trying to establish himself."

"I thought both of those guys for different reasons were huge. That was just as good as professional sports get when you've got players that are so good fighting so desperately," he added. — PTI

WORLD CHESS | CHAMPIONSHIP

Gukesh loses to Ding, scores tied

Singapore, Dec. 9: Indian challenger D. Gukesh lost the 12th game against defending champion Ding Liren of China to allow his opponent bounce back and level the World Chess Championship match here on Monday.

The 18-year-old Gukesh was ahead by one point after he notched his second win of the match on Sunday, which came after seven consecutive draws, but Liren's win on Monday brought things on an even keel.

The two players are now tied at six points each with just two games left in the 14-round classical time control format, still shy of 1.5 points in order to win the title.

The remaining two games will be played on Wednesday and Thursday, after rest day on Tuesday.

Irrespective of what happens in the next game on Wednesday, the match will go the distance (14 games) and more likely there will be tiebreaker — where games are of shorter duration — to determine the winner.

The 32-year-old Liren had won the opening game before Gukesh emerged victorious in the third game. The second, and the fourth to 10th games were drawn.

In what was the first victory for Liren with his white pieces, Gukesh's preparation did not come as good as the other 11 games that he played here.

"In the second half, I had chances in many of the games. Today was obviously a bad game, but

● The 18-year-old Gukesh was ahead by one point after he notched his second win of the match on Sunday, which came after seven consecutive draws, but Liren's win on Monday brought things on an even keel.

I wouldn't draw too much from it. Bad games happen. But if you look at the second half overall, I think we are both playing better than the first half," Gukesh said at post-game press conference.

"6-6 is overall the fair result, but since I was leading after yesterday, it is a bit disappointing to lose this game. At least the score is still tied and two more games are remaining."

Liren said he played the 12th game on Monday was his best in recent times.

"Sometimes I perform very well after a loss. It's a very important 12th game. It's maybe the best game I have played in recent times. Today I just tried to play the best moves and at some point, I realized my position was much, much better; there was no way to draw. I put pressure on my opponent in the whole game, I did not slip today," he said.

The start was an English opening by the Chinese and much to the surprise of the fans, Gukesh went for a position that led to a Benoni defense with colours reversed.

— PTI



Ace badminton player P. V. Sindhu (right) and Venkata Datta Sai meet Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan to invite him for their wedding on Monday. — PTI

SYED MUSHTAQ | ALI TROPHY

SHAMI BOWLS 13 DOTS, HITS 32 IN BENGAL WIN

Bengaluru, Dec. 9: Showing no signs of rust, Mohammed Shami carried Bengal to the quarter-finals of the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy by smashing a game-changing 17-ball-32 and bowling 13 dot balls in his four overs that paved way for his team's thrilling three-run win against Chandigarh, here Monday.

With no clarity over his international comeback, the 34-year-old played his eighth SMAT T20 game in 16 days and has bowled his full quota in almost all the games.

On the day, he first used long handle to a good effect, taking 19 runs off seasoned Sandeep Sharma's final over as Bengal reached 159 for 9 after tottering at 114 for 8.

He crunched two sixes and three fours, mostly flashing through point region but the final wicket stand of 21 off 10 balls with Sayan Ghosh proved crucial.

Veteran Kolkata Maidan slinger Ghosh (4/30), who is known to be a death

overs specialist, bowled a brilliant final over where 11 runs were required as Nikhil Sharma's planning went all awry. Chandigarh were restricted to 156 for 9.

SHAMI LOOKED BOWLING FIT

Having already warmed up nicely by facing 17 deliveries, Shami bowled a very good first spell and removed opener Arsalan Z Khan off the very third delivery, caught by Shakir Habib Gandhi.

Compared to his first Ranji Trophy game against Madhya Pradesh where he looked overweight and slightly paunchy despite bowling 42 overs, Monday's Shami looked leaner and the famous upright seam presentation was very much there. During the Ranji match, many experts debated how his follow-through, which is pretty straight post delivery, was ending towards cover which is an indication that he was unable to complete his action. — PTI

Chelsea edge Spurs in seven-goal thriller

London, Dec. 9: Chelsea came from 2-0 down to beat Tottenham 4-3 on Sunday and go second in the Premier League thanks to two Cole Palmer penalties. Dominic Solanke and Dejan Kulusevski gave under-fire Spurs boss Ange Postecoglou a dream start.

But his cavalier attacking approach will come under more scrutiny as Chelsea roared back to extend their unbeaten Premier League run to seven games.

Jadon Sancho gave the visitors a foothold before they dominated the second half with Palmer twice cool from the spot, either side of Enzo Fernandez's strike.

Chelsea close to within four points of leaders Liverpool, who have a game in hand after their



Chelsea's Enzo Fernandez (left) scores against Tottenham during their English Premier League match at the Tottenham Stadium in London on Sunday. — AP

visit to Everton on Saturday was postponed due to high winds.

Son Heung-min's 96th-minute goal was little consolation for Spurs who have won just once in seven games and remain 11th in the table.

Postecoglou was involved in an angry confrontation with his own supporters after a dismal display in a 1-0 defeat to Bournemouth on

Thursday. Spurs have often saved their best for the biggest games this season, beating Manchester City twice and cruising to a 3-0 win at Manchester United early in the campaign.

Postecoglou's men flew out of the traps to leave an in-form Chelsea chasing shadows in the early stages.

Solanke stole in at the near post to turn in Brennan Johnson's cross to open the scoring.

Kulusevski then meandered along the edge of the Blues' box before firing low past Robert Sanchez to make it 2-0 inside 11 minutes.

Sancho scored his first Chelsea goal in a 5-1 romp at bottom-of-the-table Southampton in midweek to earn himself a start. — AFP

