

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI FRIDAY 13 DECEMBER 2024



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Sai Pallavi denies turning vegetarian for *Ramayana*, threatens legal action



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President Droupadi Murmu confers the honorary rank of General of the Indian Army to Nepal's Chief of Army Staff Suprabal Janasewashree General Ashok Raj Sigdel at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi on Thursday. — PTI

Delhi records coldest Dec. day in 3 yrs as temp drops to 4.5°C

New Delhi: The city recorded its coldest December day in the last three years on Thursday as the minimum temperature dropped to 4.5°C. The forecast predicts cold wave conditions to persist at isolated places until the weekend. The city recorded a low of 4.5°C on Thursday, 0.4°C below normal, compared to 4.9 °C on Wednesday, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said. The temperature had dropped sharply from 5°C on Wednesday. According to data, the minimum temperature did not drop below 4.9°C in December 2023 and 2022. **Full report on Page 2**

Retail inflation eases to 5.5% in November

New Delhi: Retail inflation declined in November to 5.48 per cent and came within RBI's comfort zone mainly due to easing food prices, creating headroom for a rate cut at the Central bank's rate-setting panel meets under new Governor Sanjay Malhotra in February. **Full report on Page 7**

B'desh team may attend Vijay Diwas in Kolkata

Kolkata: A Bangladesh delegation is likely to attend the Vijay Diwas celebrations in Kolkata on December 16, which marks the Indian Armed Forces' historic victory over Pakistan in the 1971 war, defence sources said on Thursday. "Mukti Jodhas" may also take part in the celebrations, they said. **Full report on Page 3**

COUNTERPOINT



Believe me, dear... this rose was offered by an Opposition MP!

WEATHER

Max: 22°C
Min: 6°C
RH: 93%
Rain: Nil

Forecast: Clear

ASTROGUIDE

Krodhi: Dakshinayana
Tithi: Margasira Shukla Trayodasi till 7.40 pm
Star: Bharani till 7.49 am
Variyam: 6.48 pm to 8.16 pm
Durmuhurtham: 8.53 am to 9.36 am; 12.32 pm to 1.16 pm
Rahukalam: 10.30 am to 12 pm
SUNSET TODAY 5.26 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 7.06 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 6.27 PM
MOONSET TODAY 4.41 AM

- Legislation in Winter Session for joint LS, Assembly polls
- Constitution to be amended
- Local body polls left out now

Cabinet clears 2 draft bills to hold simultaneous elections

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

The Union Cabinet on Thursday approved legislation to implement "One Nation, One Election" for holding simultaneous polls for the Lok Sabha, state Assemblies and local bodies in a phased manner. The two draft bills are likely to be introduced in the ongoing Winter Session of Parliament. The decision was taken at a meeting of the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Sources said the Cabinet has approved two bills, including one to amend the Constitution to implement "One Nation, One Election". The sources said: "As of now, the Cabinet has given its nod to draft legislation to hold



Vice-president and Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar during a meeting with Union ministers J.P. Nadda, Kiren Rijiju, L. Murugan, Congress MP Jairam Ramesh and other MPs in the former's chamber at the Parliament House in New Delhi on Thursday. — PTI

simultaneous polls to the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies only."

A high-level committee led by former President Ram Nath Kovind had also proposed holding municipal and panchayat polls along with the

national and state elections in a phased manner, but the Cabinet has decided to stay away, "as of now", from the manner in which local body polls are held.

The Constitution amendment bill to hold simultaneous polls to the

THE CONSTITUTION amendment bill to hold simultaneous polls to the Lok Sabha and state Assemblies will not require ratification by at least 50 per cent of states, the sources said

Lok Sabha and state Assemblies will not require ratification by at least 50 per cent of states, the sources said.

Another Constitution bill proposed by the Kovind panel was aimed at creating provisions to hold simultaneous elections to municipalities and panchayats, along with the elections to the Lok Sabha and state Assemblies, by inserting a new Article 324A. It would have required ratification by half of the

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Kharge hits out at BJP's Soros jab; RS adjourned

■ Nadda takes on LoP ■ TMC privilege against Rijiju

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

The Rajya Sabha proceedings got disrupted again on Thursday as a combative BJP, led by Leader of the House J.P. Nadda, attacked the Opposition, mainly the Congress, over the no-trust motion brought against Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar. He also reiterated the allegation of links between the Congress leadership and US billionaire George Soros. Leader of the Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge protested against the "reckless allegations" made by the Treasury benches. The TMC submitted a privilege motion notice against parliamentary affairs minister



Union minister Giriraj Singh stage a protest during the Winter Session of Parliament in New Delhi on Thursday. — PTI

Kiren Rijiju for a derogatory remark against the Opposition leaders in the Upper House. Amid the disruptions, the Rajya Sabha proceedings were adjourned for the day. The Lok Sabha proceed-

ings were also disrupted till 2 pm amid uproarious scenes over Mr Soros and other issues. The House sat for the entire duration of Question Hour, but pandemonium broke out

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Maha Cabinet expansion likely tomorrow

■ Fadnavis meets PM, says BJP's list ready ■ Ajit confirms date, denies rift in Mahayuti over berths, portfolios

AGE CORRESPONDENTS
NEW DELHI/ MUMBAI, DEC. 12

Amid the buzz that the much awaited Maharashtra Cabinet expansion is likely to happen on Saturday, two days before the Winter Session of the state Assembly begins on December 16, chief minister Devendra Fadnavis on Thursday called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Briefing the media after the meeting, the Maharashtra chief minis-

ter asserted that names of the probable ministers from the BJP quota in his Cabinet have been short-listed and the final decision will be taken by the party's central leadership. "In our party, decisions are taken by the parliamentary board and our

senior leadership. Similarly, the NCP and Shiv Sena will decide the names of their ministers at their level," he said.

Mr Fadnavis, who was on a two-day visit to Delhi, held discussions on the expansion of his Cabinet with Union home minister Amit Shah, BJP president J.P. Nadda and senior party leader B.L. Santhosh late on Wednesday evening. Maharashtra BJP chief Chandra Shekhar Bawankule was also

■ Turn to Page 4



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnavis during a meeting in New Delhi on Thursday. — PTI

1,500 commutations, 39 pardons: Biden sets a new clemency record

Washington, Dec. 12: US President Joe Biden is commuting the sentences of roughly 1,500 people who were released from prison and placed on home confinement during the coronavirus pandemic and is pardoning 39 Americans convicted of nonviolent crimes.

It's the largest single-day act of clemency in modern history.

The commutations announced Thursday are for people who have served out home confinement sentences for at least one year after they



Joe Biden

were released.

Prisons were uniquely bad for spreading the virus and some inmates were released in part to stop the spread. At one point, 1 in 5 prisoners had Covid-19, said a report.

Mr Biden said he would be taking more steps in the weeks ahead and

would continue to review clemency petitions. The second largest single-day act of clemency was by Barack Obama, with 330, shortly before leaving office in 2017.

The clemency follows a broad pardon for his son Hunter, who was prosecuted for gun and tax crimes. Mr Biden is under pressure from advocacy groups to pardon broad swaths of people, including those on federal death row, before the Trump administration takes over in January. — AP

■ More on Page 6

Gukesh becomes youngest world chess champion



D. Gukesh reacts after beating title-holder Ding Liren of China in the FIDE World Chess Championship 2024 in Singapore on Thursday. Gukesh became the youngest world chess champion at 18 years after beating Liren in the 14th and last game. — PTI

■ Report on Page 8

SC bars surveys, orders on religious sites' suits

■ Centre told to reply in 4 wks ■ 'No' to new cases

RAKESH K. SINGH
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

In a major intervention in disputes over the identities of mosques and dargahs, the Supreme Court on Thursday barred the courts across the country from entertaining fresh lawsuits and passing any effective interim or final orders in pending ones seeking to reclaim religious places.

A special bench comprising Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna and Justices Sanjay Kumar and K.V. Viswanathan that was hearing a clutch of petitions challenging the constitutional validity of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act 1991 said, "As the matter is subjudice in this court, we deem it appropriate that no fresh suit would be registered and proceedings are undertaken till further orders of this court. We also direct that in the pending suits, the courts would not pass any effective interim orders or final orders, including orders of survey, till the next date of hearing." The apex court directive



A file photo of security personnel outside a gate of the Krishna Janmabhoomi temple in UP's Mathura. — PTI

THE TOP court was hearing about six petitions, including the lead one filed by lawyer Ashwini Upadhyay, challenging various provisions of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act 1991

has effectively stalled proceedings in 18 ongoing lawsuits filed by various Hindu parties seeking a survey to ascertain the original religious character of 10 mosques, including Gyanvapi at Varanasi, Shahi Idgah Masjid at Mathura and

Shahi Jama Masjid at Sambhal, where four persons were recently killed in communal clashes.

The top court was hearing about six petitions, including the lead one filed by lawyer Ashwini Upadhyay, challenging various provisions of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act 1991.

The 1991 law prohibits conversion of any place of worship and provides for the maintenance of the religious character of any place of worship as it existed on August 15, 1947. — PTI

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S. Korea Prez vows to fight; fresh bid for impeachment

Seoul, Dec. 12: South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol defended his martial law decree as an act of governance and denied rebellion charges, vowing Thursday to "fight to the end" in response to attempts to impeach him and intensifying investigations into last week's dramatic move.

The main Opposition Democratic Party quickly slammed Mr Yoon's speech as "an expression of extreme delusion" and "false propaganda." Later Thursday, it and other Opposition parties submitted a new impeachment motion against Mr Yoon for a floor vote this week-end.

The Opposition-controlled parliament also passed motions Thursday to impeach and suspend the South President's police chief and justice minister over the imposition of martial law, escalating the pressure on Yoon's embattled government. — AP

IN BRIEF

Delhi-Ghaziabad
RRTS trial completes

New Delhi: The National Capital Region Transport Corporation (NCRTC) on Thursday said the trial runs on the Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut RRTS corridor between New Ashok Nagar and Sahibabad stations are nearly complete and are expected to be operational by January next year. A senior National Capital Region Transport Corporation (NCRTC) official said that the station work of Sarai Kale Khan is in its final stage and the track laying process is underway between New Ashok Nagar and Sarai Kale Khan. Trial run between the section will be started soon after the infrastructure work is completed. There would be a dedicated parking space provided at the station that will give space for around 1,200 vehicle, the official said. The trial runs on Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut RRTS corridor, between Sahibabad and New Ashok Nagar, are progressing swiftly. The Anand Vihar and New Ashok Nagar stations opening will extend the corridor's length from 42 km to 54 km, another official said.

Tantrik sentenced to
20-yr RI in rape case

New Delhi: A Delhi court has sentenced a "tantrik" to 20 years of rigorous imprisonment for repeatedly sexually assaulting a 13-year-old girl in the guise of providing treatment to her brother by occult methods. Additional sessions Judge Aditi Garg was hearing the case against the 45-year-old man, who was convicted under section 6 (aggravated penetrative sexual assault) of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (PoCSO) Act and under section 363 (kidnapping) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). Additional public prosecutor Yogita Kaushik Dahiya sought maximum punishment for the convict, saying the man subjected the victim to repeated penetrative sexual assault in 2018. The court also sentenced him to three years RI for kidnapping.

3-day security expo
& conference begins

New Delhi: The three-day security expo and conference IFSEC India 2024, billed as the largest in South Asia, kicked off on Thursday at the Bharat Mandapam. The event brought together over 300 leading security and fire safety brands, featuring more than 5,000 products from cutting-edge CCTV and video surveillance systems to biometrics, RFID and perimeter security technologies. Deputy high commissioner of UK high commission in India, Christina Scott said, "India's success in executing the world's largest democratic process with minimal risks highlights the strength of its security infrastructure." DCP, Delhi Traffic Police, HQ & Road Safety, SK Singh said, "With 35 percent of critical assets still at risk of cyber threats, integrating robust digital defences alongside physical measures has become imperative."

DRIVE TO IDENTIFY
ILLEGAL B'DESHIS
IN CITY CONTINUES

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

The long arm of the law catches up with illegal Bangladeshi immigrants as Delhi police on Thursday continued the crackdown against them. The police have so far identified over two dozen of the illegal immigrants staying in the national capital. Notably the move also coincided with the forthcoming Delhi Assembly polls slated early next year. The move follows a communication from the Delhi lieutenant-governor V.K. Saxena directing the chief secretary and police commissioner to launch a two-month special drive to identify and take strict action against illegal Bangladeshi immigrants residing in the national capital and to provide a time-bound response with weekly progress reports to be submitted. Teams from the different police stations are visiting slum areas and Delhi's Kalindi Kunj, Shaheen Bagh and Jamia Nagar to identify illegal immigrants.



V.K. Saxena

Delhi govt will raise assistance to ₹2,100 from ₹1,000 after polls
AAP will hike aid to women
if party forms govt: Kejriwal

SANJAY KAW
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

With an eye on the upcoming Delhi Assembly elections, AAP national convener and former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday announced that the monthly allowance to women under the Mahila Samman Rashi Scheme would be increased to ₹2,100 from ₹1,000 if his party returns to power. The scheme, under which the AAP-led Delhi government announced ₹1,000 per month in the budget this year, was approved by the Cabinet headed by chief minister Atishi on Thursday. However, the initial payment of ₹1,000 will be credited only after the elections, Mr Kejriwal said, pointing out the poll dates to be announced in 10-15 days, thus making it impossible to transfer the money now. An amount of ₹2,000



Delhi chief minister Atishi with AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal during an event outside the party office in New Delhi on Thursday.

crore, set aside for this scheme in the budget, is meant to benefit an estimated 45 lakh women that have no formal source of income. Those women who pay tax or the ones already receiving aid from other government schemes are, however, not eligible for this scheme. To avail the benefit of the

scheme, one has to register with a voter ID card and a residence proof.

While making the announcement, the AAP supremo, with Ms Atishi by his side, also hit out at the BJP, accusing the Opposition party of having delayed the scheme's roll-out by "conspiring and sending him to jail (in

the liquor policy case)" and having cost Delhi women the steady honorarium.

Making his poll pitch, Mr Kejriwal said, "Today I am implementing the ₹1,000 scheme but after the elections, I will give ₹2,100 to all my sisters and mothers in Delhi. If you want to receive this money every month in your account, vote for Kejriwal, vote for the AAP, and help us win more than 60 seats." "This scheme is for empowering women and addressing their financial needs," he said, hitting back at BJP's criticism of the move as merely a poll plank — a freebie or a revdi.

Appealing to the women to vote for the AAP, Mr Kejriwal said, "If anyone asks you 'from where will he (Kejriwal) bring the money?' Tell them, 'Kejriwal jadoogar hai, wo denge (Kejriwal is a magician, he will provide the money).'"

Kejriwal writes to EC
over 'deletion of votes'

New Delhi, Dec. 12: A day after meeting the Election Commission officials over vote deletion issue, AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday wrote to Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar hoping the poll body will fulfil its "assurances" with necessary action.

Earlier on Wednesday, Kejriwal led a delegation of the AAP in the meeting with the election commissioners to urge them for not undertaking any mass deletion of voters names before the Delhi Assembly polls.

In his letter to the chief election commissioner, Kejriwal thanked the Election Commission for hearing concerns over "threat of mass deletions of voters names" in Delhi ahead of the assembly elections.

"We were all reassured by your commitment to uphold the sanctity of the electoral process and to

safeguard the right to vote of each and every voter in Delhi," said Mr Kejriwal citing "assurances", including "no mass deletion of votes in any assembly constituency until the Delhi Assembly polls", given to the delegation.

He also cited various other "assurances", including no deletion based on lists furnished by individuals, field enquiry by the election officials in the presence of representatives of the political parties, in case of deletion of voters names and registration of FIR against individuals for wrongfully filed applications for mass deletion of votes.

"We look forward to your actions and orders based on the above assurances," he said in the letter assuring the AAP as the largest political party in Delhi will always be open to any suggestions and guidance of the EC. —PTI

'Notices are served and you even don't bother to appear'
SC pulls up Centre over lawyers

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

Irked over the repeated absence of the Centre's advocates in several cases, the Supreme Court on Thursday said it did not take pleasure in summoning government officers before it.

A bench of Justices B.R. Gavai and K.V. Viswanathan on Wednesday sought the presence of the director-general of the Centre's directorate-general of health services while flagging the "casual approach" in a matter concerning admission of

a medical aspirant belonging to persons with disability category.

The apex court had said, "The court does not take pleasure in summoning the officers to the court. However, when in spite of being duly served, the respondents do not put in appearance, we were compelled to do so."

Noting that it normally does not direct government officers to remain present in the court, the top court said, "...In view of the casual approach of respondent no.2, we are compelled to direct the personal presence of the

THE TOP COURT bench on Wednesday sought the presence of the director-general of the Centre's directorate-general of health services while flagging the "casual approach" in a case

director-general, directorate-general of health services, ministry of health and family welfare, government of India, New Delhi in this court on December 12 at 10.30 am."

"What is this? Notices are served and you don't bother to

appear...this is not happening for the first time. On many occasions, for the Union of India, nobody is present here," Justice Gavai had said.

The bench said it had passed the order directing the officer to remain present as despite being duly served, no lawyer had appeared for the authority during the hearing on December 11.

The court said it waited till 4 pm for the counsel's appearance but when nobody appeared for the Centre, despite there being many lawyers present, it passed the order.

32-yr-old shot at in
E. Delhi, 3 arrested

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

A 32-year-old man was shot at by a group of attackers, allegedly due to a long-standing enmity between their families.

Two of the three suspects have been apprehended in the case. The incident occurred on the intervening night of Wednesday and Thursday when the victim, Ravi Yadav, was warning his hands in a bonfire near his home in the Trilokpuri area, police said.

Yadav sustained multiple bullet injuries and was rushed to Max Hospital, where his condition is reported to be critical. A caller, identified as Virender Yadav, informed the police that his nephew had been shot.

According to a police statement, he alleged that Sunil Gupta, alias

Golu, and two of his associates were involved in the firing. "Ravi and his family have a long term enmity with the family of Golu," said Virender Yadav, who is a practicing advocate in Karkardooma Court.

"The victim was involved in an attempted murder case where he and his associates assaulted Golu with a knife and sticks in March this year," the police said.

It is alleged that Golu's brother, Vipin, lost his job recently due to multiple complaints and RTIs filed by Virender Yadav, the police said.

The police are still verifying the facts and an investigation is underway, an officer said. "Two of the three named suspects have been apprehended and are currently being questioned," he said.

Cong releases 1st list of 21
candidates for Delhi polls

Sandeep Dikshit to take on Kejriwal from New Delhi seat

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

Putting aside the speculations of an alliance between the AAP and Congress in the impending Delhi Assembly polls, the grand old party on Friday released its first list of 21 candidates, fielding Sandeep Dikshit, son of former Delhi chief minister Sheila Dikshit, from New Delhi, a seat held by AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal since 2013.

Mr Dikshit, who twice served as an MP from East Delhi, will take on Mr Kejriwal on the home turf of New Delhi. Notably Mr Kejriwal, in his first election in 2013, had defeated Ms Dikshit, the then CM.

The decision to this effect was taken at a meeting of Congress Central Election Committee (CEC) chaired by party president Mallikarjun Kharge and Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi earlier in

Involve parties in voters' list
revision: EC to poll machinery

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

The Election Commission (EC) on Thursday held a meeting with the CEO Delhi, all DEOs, ROs, DCPs, and other nodal officials to review the progress of the ongoing special summary revision 2025 and the poll preparedness.

The poll body has said that all complaints and grievances from the political parties should be resolved promptly and factually.

The evening. Further the CEC has cleared 21 names, including Delhi Congress president Devender Yadav from Badli. Senior leaders like Anil Chaudhary (Patparganj), Ragini Nayak (Wazirpur), Abhishek Dutt (Kasturba Nagar), Mudrit Agarwal (Chandni Chowk) and Haroon Yousuf (Ballimaran) are

updating of the electoral rolls, in accordance with statutory provisions.

The commission emphasised that representatives of political parties should be involved in the electoral roll revision process with "fuller transparency and disclosures".

The poll body has said that all complaints and grievances from the political parties should be resolved promptly and factually.

The AAP MLA from Seelampur Abdul Rehman, who joined the party just two days ago, has also been fielded from the same constituency.

After the meeting, Mr Yadav said the party would be fielding senior leaders as well as young faces in the elections.

Direction to relax stringent GRAP curbs to continue, says SC
At 4.5°C, Delhi records coldest day

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

The city on Thursday recorded the lowest temperature of this winter season so far with the minimum dipping to 4.5 degrees Celsius.

Cold wave conditions were observed at isolated places in Delhi, including Ayanagar and Pusa, where temperatures dropped to 3.8 and 3.2 degrees Celsius respectively.

According to the India Meteorological Department, cold wave conditions occur when actual temperatures fall below 4.1 degrees Celsius or when the departure from normal is 4.4 degrees Celsius or more below average. Delhi's minimum temperature on Wednesday stood at 4.9 degrees Celsius.

The minimum temperatures in early December have been recorded below

Drone pilot project faces setback
over high costs & limited results

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI DEC. 12

A pilot project that involves the use of drones to spray mist at pollution hotspots has not been approved due high cost and lack of measurable results, an official said.

The technology was proposed as part of Delhi's 21-point Winter Action Plan

to combat worsening air quality. Officials have deemed the project costly and ineffective, stating it has failed to deliver significant, measurable improvements.

"The technology is extremely expensive and does not provide noticeable advancements compared to existing methods," an official said.

settle around 23 degrees Celsius.

Meanwhile, Delhi's air quality was recorded in the poor category, with an AQI reading of 262 at 9 AM, compared to the moderate category on Wednesday, when the 24-hour average AQI was 199.

The Supreme Court on Thursday said the direction to relax the stringent GRAP-4 curbs, meant to

deal with severe air pollution levels to stage 2, would continue till further orders.

A bench of Justices Abhay S. Oka and Augustine George Masih asked the Centre to consider identifying top experts in the field of environment, agriculture and other related fields for appointment in the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM), may be in the advisory capacity.

The Delhi government further informed the bench it had imposed the ban on firecrackers till January but was mulling to implement a round-the-year ban which would soon be notified.

The top court then directed the NCR states to place on record their decisions for enforcing the round-the-year firecrackers ban saying it was required to curb both air and sound pollutions.

Centre nod to 1,030
CISF personnel for
UP's Noida airport

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

The Union government has sanctioned a combined strength of more than 2,800 CISF personnel to guard two soon-to-be operational international airports in Uttar Pradesh's Noida and in Maharashtra's Navi Mumbai, the official sources said here on Thursday.

The Union home ministry has sanctioned 1,840 Central Industrial Security Force personnel for the Navi Mumbai airport and 1,030 the Noida international airport (NIA) in Uttar Pradesh.

The total CISF manpower sanctioned for providing a counter-terrorist cover to the two upcoming airports is 2,870.

The sanction of the CISF manpower is for the first phase of operationalisation of the two airports. The force's strength will be enhanced once these airports finish phase II, the sources said.

The security units, to be headed by deputy inspector-general rank officers, will take charge once the infrastructure to install security gadgets and other logistics get ready at both the facilities.

The Navi Mumbai international airport project, being developed by the Adani Group, will be completed in five phases and will have a total handling capacity of nine crore passengers per annum. The first phase will have a capacity to handle two crore passengers per annum.

The commercial operations at this airport, second in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region after the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport, is expected to begin by March-April, 2025.

The Noida international airport is a greenfield facility which is being built in the Jewar area of Gautam Buddha Nagar district in Uttar Pradesh, about 75 km from Delhi.

NORTHERN RAILWAY

E-TENDER NOTICE

Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer/Traction Distribution, DRM's Office, State Entry Road, New Delhi for & on behalf of President of India, invites open e-tender for the under noted work:

1.	Name of Work with its location	Design, supply, erection, testing & commissioning of 25 KV AC OHE modification work required in connection with augmentation of horning capacity of EL/S/GZB from 225 to 275 Locomotives in the section of SSE/W/E/GZB under ADEN/GZB.
2.	Approx. Cost of work	Rs. 15,85,849.39/-
3.	Earnest Money Deposit	Rs. 31,700/-
4.	E-Tender Bid Online Submission Period	24.12.2024 (00.00 Hrs.) to 07.01.2025 (15.00 Hrs.)
5.	E-Tender Bid Submission End Date & E-Tender Open Date & Time	07.01.2025 (15.00 hrs.)
6.	Website particulars where complete details of tender documents can be seen	www.ireps.gov.in

E-Tender No.: 39-TRD-NDLS-2024-25 Dated: 11.12.2024
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SHORT TAKES

Himanta predicts downfall of BJD

Bhubaneswar: Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, a key BJP campaigner in Odisha's recent elections, on Thursday predicted the eventual downfall of the Naveen Patnaik-led Biju Janata Dal (BJD) and projected a 50-year reign for the BJP in the state. During his two-day visit to Odisha, Mr Sarma arrived in Bhubaneswar on Thursday morning before heading to Puri to seek blessings at the Jagannath Temple. Responding to journalists' questions in Puri, he confidently declared, "BJD's history will come to an end soon." "The BJP-led government under Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi is performing well. BJP will govern Odisha for the next 50 years. There is nothing to worry about," Mr Sarma asserted. Touching on national security, he emphasised the importance of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in curbing illegal immigration.

BJP to elect Odisha prez in Jan: Leader

Bhubaneswar: The BJP's membership drive and grass-roots-level organisational elections in Odisha are nearing completion. The state unit of the BJP will elect its new president in January 2025, announced the party's state incharge, Vijay Pal Singh Tomar, on Thursday. Speaking to the media in Bhubaneswar, Tomar confirmed that the election to select the new state president would be conducted in January. "Ours is a democratic party, and the president will be elected through democratic means. Even a regular party worker can become president," he said. "Organisational elections have already commenced, with mandal-level elections currently underway," Mr Tomar added. At present, Manmohan Samal serves as the party's state president. Under his leadership, the BJP formed the government for the first time in Odisha, ending BJD's 24-year rule.

DHAMI: U'KHAND GOVT WORKING ON '1ST' YOGA POLICY

PRITHVIRAJ SINGH
DEHRADUN, DEC. 12

Uttarakhand chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami on Thursday announced that his government is working towards implementing the country's "first" yoga policy. It will play an important role in bringing about a new revolution in the field of health by bringing ayurveda and yoga together on a big scale, he said. Addressing the 10th Ayurveda Congress and Arogya Expo 2024 in Dehradun, which began on Thursday, Mr Dhami described Uttarakhand as the land of Ayurveda since ancient times because of its herbal wealth. More than 3,000 ayurveda experts and delegates from 50 countries are attending the three-day event, with Uttarakhand being the first Himalayan state where the event is being held. "We will be the first state in the country to put in place our own yoga policy. The policy will play a crucial role in integrating ayurveda and yoga as key aspects of wellness and the healthcare sector. This is a proud moment for Uttarakhand and my government to make this announcement," the Uttarakhand CM said. Mr Dhami also thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for providing the state an opportunity to host the event.



Pushkar Singh Dhami

■ Lane indiscipline biggest reason for mishaps: Minister in LS
'I try to hide my face in meets abroad': Gadkari on accidents

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

"When I go to attend international conferences where there is a discussion on road accidents, I try to hide my face," Nitin Gadkari said on Thursday, underlining he had set a target to reduce accidents by 50 per cent when he first took charge as the road transport and highways minister.

During a discussion on road accidents in the Lok Sabha, Mr Gadkari confessed that the number of accidents have increased with a surge in resultant fatalities against the targeted reduction in both the parameters.

"Forget about reducing the number of accidents, I have no hesitation to



Union transport minister Nitin Gadkari speaks in the Lok Sabha during the Winter Session of Parliament in New Delhi on Thursday.

— PTI

admit that it has increased. When I go to attend international conferences where there is a discussion on road accidents, I try to hide my face," he said in his reply during the Question Hour

in the Lok Sabha.

Mr Gadkari conceded that he had set a target to reduce accidents by 50 per cent when he first took charge as the minister.

The minister also stated that the biggest reason for

road accidents is lane indiscipline and his own car was fined twice in Mumbai for not following traffic rules.

Mr Gadkari also said road accidents claim 1.78 lakh lives annually in the country and 60 per cent of the victims are in the age group of 18-34 years.

He informed the LS that while UP leads the chart among states, Delhi tops the list for cities. In UP, over 23,000 people (or 13.7 per cent of the total deaths due to road accidents) died, followed by Tamil Nadu with over 18,000 (10.6 per cent) deaths.

"In Maharashtra, the figure stands at over 15,000 (or nine per cent of the total deaths), followed by MP with over 13,000 (eight per cent) deaths.

Ministry, HAL sign ₹13,500cr deal to procure 12 Sukhois

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

In a major boost to the "Aatmanirbhar Bharat" initiative, the defence ministry on Thursday signed a ₹13,500-crore deal with the state-owned Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) for the procurement of 12 Su-30MKI aircraft.

The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) on Thursday had given clearance to two major deals worth around ₹20,000 crores, including 12 Su-30 MKI fighter jets for the Indian Air Force and 100 K-9 Vajra self-propelled howitzers for the Indian Army.

"A Bangladesh delegation is likely to attend the Vijay Diwas celebrations in Kolkata," Eastern Command spokesperson Wg Cdr Himanshu Tiwari said on Thursday.

He also indicated that the Mukti Joddhas are "likely" to be among the delegation.

The size of the Bangladeshi delegation is yet to be ascertained. "We will communicate as we receive more details," Wg Cdr Tiwari added.

The development comes days after Indian foreign secretary Vikram Misri's recent visit to Dhaka and his meeting at the diplomatic level with the interim government, led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, following a series of attacks on the Hindu community in Bangladesh.

Yadav: Strived hard to deliver, removed obstacles in projects

AGE CORRESPONDENT
BHOPAL, DEC. 12

Madhya Pradesh chief minister Mohan Yadav on Thursday said that he strived hard to deliver by removing hurdles in the implementation of some long pending vital projects such as the interlinking of rivers during his maiden year in the office.

defence industry.

These aircraft would be manufactured at the Nasik division of the HAL. The supply of these aircraft would enhance the operational capability of the Indian Air Force and strengthen the defence preparedness of the country.

Last year in September, the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), headed by defence minister Rajnath Singh, had approved the proposal for the procurement of Russian-origin 12 Su-30MKIs fighter aircraft for the Indian Air Force (IAF) which would be manufactured in the country by the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited.

The order for 100 K-9 self-propelled howitzers to be made by Larsen and Toubro at Hazira in Gujarat would be a repeat order as 100 of them have already been inducted into the Army.

Mr Yadav, who completes one year in the office on Friday, said that the dream of former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee will be realised when the foundation stone for the Ken-Betwa interlinking project is laid by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in MP's Chhatarpur on December 25.

Solution to crisis to take time due to fragile situation: Biren

Imphal, Dec. 12: Manipur chief minister N. Biren Singh on Thursday said the Centre and the state governments are making all efforts to bring a permanent solution to the ongoing crisis in the state, but suggested that it could take time due to the fragile nature of the situation.

Speaking at a programme to commemorate Nupi Lan, Mr Singh said, "The state and central governments have been putting all efforts to bring a permanent solution. However, bringing a solution would take time



N. Biren Singh

Powers Act (AFSPA) in six police station areas, Mr Singh said, "The state government had requested the Centre to review and withdraw AFSPA from the said police stations" and sought cooperation and support from the public in the government's effort to restore peace

as the situation had become chronic and fragile."

Regarding the re-imposition of Armed Forces Special

and tranquility in the state. The CM said Nupi Lal Numit is observed annually to remember the role played by Manipuri women in 1904 and 1939, revolting against the injustice of British colonialism.

Mr Singh said apart from the contribution of women during the two historical events, "we should also remember the bravery and courage shown by Manipuri women in other instances, including ousting the Burmese during the Seven Year Devastation period (1819-1826)."



Vishu Deo Sai

to achieve the target set by Union home minister Amit Shah to end Naxalism in the state by March 2026.

His government has put all its efforts towards this resulting in major success in the counter-insurgency

operations conducted in Bastar in the state last year. He said that a total of 217 Naxals have been killed in separate encounters in Bastar in the last year while around 1,700 Maoists either laid down arms or were arrested during the period.

Mr Sai said that he has fulfilled another major promise made before the last polls by releasing monthly incentives of ₹1,000 each to women beneficiaries under the "Mahatari Bandhan Yojana" regularly.

Rahul meets kin of Hathras victim, invites BJP criticism

Visits after victim's father writes letter seeking his help

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Thursday met the family members of a 19-year Dalit woman who died allegedly after being gangraped in September 2020 in Hathras. Mr Gandhi visited the family in Bool Garhi village after the victim's father Om Prakash wrote a letter to him seeking help in getting speedy justice for his daughter.

In his letter, Mr Prakash expressed despair over the handling of the case by the state administration and failing to keep promises made to the family. Mr Gandhi spent roughly half an hour with the family and left the place without speaking to



Rahul Gandhi

Vikrama-ditya

said, "Rahul Gandhi has a relation with this family. He has always stood with them and will continue to do so. Today he came to listen to their problems. He is continuously fighting for their problems."

UP deputy CM Brajesh Pathak, however, criticised Mr Gandhi for the visit, saying he is "confused" and "not aware of the status of the case."

"The CBI has already conducted an inquiry into this case. Under the BJP

the media. After Mr Gandhi's visit, Congress' former Hathras chief Chandragupta

said,

"Rahul Gandhi has a relation with this family. He has always stood with them and will continue to do so. Today he came to listen to their problems. He is continuously fighting for their problems."

UP deputy CM Brajesh Pathak, however, criticised Mr Gandhi for the visit, saying he is "confused" and "not aware of the status of the case."

"The CBI has already conducted an inquiry into this case. Under the BJP

rule, no culprit is allowed to get away scot-free," Mr Pathak said. "Whether Sambhal or Hathras, he (Gandhi) keeps visiting them just to be in the limelight and not for any other reason."

The 19-year-old woman was allegedly gangraped on September 14, 2020, by four men belonging to the upper caste. She was moved to Aligarh for treatment and later to Delhi, where she died on September 29, 2020. She was cremated in the early hours of October 30, with her family alleging the local police had forced them to conduct the last rites in the dead of the night. Local police officers, however, claimed that the cremation was carried out "as per the wishes of the family".

2-day discussion on Constitution in LS from today

New Delhi, Dec. 12: The Lok Sabha will on Friday begin a two-day debate on the Constitution to mark the beginning of the 75th year of its adoption in the country.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to reply to the two-day debate on the Constitution in the Lok Sabha on Saturday, sources said.

Defence minister Rajnath Singh will initiate the debate on the Constitution in the Lok Sabha, while Union home minister Amit Shah is expected to initiate a similar debate in the Rajya Sabha, said government sources.

As per the listed agenda of the Lok Sabha, there will be a "special discussion on the 75th anniversary of adoption of the Constitution of India".

— PTI

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SHORT TAKES

Boy retrieved from pit declared dead

Jaipur: It was just another day in the field for Guddi Devi, working and seeing her five-year-old son play when he suddenly disappeared into a borewell pit, dug by his father in the farm. An unconscious Aryan was brought out of the 150-ft borewell pit last night after a 56-hour-long operation. He was declared dead at a hospital on Thursday. "The child's post-mortem was done today and the body was handed over to the family. Aryan was one of Guddi Devi's five children," Nangal Rajawatan's subdivision officer Yashwant Meena said. The incident occurred Monday afternoon in the Kalikhad village of Dausa. Drilling machines brought from Jaipur, Dausa, and Sawai Madhopur bored into the ground for hours, testing the patience of the kin. All this while, Aryan's mother kept on fainting, while his father cursed why he ever dug the pit. The hole was dug three years ago but it could never be put to use and the work never finished. — PTI

Miscreants in Odisha kill pregnant woman

Bhubaneswar: A pregnant woman was shot dead by unidentified miscreants outside her home in the Jhirda-pali area under Tikayatpali police limits in Bonaigarh of Sundargarh district in Odisha on Wednesday. The deceased was identified as Simamayee Behera. As per sources, a group of unidentified men attempted to break into Behera's house at midnight by forcing open the door. Behera reportedly opened the door after hearing the commotion. Upon seeing her, the miscreants tried to snatch her gold chain and mangalsutra but shot her when she resisted their robbery attempt before fleeing the scene. The injured woman was rushed to Sundargarh district hospital but succumbed to her injuries. She was reportedly seven months pregnant. "At about 1 to 1.30 am today, a woman was brought in with an alleged gunshot wound but was declared dead upon arrival. We found one bullet wound in her chest, but the cause of death can only be confirmed after autopsy," Dr Sanjay Kumar.

UAE minister in Delhi to review ties

New Delhi: United Arab Emirates (UAE) deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan reached the capital on a visit that will see him holding the fourth edition of the strategic dialogue with New Delhi later in the evening and the 15th edition of the Joint Commission meeting on Friday. "UAE deputy PM's visit will further strengthen the multifaceted Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between India and the UAE," the MEA said on Thursday. The two nations share very strong strategic ties and the bilateral ties have strengthened enormously in the past decade.

NIA searches sites in 3 states linked to supply chain case

7 Maoists shot dead in Bastar encounter, ops still underway

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
CHOURPUR, DEC 12

At least seven Maoists were on Thursday gunned down in an encounter with security forces in south Abujhmad under Narayanpur district in Bastar in Chhattisgarh ahead of Union home minister Amit Shah's visit to the Leftwing extremism-hit region. "An anti-Naxal operation was going on in which our security forces succeeded in killing seven Naxals. I salute their courage", chief minister Vishnu Deo Sai said in his post on X.

A senior police officer monitoring the counterinsurgency operation said that the encounter took place at around three in the morning in the forest of south Abujhmad. "Bodies of seven Maoists have so far been recovered. Encounter and search

Shah's 3-day visit to C'garh Naxal-hit areas from Dec. 14

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

Union home minister Amit Shah will be on a three-day visit to Chhattisgarh's Naxal-affected areas from December 14 during which he will review the law-and-order situation in the state and also to interact with surrendered Naxals and locals, the sources said on Thursday. During his visit starting from December 14-16, Mr

operations were going on. More casualties among the Naxals are not ruled out", the police officer told this newspaper requesting not to be quoted since he was not authorized to speak to

the media. As per him, a joint team of around 1,000 security personnel, mobilised from the four districts of Narayanpur, Dantewada, Kondagaon and Bastar, launched search operation in the jungles of south Abujhmad following specific intelligence inputs on the presence of some senior Naxal leaders along with a large number of armed Maoist cadres in the area, preparing for a major attack on the forces, the police officer said.

Meanwhile, the National Investigation Agency conducted a series of searches across three states on Thursday in connection with a Maoist supply chain case, the federal probe agency said. NIA teams seized several digital devices and incriminating documents during the searches in Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha, it said. The searches were conducted on the premises linked to seven accused in the case that was originally registered by the Chintur police in Andhra Pradesh following the arrest of two accused.

As per him, a joint team of around 1,000 security personnel, mobilised from the four districts of Narayanpur, Dantewada, Kondagaon and Bastar,

Extremely heavy rainfall alert in 3 Kerala districts

AGE CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DEC. 12

A red alert, indicating an extremely heavy rainfall forecast, has been issued for three districts in Kerala: P a t h a n a m t h i t t a , Ernakulam, and Idukki. Additionally,

The Central meteorological department has declared a high alert for central and southern Kerala.

An orange alert is in effect for Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Alappuzha, Kottayam, and Thrissur districts, while a yellow alert has been issued for all districts except Kannur and Kasargod.

'To prove abetment to suicide, mere harassment not enough'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

The Supreme Court has ruled that mere harassment is not sufficient to hold someone guilty of the offence of abetting suicide, and there must be clear evidence of direct or indirect incitement.

A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and P.B. Varale remarked while delivering a verdict on an appeal challenging a Gujarat high court order refusing to discharge a woman's husband and her in-laws for allegedly harassing her and driving her to suicide.

The apex court said: "Mere allegations of harassment are insufficient to establish guilt.

'Banana republic': Opp. on Assam's NRC-Aadhaar link

Admin to start verification of Aadhar applicants soon

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, DEC. 12

In what has triggered an angry reaction from opposition camp, Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma here on Thursday said that his government has decided to reject the Aadhar applications of those whose families had not applied for inclusion in the National Register of Citizens (NRC).

Pointing out that the state government would begin verification of applicants for Aadhaar cards in Assam soon, Mr Sarma said that the decision to link Aadhaar cards with NRC applications was announced in September this year.

He stated that the state government decided to issue a standard operating protocol for future issuance of Aadhaar cards, which will make it mandatory for one to furnish their NRC Pointing



Himanta Biswa Sarma

out that the Cabinet had approved the proposal for the implementation of an SOP he said that the general administration department of the state government would be the nodal agency for its implementation, which would be overseen by additional district commissioners at the district level and by circle officers at the revenue circle level.

Arguing that the arrest of dozens of infiltrators from Bangladesh has forced them to strengthen

the system, the chief minister said that after an application is made for Aadhaar, the UIDAI will send it to the state government for verification, following which the circle officer concerned would check if the applicant or their family had applied for inclusion in the NRC.

"If it is found that there was an application for NRC, the circle officer will go for field-level verification as per Supreme Court directives. After the officer is fully convinced, the Aadhaar will be approved," he said.

Meanwhile, opposition Congress and Trinamool Congress on Thursday criticised the Assam government's decision to make NRC application a pre-condition for obtaining an Aadhaar card, stating the state has turned into a "banana republic" under chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and BJP.

Committed to strong ties with India: Portugal FM

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

The Indian diaspora in Portugal is completely integrated with Portuguese society and has contributed immensely to its development, Portuguese foreign minister Paulo Rangel said in the Capital on Thursday. Ahead of talks on Friday with external affairs minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar, Mr. Rangel said his country is "fully committed" to strong ties with India and pointed out that this was his first visit to Asia in his current designation.

Speaking at an interaction organised by think-tank observer research foundation (ORF), Mr. Rangel referred to the shared values between the two nations including democracy and respect for human rights.

Mr. Rangel also said his country would "invite" India to speak to the "two sides" (Ukraine and Russia) to resolve the Ukraine conflict, even as he termed Russia an aggressor that did not respect the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

The minister also pitched for stronger bilateral trade ties in the context of a proposed free trade pact between India and the European Union (EU) of which Portugal is a part.

JeM conspiracy case: NIA raids in 19 places

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

The National Investigation Agency on Thursday conducted searches at 19 locations in 8 states across the country in a Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) terror conspiracy case.

Several incriminating documents, electronic devices including mobile phones, pen drives, CDs, hard disks etc were seized during the searches carried out at multiple locations in the states of Assam, Maharastra, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, J&K, Rajasthan and Gujarat.

The searches were conducted at the premises of suspects/close aides of an accused Sheikh Sultan Salah Uddin Ayubi alias Ayubi, a Jaish-e-Mohammad operative

who was arrested on account of his incriminatory role in the case. Ayubi was taken into custody in October this year for disseminating propaganda material associated with JeM, and radicalising and recruiting youth into the Jamaat outfit inspired by JeM.

The locations at which the searches were conducted on Thursday were Goalpara (Assam), Aurangabad, Mumbai, Amravati (MH), Jhansi, Bareilly, Deoband, Saharanpur (UP), Sitamarhi (Bihar), Hooghly (West Bengal), Baramulla, Reasi, Budgam, Anantnag (J&K), Durgapur (Rajasthan), and Mehsana (Gujarat), the central anti-terror probe agency said, adding that further investigations in this case is continued.

Maha clashes: Over 50 held, prohibitory orders continue

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, DEC. 12

The police have arrested 50 people in connection with Parbhani violence, which took place in reaction to vandalisation of a replica of the Constitution held by the statue of B.R. Ambedkar. Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnavis condemned the violence stating that prompt action had been taken against the perpetrator.

"The mentally unstable

man involved in the vandalising of the replica was arrested promptly. Still, despite action being taken, there was violence. This is not acceptable. Protests can be held by abiding by the Constitution," Mr. Fadnavis said.

A bandh was called on Wednesday to protest the incident, but the situation spiraled out of control as mobs engaged in arson and vandalism, damaging over 20 vehicles, shops, and even the district collector's office.

UP may revisit existing criminal cases

'Existing cases will be examined on whether law should be applicable or not'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

The Uttar Pradesh government on Thursday told the Supreme Court that it might revisit existing criminal cases where its stringent anti-gangsters law was invoked and new guidelines were being formulated on its application.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan told additional solicitor-general K.M. Nataraj, representing the state government, "Some of the provisions of Uttar Pradesh Gangsters and Anti-Social Activities

THE TOP court passed the order on a plea of one Gorakh Nath Mishra, who has challenged an order of the Allahabad high court refusing to quash the FIR lodged against him under the provisions of the act

(Prevention) Act are draconian. Government must examine where it should be applicable and where it should not be applicable."

In response, the ASG said, "In compliance with the court's earlier order the government is formulating new guidelines on

applicability of the provisions of the Uttar Pradesh Gangsters and Anti-Social Activities (Prevention) Act. It is almost ready and we will put it on record. The existing cases will also be examined on whether the law should be applicable or not."

The bench recorded his submission and said, "Some guidelines are being formulated and it will be placed on record for our consideration. List in the first week of January, 2025. The authorities may revisit the existing cases in view of the revised guidelines to find out if the Uttar Pradesh

Gangsters and Anti-Social Activities (Prevention) Act are required to be pressed or not."

The top court passed the order on a plea of one Gorakh Nath Mishra, who has challenged an order of the Allahabad high court refusing to quash the FIR lodged against him under the provisions of the act.

The top court also tagged another case seeking quashing of charges under the law with Mr Mishra's case saying the state government had agreed to revisit all the cases in view of the new proposed guidelines.

Kharge hits out at BJP's Soros jab

Continued from Page 1

in the Zero Hour when the Chair called the Congress member to speak, who then made a reference to the alleged links between a prominent industrialist of the country and the BJP.

Presiding officer Jagdambika Pal said the businessman's name will not go on records, triggering protests from the Opposition. Amidst protest, the House was adjourned till 1 pm. When the House resumed at 1 pm, noisy exchanges broke out between the Opposition and the BJP members. Following which, Sandhya Ray, who was presiding over the House, adjourned it till 2 pm.

Resuming the proceedings at 2 pm, the Lower House took up the Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill 2024 for consideration and passing. The bill seeks to empower the NDMA and SDMA to prepare the disaster plan at the national level and state level instead of the national executive committee and the state executive committee.

When the Rajya Sabha met at 11 am, the Chair wished birthday greetings to NCP(SP)'s Sharad Pawar and BJP's Harsh Mahajan. Mr Dhankhar informed that six notices to adjourn the scheduled business of the day have been rejected. One of the notices included a discussion on Allahabad high court judge Shekhar Yadav's recent remarks on Muslims. The Chair clarified that the issue can only be discussed through substantive motions.

As several Opposition members raised objections, Ms Nadda criticised Mr Kharge for holding a press conference and criticising Mr Dhankhar.

"The Chairman's ruling cannot be questioned or criticised. To do so is contempt of the House and the Chairman," Mr Nadda said while quoting from the rule book.

Citing Mr Kharge's statement made during a press conference on Wednesday, Mr Nadda said the Congress president criticised the Chairman, which is "objectionable and condemnable" and "sets a wrong precedent."

Refuting Mr Kharge's allegation that he was not given an opportunity to speak in the House, Mr Nadda said letters were written by the Chair to the LoP time and again to participate and come to the Chairman's chamber. But the LoP did not visit the Chairman's chamber and also did not attend the last meeting of the Business Advisory Committee, he said. The Congress has even tried to demean the constitutional post by criticising "the Chair as cheerleaders" on its official social media handle, he said.

Mr Nadda claimed that a senior Congress leader, an apparent reference to former Congress president Rahul Gandhi, was seen making a video of the mimicry of the Chairman in the recent past and said, "The Congress has no interest in democracy and no respect for the parliamentary practices."

The Leader of the House charged that the press conference was held to divert attention from the main issue. He asked the Congress, "What is the relationship between Mr Soros and (Congress parliamentary party chairperson) Sonia Gandhi? The country wants to know... Mr Soros gives billions of dollars in investment to destabilise the country."

This triggered further uproar in the House. Mrs Gandhi was present in the House. Mr Dhankhar gave the floor to Mr Kharge to respond to Mr Nadda's remark, but he could not speak much as members of the Treasury benches were on their feet and began sloganeering. The House was adjourned till 2 pm.

When the House reassembled at 2 pm, TMC parliamentary party leader Derek O'Brien tried to raise a point of order. Amid the ruckus, the Chairman said it will not go on record. As sloganeering continued, Mr Dhankhar called former prime minister and JD(S) MP HD Deve Gowda to speak. However, his speech was drowned in the din.

Mr Kharge then tried to raise a point of order: "House is not in order. They are making reckless allegations. You are listening and encouraging... Democracy runs on two wheels - one is the Opposition party, the other is the ruling party and you are the umpire. But if you take one-sided decisions, it is a setback for the country and democracy..." Mr Kharge said.

SC bars surveys on religious sites' suits

Continued from Page 1

1947. The dispute relating to Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid at Ayodhya was the only exception under the law.

There are several cross petitions that seek strict implementation of the 1991 law to maintain communal harmony and to preserve the present status of mosques, sought to be reclaimed by Hindus on the ground that they were temples before invaders razed them.

Making it clear that the bench will be examining the "vires (legality), contours and ambit" of the 1991 law and it was imperative to ask other courts to "stay off their hands" till it passed any further orders, the top court said, "In pending suits, the courts will not pass any effective interim or final order, including order of survey, till further orders."

Senior advocate J. Sai Deepak, appearing for a Hindu party, opposed the order restraining all other courts and said the parties should have been heard before such a direction.

The CJJ said it was quite natural to ask courts not to pass any order as the Supreme Court was hearing the larger issue.

"Can the trial courts overreach the Supreme Court?" asked the bench and said the apex court was already dealing with the validity of the

law. The bench said if parties insisted, then the matter could be referred to a high court.

Observing that the top court cannot decide the matter without the Centre's response, it asked the Union to file its reply to the pleas and cross ones in four weeks.

The bench also granted another four weeks to other parties to file their rejoinder after the Centre filed its reply.

Earlier, the top court had issued notice to parties, including the Centre, on the lead petition in September 2022.

On Thursday, the apex court also appointed nodal counsel to assist it in the hearing on the pleas, which will be listed after eight weeks. The court appointed advocates Kanu Agarwal, Vishnu Shankar Jain and Ejaz Maqbool as nodal counsel to make compilations on behalf of the Union, the petitioners and the parties supporting the Act, respectively.

When the bench asked: "How many suits are pending now?" One of the advocates for the parties said a total of 18 suits pertaining to 10 mosques were pending in several courts across the country.

"Ultimately, we will have to hear the arguments," the bench said, observing the primary issue was with regard to Sections 3 and 4 of the 1991 law. While Section 3 deals with the bar of conversion of

places of worship, Section 4 pertains to declarations as to the religious character of certain places of worship and the bar of jurisdiction of courts, etc.

The top court also allowed the pleas of various parties, including Muslim bodies, seeking to intervene in the proceedings.

The six pleas pending before the top court have sought the setting aside of Sections 2, 3 and 4 of the Act.

The petitioners have contended that these sub-sections of the 1991 law took away the right of judicial remedy to reclaim a place of worship of any person or a religious group.

Various Muslim parties, including the Gyanvapi Mosque management committee, moved the apex court to oppose several pending petitions that challenge the constitutional validity of the 1991 law.

Listing a series of contentious claims made over the years concerning various mosques and dargahs (shrines), including the Shahi Idgah Masjid in Mathura, the Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque near Delhi's Qutub Minar, the Kamal Maula Mosque in Madhya Pradesh, among others, the mosque committee has claimed that the petitions challenging the validity of the Act were filed with "mischievous intent" to facilitate lawsuits against these religious sites.

Fadnavis meets Modi in Delhi

Continued from Page 1

present during the meeting.

"We are yet to decide on a date for the Cabinet expansion. The formula has been decided and you will know about it soon," Mr Fadnavis said.

Separately, NCP chief Ajit Pawar said the expansion of the Maharashtra Cabinet could take place on December 14.

"As per my information, it will take place on December 14," the Maharashtra deputy CM said. He also denied that the Cabinet formation has been delayed due to differences among the alliance partners - the BJP, the Shiv Sena and the NCP - over the number of Cabinet berths and specific portfolios.

According to some reports, there are at least 10 departments, including home, finance, revenue, urban development, rural development, energy, water resources, public works, agriculture and excise, on which there is no consensus in the ruling alliance. Mr Fadnavis, however, denied that there are any disputes in the alliance.

"There is no issue with the expansion of the Cabinet. I had come here to meet my party leaders and discuss who could be the ministers from the BJP. Eknath Shinde will decide on the ministers from the Shiv Sena and Ajit dadas will decide on the NCP ministers," he said.

Mr Fadnavis, though, refused to reveal the date for the Cabinet expansion. "We are yet to decide on a date for the Cabinet expansion. The formula has been decided and you will know about it soon," he added.

THE ASIAN AGE

13 DECEMBER 2024

Parl held to ransom by both govt & Opp.

The Winter Session of Parliament has witnessed a series of curious events with some having precedents but not the others. Most notable among them was the notice to remove Jagdeep Dhankhar as vice-president and Chairman of the Rajya Sabha but no less surprising were the Treasury benches disrupting proceedings even as the Opposition insisted it wanted the Houses to function at all costs.

It is the first time in the history of the Rajya Sabha that a mandatory 14-day notice has been given for the removal of its chairman. Article 67 (b) of the Constitution says a vice-president may be removed from office by passing a resolution in the Rajya Sabha which is agreed to by the Lok Sabha. The notice precedes the resolution seeking his removal.

India is an electoral democracy where people are elected to their legislative posts with the backing of political parties. The practice for the elected representatives so far, however, has been to present themselves as representatives of the entire electorate. It is from this position that they derive their moral authority to act in the name of all people. Those holding portfolios of executive power such as ministers have often been accused of acting in a partisan manner, but the Presidents and Vice-Presidents have been honourable exceptions.

After the disruptive interventions of the Opposition washed out the first week of the Winter Session, it is now the turn of the Treasury benches to ensure that no meaningful discussion occurs

People, and that the alliance has already voiced its support for him, Mr Dhankhar faces no immediate threat of losing his chair. It is up to him to contemplate if he has been true to his constitutional responsibility, or whether he should press ahead with the thought that his performance will form part of the resume that he prepares for his next position.

After the disruptive interventions of the Opposition washed out the first week of the Winter Session, it is now the turn of the Treasury benches to ensure that no meaningful discussion happens in the Houses. The behaviour of the ruling party members borders on strangeness when they raise media reports pointing to what they feel are questionable links Opposition leaders have with questionable people. Why they would stall the Houses instead of putting the Opposition leaders in the dock by allowing them to function remains a mystery.

It has now dawned on the Opposition that they are the biggest losers in the game of disruption and it wants the Houses to function. It should at least now realise that the people have sent its members here to hold the government to account for its sins of commission and omission. Democracy becomes a winning proposition when all the players recognise their roles and act responsibly.

FM, new RBI chief signal cut

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman's statement that inflation is a major challenge faced by countries around the world and that no country can solve it alone appears to have set an agenda for new RBI governor Sanjay Malhotra, who took charge a few hours before she made this statement. In his initial remarks after assuming office, the RBI governor said the central bank has to be alert and agile to meet challenges and cannot remain stuck to continuity and stability.

The statements of Ms Sitharaman and Mr Malhotra, when seen together, appear to hint at an imminent cut in repo rate during the Monetary Policy Committee's bimonthly review meeting in February. During the tenure of Shaktikanta Das, the RBI remained squarely focused on controlling inflation, sometimes even at the cost of sacrificing some economic growth. Under Mr Malhotra, the RBI could focus on boosting economic growth.

The newfound urgency in New Delhi's North Block as well as Mumbai's Mint Road to take measures to promote the economic growth has come after the country's GDP growth slumped to a seven-quarter low of 5.4 per cent in the July-September quarter, which was much lower than even the most pessimistic projections.

While it is true that the central bank does not have enough tools to control inflation, which was fuelled by supply shortage, the government as well as RBI should remain conscious of the fact that inflation affects an average family the most. The central government as well as state governments should, therefore, chip in to address supply issues to tame inflation.

India is, in fact, still a middle income country in terms of per capita income, which is still nearly half of war-ravaged Iraq's and slightly less than Africa's poverty-stricken Angola's. The government should, therefore, try to balance economic growth and inflation, instead of leaning towards any one of them.

THE ASIAN AGE

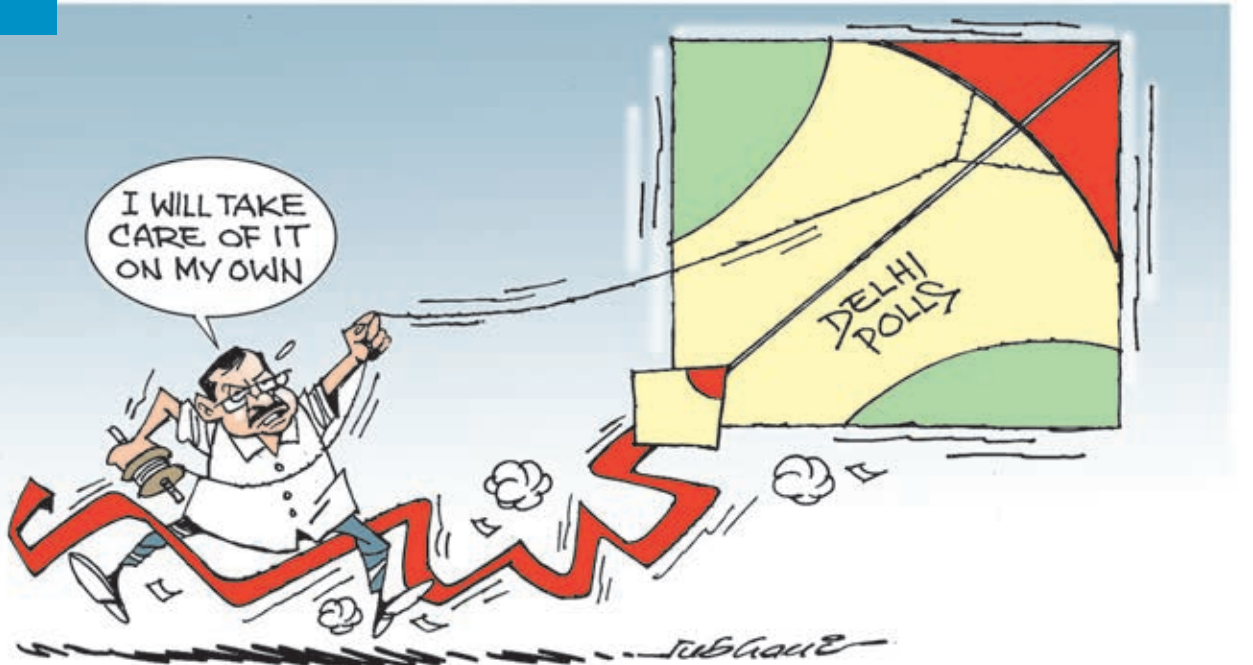
KAUSHIK MITTER
Editor

K. SUDHAKAR
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Subhani



Tap private sector for climate change goals



Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr

There was huge disappointment across all developing countries at the deal which finally emerged at the COP29 climate summit in Baku, Azerbaijan, late last month. The developed countries had agreed to increase the fund commitment to help developing countries to green their economies from \$100 billion annually, made at the landmark 2015 Paris summit, but which was not fulfilled consistently, to \$300 billion annually. The demand from the developing countries was for \$1.3 trillion if Net Zero emissions were to be achieved by 2050 and the global temperatures kept below 1.5 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial era levels.

The assurance was given by the developed countries that the gap in funding — between \$300 billion and \$1.3 trillion — would be covered by tapping sources other than governmental funding, including multi-lateral development banks and private investors.

There was justifiable scepticism on the part of the developing economies whether this target would ever be reached.

The scepticism on the part of developing economies is indeed justified because raising funds from the market to meet climate change goals is unrealistic because the private investors look for returns in a reasonable time frame. The debate about the participation of the private sector in playing a substantial role in responding to climate change challenges has been going on for quite some time. An argument was offered during the COP28 summit in Dubai in 2023 that the private sector's global carbon emissions were 70 per cent, and that it had a responsibility

to help with the task of supporting projects which will help de-carbonise the economy. It is an argument that needs to be kept alive and many of the private sector players are willing to do their bit. Again, there is scepticism how sincere and effective the private sector efforts would be.

In this either-or situation, there have been some interesting developments in Africa. They have not received enough attention, and they have not been talked about. The African leaders and policymakers feel that they should not depend any longer on the largesse of the developed world to meet the challenge of sustainable growth and climate change. They feel that they should find their own ways of raising funds collectively in Africa and turn to the markets in Africa and across the world.

The African Development Bank has joined hands with the Climate Investments Funds' Capital Markets Mechanism, and the CIF has announced its bond listing at the London Stock Exchange. The announcement was made in Baku on November 12. The CIF has been in existence since 2008 and it has been supporting climate change projects across countries. But the fund's value is a mere \$12 billion, which can be termed a drop in the ocean. But it opens the door to a global market which should be of great importance as the century passed and the challenges posed by climate change would only increase.

It must be recognised that the long-term trend is that of declining growth in the developed economies due to a variety of reasons, including the shift in manufacturing base away from these countries and to Asia. So, the ability of the

The challenge is to make de-carbonisation a profitable venture. This would require a smart strategy of making it demand-driven. People now understand the hazards of climate change.

governments of the advanced economies would shrink in the future. Their responsibility as the largest polluters remains undisputable and it is borne out by the cumulative CO2 emission figures, with the share of the United States at 29 per cent (457 billion tonnes) and that of Europe, technically referred to as EU 28, at 22 per cent (353 billion tonnes), with China at a relatively distant third position at 12.7 per cent (200 billion tonnes) and India's miniscule three per cent (48 billion tonnes). Russia, with its cumulative CO2 emissions at six per cent (101 billion tonnes), stands between China and India.

At the Africa Climate Summit held in Nairobi in July this year, releasing the third edition of the United Nations Development Programme's Africa Investment Insights Report, Maxwell Gomera of UNDP Africa Sustainable Finance Hub said: "Through the UNDP Africa Investment Insights Report, we turn Africa's climate challenges into investment opportunities for the private sector, as per the continent's own ambition captured in national NDCs."

Africa's trust in the markets might look naïve given the fact that the global markets have been under stress even since the worldwide financial recession of 2007-08 and the Covid-19 pandemic interruption of 2020-22. Countries are struggling to get back to pre-Covid-19 levels of growth. The general sentiment across the globe, among the youth, farmers and workers, is against free markets and

in favour of protected markets behind tariff walls. It is clear that governments cannot bear the burden of providing basic services to the people if the markets do not flourish. The socialist utopia simply cannot be resuscitated. The private sector must recover its animal spirits, and it must be pressed into the service of combating climate change as well. India and China and many other emerging market economies have successfully tapped the private sector to spur growth. So, the private sector can be an effective pathway to sustain the climate change action plan. The example of the African Development Bank with the Climate Investment Fund shows that there can be collaboration between governments and the private sector.

The challenge is to make de-carbonisation a profitable venture. This would require a smart strategy of making it demand-driven. People now understand the hazards of climate change, from droughts and floods to heat waves and cold waves. They are feeling the pain and the discomfort. When people demand change, things happen. As long as developing countries depend on the developed economies, the developed economies will continue to call the shots. The technological breakthroughs for the green economy should now flow from the developing economies. Funds for research and development must be stepped up in these countries. This could also lead to the advanced economies turning to the Asian, African and Latin American countries for technology transfers. This is not a wholly unrealistic expectation. It needs intellectual and entrepreneurial breakthroughs. With a bit of daring, it can be done. Call it the Christopher Columbus spirit. Set out to reach the old eastern ideal of ecological and economic balance and you will end up at a new place, and new horizons open up.

The writer is a Delhi-based commentator and analyst

LETTERS

HELP HUSBANDS

The unfortunate case of the Atul Santosh suicide shows that there are a significant number of husbands suffering silently because of stringent anti-dowry provisions being used by cold calculating women to squeeze them dry of their financial assets. While the war of the roses will never be eliminated in a husband-wife relationship, the allegations made against the judge in what can be safely taken as a dying statement must worry the nation most of all. News of corruption in the judiciary always came out in whispers, but the suicide note of the deceased makes it clear as to how the judges can drive anybody to despair with financial demands.

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

A BAROMETER!

THE BUZZ surrounding the Oxford Word of the year — "brain rot" — is not without reason. The annual tradition of dictionaries picking a Word of the Year has become more than a mere linguistic exercise — it serves as a cultural barometer, reflecting the collective ethos, mood and preoccupation of society at a specific moment of time. Thus Cambridge has named "manifest" as its selection and Collins chose "brat".

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

SELFISH CONGRESS

THE AAP and the Congress have both announced that they will not form an alliance in Delhi for the upcoming elections. Both are constituents of the INDIA bloc and fought the Lok Sabha elections together in May this year. Hence their fighting separately now may affect both the parties and will be an advantage to the BJP. Sadly, it appears that both the parties have not learnt any lessons from the Haryana Assembly elections which they contested separately as well. The AAP is carrying the weight of anti-incumbency on its shoulders and the Congress wanted no part of it. We have to wait till February to know the outcome of such selfishness.

D.B. Madan
New Delhi

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



As the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) prepares for a leadership transition, all eyes are on revenue secretary Sanjay Malhotra, who has been appointed as the new RBI governor for a three-year term starting Wednesday. His appointment comes as the financial world speculates on the future of the outgoing governor, Shaktikanta Das, whose extended tenure concluded with the recent monetary policy announcement.

Mr Das, a veteran babu with an uncanny ability to sidestep contentious queries, has kept everyone guessing about his plans. Even as whispers of a behind-the-scenes campaign for an extension swirl — fuelled by rumours of his visit to a Chennai hospital — added to the prolonged intrigue.

Mr Das' tenure has been pivotal, marked by stability and a steady hand during turbulent times. Appointed after the unexpected exit of Urjit Patel in 2018, Mr Das steered the RBI through the pandemic-induced economic upheaval. His administration delivered bold monetary measures, including the latest CRR cut, which is expected to infuse ₹1.16 lakh crores into the banking system.

Yet, the government's choice of Mr Das — and now Mr Malhotra — signals a clear preference for seasoned administrators over candidates selected solely on performance metrics. While Mr Das' leadership underscored continuity and control, it also spotlighted a shift away from independent-minded central banking.

As Mr Malhotra steps into this high-stakes role, the financial community will keenly watch how he balances the RBI's autonomy with the government's expectations. The baton has been passed, but the challenges of inflation, growth, and global financial headwinds remain as pressing as ever.

CBI MOVES TOWARDS MULTIDISCIPLINARY INVESTIGATIONS

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) is getting a makeover — or at least, that's the idea behind the new rules the government has notified. The aim? To bring in more diversity at the superintendent of police (SP) level by opening up the doors to professionals from outside the Indian Police Service (IPS).

Until now, only 15 of the 75 SP-level deputation posts could be filled by officers from non-police backgrounds. That number has now been bumped up to 18. It may not seem like a seismic shift, but in bureaucracy-speak, even small tweaks signal intent. The new rules allow half the SP posts in CBI to be filled through deputation and the rest through promotions. And it's not just the IPS officers in the mix anymore. The expanded pool includes members of All India Services, Central Police Organisations, organized Group 'A' services of the Central government, and even state and Union Territory police organisations.

This shift isn't just about filling seats but equipping the CBI to handle complex financial crimes and multidisciplinary investigations better.

Financial shenanigans today often demand expertise beyond traditional policing—think forensic auditing, financial analysis, and cybercrime tracking. Having onboard officers with such skill sets is a step in the right direction.

That said, the four-year cap on deputation tenure remains intact. While it ensures a constant inflow of fresh talent, it also means the clock is ticking for these specialists to make an impact.

This move reflects a slow acknowledgment that crime-solving in the 21st century needs more than just a badge and a baton. It needs minds that think differently — and now, the CBI seems ready to embrace that change.

SEBI'S DILEMMA: EXTERNAL HIRES AND INTERNAL FRUSTRATIONS

Sebi is no stranger to turbulence, but the latest row might signal deeper cracks within its ranks. The appointment of Shikha Gupta, a former taxation head at Hindustan Unilever Ltd (HUL), as executive director (ED) has reportedly ruffled feathers among Sebi's employees. Their contention? A deep-seated belief that such positions should go to internal candidates, not external hires parachuting in.

This discontent comes amid a swirling controversy surrounding Sebi chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch, already under scrutiny following allegations tied to the Hindenburg report. Adding fuel to the fire is Ms Gupta's rumored connection to Buch — her husband's longstanding association

with HUL raises questions about impartiality. While the optics aren't ideal, is the uproar entirely justified? Critics argue that external appointments, though unsettling, can bring fresh perspectives. Shikha Gupta's corporate experience could potentially inject Sebi with innovative approaches, especially in navigating taxation complexities. Yet, this optimism is overshadowed by Sebi's internal dynamics. Its employees appear to view this as another instance of sidelining its own talent — a sentiment exacerbated by memories of Pramod Rao's appointment from ICICI Bank in 2022, which triggered similar dissent.

The larger issue here is the perceived erosion of Sebi's autonomy. When top roles are filled with outsiders, particularly those linked to private sector powerhouses, it's easy for whispers of cronyism to gain traction. For Sebi to maintain its credibility, it must address this trust deficit. Transparent hiring practices and robust communication with its internal teams would go a long way in quelling such revolts.

Ultimately, the question Sebi faces isn't just about Ms Gupta's appointment - it's about whether the regulator is doing enough to balance internal aspirations with the need for external expertise. Getting that balance right is critical for its future.

Love them, hate them ignore them at national peril, is the babu guarantee and Dilip's belief. Share significant babu escapades dilipcherian@hotmail.com.

SHORT TAKES

KYRGYZSTAN TO
CHANGE ITS
NATIONAL ANTHEM

Bishkek, Dec. 12: Kyrgyzstan said that it would change its national anthem, deeming it too reminiscent of the Soviet era, in the latest move to update its state symbols and strengthen national identity.

The official *Kabar* news agency said a parliamentary commission had been formed to look into ditching the current anthem, which was adopted in 1991 and has the same melody as the old Soviet one. President Sadyr Japarov said it glorified only independence, not a “fully constituted” state with a “5,000-year-old history”.

TAIWAN DETECTS
16 CHINESE
WARSHIPS

Taipei, Dec. 12: Taiwan said on Thursday it detected 16 Chinese warships in waters around the island, one of the highest numbers this year, as Beijing intensifies military pressure on Taipei.

The navy vessels, along with 34 Chinese aircraft, were spotted near Taiwan in the 24 hours to 6.00 am (2200 GMT) Thursday, according to the defence ministry’s daily tally.

Beijing has been holding its biggest maritime drills in years from near the southern islands of Japan to the South China Sea, Taiwan authorities said this week.

MACRON LIKELY
TO NAME NEW
FRENCH PM

Paris, Dec. 12: French President Emmanuel Macron was expected to name a new prime minister a week after MPs toppled the government, shortening a visit to Poland amid a torrent of criticism over the prolonged political crisis.

Macron had promised to name a replacement government chief within 48 hours of meeting party leaders on Tuesday, participants said.

But he remains confronted with the complex political equation that emerged from July’s snap parliamentary poll: How to secure a government against a no-confidence vote.

IMRAN, WIFE
INDICTED IN ONE
MORE GRAFT CASE

Islamabad, Dec. 12: A Pakistani court indicted imprisoned former prime minister Imran Khan and his wife on fresh charges of illegally selling state gifts on Thursday, local broadcaster *Geo* reported.

The indictment was the latest in dozens of cases against the 72-year-old former cricket star, who has been in jail since late last year. Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi have already been granted bail in the case.

These charges revolve around allegations that Khan and his wife illegally procured and then sold gifts worth more than 140 million rupees.

LULA RECOVERING
FROM SECOND
SURGERY: DOCTOR

Sao Paulo, Dec. 12: Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva underwent a second procedure on Thursday morning following his emergency brain surgery earlier this week, his doctor said, adding the operation was successful.

“The president is awake and speaking,” Roberto Kalil Filho told reporters after the surgery, which lasted about an hour.

Doctors at Sao Paulo’s Sirio-Libanês Hospital had already operated on the leftist leader for about two hours on Tuesday to drain bleeding between his brain and meningeal membrane.

DAY CARE FREE IN
JAPAN TO BOOST
BIRTH RATE

Tokyo, Dec. 12: Tokyo plans to make day care free for all pre-school children starting in September, the city governor has announced as part of efforts to boost Japan’s low birth rate.

The move aims to reduce the financial burden on families by expanding a policy of free day care for second-born and subsequent children to first-borns as well.

While many developed countries are struggling with low birth rates, the problem is particularly acute in Japan where the population has been declining for years.

Syria govt to suspend
Parl for three months

Kurdish administration to adopt Syria’s independence flag

Damascus, Qamishli, Rome, Dec. 12: Syria’s new government spokesman told *AFP* on Thursday the country’s Constitution and Parliament would be suspended for the duration of the three-month transition period following president Bashar al-Assad’s ouster.

The semi-autonomous Kurdish administration that holds swathes of Syria’s northeast said on Thursday it will adopt the three-starred independence flag used by the opposition, after rebels toppled president Assad.

The Kurdish authority said it has “decided to raise the Syrian (independence) flag on all councils, institutions, administrations and facilities affiliated with the Autonomous Administration”.

Leaders of the Group of Seven (G7) powers said on Thursday they were ready to support the transition to an “inclusive and non-sectarian” government in Syria after Assad’s rule.

They called for the protection of human rights, including those of women and minorities, while emphasising “the importance of holding the Assad regime accountable for its crimes”.

“A judicial and human rights committee will be established to examine the Constitution and then introduce amendments,” Obaida Arnaout told *AFP*.

The current Constitution dates back to 2012 and does not specify Islam as the state religion.

Rebels led by the Islamist militant group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham seized the capital Damascus on Sunday, sending Assad fleeing into exile.

On Tuesday, they named



Syrians wait to cross into Syria from Turkey at the Oncupinar border gate, near the town of Kilis, in southern Turkey, on Thursday.

Mohammed al-Bashir, who headed the rebels’ self-proclaimed “Salvation Government” in their northwestern bastion of Idlib, as the country’s transitional Prime Minister until March 1.

Arnaout said a meeting would be held on Tuesday “between Salvation Government ministers and the former ministers” of Assad’s administration to carry out the transfer of power. “This transitional period will last three months,” he added in an interview with *AFP*. “Our priority is to preserve and protect institutions.”

Speaking at the state television headquarters, now seized by the new rebel authorities,

Arnaout pledged that they would institute “the rule of law”. “All those who committed crimes against the Syrian people will be judged.” — *AFP*

SYRIAN WHOSE MERKEL SELFIE WENT
VIRAL WANTS TO STAY IN GERMANY

Berlin, Dec. 12: Almost a decade ago, a Syrian refugee’s selfie with German Chancellor Angela Merkel went viral. Today, Anas Modamani has a job, a German passport and a fiancée and no plans to return home.

While right-wing politicians in Europe have been quick to demand that Syrians “go home” after the fall of president Bashar al-Assad, Modamani’s story typifies how many have put down roots in their host countries.

“I am a Berliner, I have my life here,” said the 27-year-old cameraman who arrived in the German capital in 2015 at the age of 18, and is now part of the Syrian refugee community in Europe. — *AFP*

American
man freed

Damascus, Dec. 12: An American who says he crossed into Syria on foot is now free after seven months in detention.

Travis Timmerman told the *Al-Arabiya* TV network in an interview on Thursday that he had been treated well. He said he had crossed into Syria from Lebanon on a Christian pilgrimage.

He appeared in videos circulating online earlier in the day in which rebels said they had located him and were keeping him safe. — *AP*

EU LETS BULGARIA,
ROMANIA ENTER
SCHENGEN AREA

Sofia, Dec. 12: EU states on Thursday cleared Bulgaria and Romania to become full members of the borderless Schengen zone from the start of next year, officials said, following a 13-year wait for the two eastern European nations.

“It is a historic moment to finally welcome Bulgaria and Romania,” said interior minister Sandor Pinter of Hungary, whose country holds the EU’s rotating presidency. The two countries, both members of the European Union since 2007, were partially integrated into the free movement zone in March, opening up travel by air and sea without border checks.

But Austria held up their full entry over migration concerns, which meant that controls still applied at their land routes. Vienna announced on Monday that it would not use its veto at Thursday’s meeting of EU ministers, paving the way for the two to become full members from January 1, 2025.

Romania and Bulgaria “strongly” welcomed their full entry.

“This is a historic decision, marking the end of the process of accession of the two countries to the EU free movement area, a key objective of both Bulgaria and Romania.” — *AFP*

Immediate ceasefire in
Gaza, demands UNGA

United Nations, Cairo, Dec. 12: The UN General Assembly has overwhelmingly approved resolutions demanding an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and backing the UN agency for Palestinian refugees that Israel has moved to ban. The votes in the 193-nation world body were 158-9, with 13 abstentions to demand a ceasefire now and 159-9 with 11 abstentions in support of the agency known as UNRWA.

Israel killed 13 Palestinians in two airstrikes on Thursday that Gaza medics and Hamas said were part of a force protecting humanitarian aid trucks, but Israel’s military said they were Hamas militants trying to hijack the shipment.

Many of those killed in the attacks on Rafah and Khan Younis in southern Gaza had links to Hamas, medics and Palestinian residents said. The 13 were among 36 Palestinians killed in separate Israeli attacks on Thursday, the medics said.

The votes culminated two days of speeches overwhelmingly calling for an end to the 14-month war between Israel and the militant Hamas group. Israel and the US were in a tiny minority speaking and voting against the resolutions. — *Agencies*



Israeli soldiers with the national flag stand on an armoured vehicle after crossing the security fence near the so-called Alpha Line, in the town of Majdal Shams, on Thursday.

54 scribes killed in
'24: Media group

Paris, Dec. 12: Fifty-four journalists were killed worldwide while carrying out their work or because of their profession in 2024, a third of them by the Israeli army, according to an annual report by Reporters Without Borders published on Thursday.

According to the press freedom NGO, Israeli armed forces were responsible for the deaths of 18 journalists this year — 16 in Gaza and two in Lebanon. “Palestine is the most dangerous country for journalists, recording

a higher death toll than any other country over the past five years,” RSF said in its annual report.

The organisation has filed four complaints with the International Criminal Court for “war crimes committed against journalists by the Israeli army.”

It said that in total “more than 145” journalists had been killed by the Israeli forces in Gaza since the start of the war there in October 2023, with 35 of them working at the time of their deaths, RSF said. — *AFP*

Biden commutes 1,500
sentences, pardons 39

Washington, Dec. 12: President Joe Biden is commuting the sentences of roughly 1,500 people who were released from prison and placed on home confinement during the Coronavirus pandemic and is pardoning 39 Americans convicted of non-violent crimes.

It’s the largest single-day act of clemency in modern history. The commutations announced on Thursday are for people who have served out home confinement sentences for at least one year after they were released.

Prisons were uniquely bad for spreading the virus and some inmates were released in part to stop the spread. At one point, 1 in 5 prisoners had Covid-19, according to a tally kept by *The Associated Press*. Biden said he would be taking more steps in the weeks ahead and would continue to review clemency petitions.

The second largest single-day act of clemency was by Barack Obama, with 330, shortly before leaving office in 2017. “America was built on the promise of possibility and second chances,” Biden said in a statement.

“As President, I have the great privilege of extend-



Joe Biden



Kari Lake

TRUMP TAPS
LAKE TO HEAD
MEDIA OP. VOA

Washington, Dec. 12: US President-elect Donald Trump on Wednesday appointed election denier Kari Lake to be the new director of Voice of America, the state-funded international media organisation.

VOA has reach around the world, with programming in a slew of African, Asian and European languages, including Somali, Dari and French.

It receives US funding but is generally considered a reliable, independent media operation.

However, previous leadership under Trump’s first administration came under fire for politicising the outlet. — *AFP*

FBI director to quit for Patel

Washington, Dec. 12: FBI director Christopher Wray has announced his decision to resign at the end of US President Joe Biden’s term in January, paving the way for President-elect Donald Trump’s nominee Indian-American Kash Patel to take charge of the country’s top investigating agency.

The move has been welcomed by Trump. “After weeks of careful thought,



Christopher Wray (L) and Kash Patel

I have decided the right thing for the bureau is for me to serve until the end of the current administration in January.” — *PTI*

RARE | SIGHTINGS

Local news reports amplify sky-gazing, wild speculation

US mystery drones confound officials

Edgewater, Dec. 12: A rash of unexplained drone sightings in the skies above New Jersey has left locals rattled and sent US officials scrambling for answers. Breathless local news reports have amplified the anxious sky-gazing and wild speculation — interspersing blurry, dark clips from social media with irate locals calling for action.

For weeks now, the distinctive blinking lights and whirling rotors of large unmanned aerial vehicles have been spotted

across the state west of New York. But military brass, elected representatives and investigators have been unable to explain the recurring UFO phenomenon.

Sam Lugo, 23, who works in the Club Studio gym in New Jersey’s Bergen county, one of the corners of the state that has seen several drone sightings, called the reports “crazy”.

“It’s pretty concerning they were sighted... without explanation. It can be alarming,” he said. Officials, including the



governor, have called on people not to be alarmed but have not yet offered an explanation for the aerial activity. “I’ve seen them every night since Thanksgiving, they’re smaller than my Jeep,” wrote X user Gus Seretis.

“They hover just about tree height or a little higher,” he added, describing them as like aircraft too small for a pilot and vowing to “shoot at one if it comes low enough”.

New Jersey congressman Chris Smith wrote to the Pentagon on Tuesday demanding answers.

“There have been numerous instances of unmanned aerial systems flying over New Jersey, including in close proximity to sensitive sites and critical infrastructure, to include military installations located

in my district,” he wrote to defence secretary Lloyd Austin.

Smith said he had been told that more than a dozen drones pursued a Coast Guard lifeboat over the weekend.

The lawmaker then spent “hours” monitoring the night sky with the sheriff of Ocean County, the location of a number of sightings, according to his office. The Pentagon, the nerve centre of the US military, insists the objects are not “US military drones”. — *AFP*

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	81,289.96	-0.29
Nifty 50	24,548.70	-0.38
S&P 500*	6,078.27	-0.10
Dollar (₹)	84.86	-0.02
Pound Sterling (₹)	108.27	-0.25
Euro (₹)	89.20	-0.13
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	77,900▼1,102	-1.39
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	72.53	-1.35
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.736	0.018
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.277	0.006

* As of 8:30 PM IST

L&T's data centre biz onboards major customer

Larsen and Toubro (L&T) said its data centre business L&T-Cloudfiniti has on boarded the first major customer at its hyperscale data centre in Sriperumbudur near Chennai. The centre has a built-in capacity of 30 MW, of which 12 MW colocation-ready capacity is live across two floors. The client has rented as much as 6 MW IT load capacity. The tenure of the contract is 10 years.



NLC's new power plant begins commercial ops

State-owned NLC India Ltd (NLCIL) on Thursday said its first supercritical thermal power plant in Uttar Pradesh has begun commercial operation. "The successful commissioning of the first supercritical power plant of NLCIL at Ghatampur marks a historic milestone in our journey towards energy sustainability. We remain steadfast in our resolve to operationalise the remaining units," NLCIL chairman and managing director Prasanna Kumar Motupalli said.

Adani Green Energy's arm sets up solar project

Adani Green Energy on Thursday said its arm has commissioned a 250 MW solar power project at Badi Sid in Jodhpur. Total operational renewable generation capacity has increased to 11,434 MW, a BSE filing said. Adani Green Energy Twenty Five Ltd, a step-down subsidiary of Adani Green Energy has commissioned the solar power project in Jodhpur, according to the exchange filing.

FinX raises \$6 mn seed funding from Elevar

Skilling platform FinX said it has secured \$6 million seed funding from Elevar Equity for product and geographical expansion and diversification into IT skill training, among others. This funding will help in enhancing its technology platform for creating scalable solutions, the company said. FinX works to bridge gaps between formal education and employability in the banking, financial services, and Insurance sectors.

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Lower food prices ease retail inflation to 5.48%

Industry hopeful of revival in consumption growth in near future

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

With the significant easing of food prices, especially vegetables, India's retail inflation slowed to 5.48 per cent in November as compared to 6.21 per cent in October. Though it breached the central bank's 6 per cent upper tolerance band, this is a sharp drop from the previous month, showing a positive sign of the economy.

With the sign of easing food prices, industry experts are of the view that 'green shoots' are visible on the consumption front as food inflation has started receding and hopeful for a revival in consumption growth in the near future.

As per the data by National Statistics Office (NSO), the inflation in the food basket reduced to 9.04 per cent in November, while it was 10.87 per cent in October and 8.70 per cent in November 2023. "But the CPI-based headline inflation increased from an average of 3.6 per cent during July-August to 5.5 per cent in September and further to 6.2 per cent in October 2024, the highest in more than a year since September 2023," the NSO data said.

"During the month of November, a significant decline in inflation is observed in vegetables, pulses and products, sugar and confectionery, fruits, eggs, milk and products, spices, transport and communication and personal care and effects subgroups," the NSO data said.

Earlier this month, the RBI kept interest rates

IMPORTS PART OF ECONOMY THAT IS GROWING: OFFICIAL

FC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

The commerce secretary Sunil Barthwal on Thursday said that India should not be overly concerned about imports as long as exports' share continues to grow.

"If the Indian economy is growing at 7 per cent and if the world is growing at 3-3.5 per cent rate of growth then obviously India will be requiring more of consumption, more of imports. The role of imports in exports is also important," he said at a CII event.

Barthwal said that imports of raw materials and intermediate products are essential. "The developed countries are confused about the concept of migration and mobility. If Indians or Indian companies are setting up bases in other countries, then mobility of professionals needs to be ensured," he said.

The secretary called for more mutual recognition agreements or MRAs.



DIGITAL ASSISTANT

California, Dec. 12: Google debuted a new version of its flagship artificial intelligence model that it said is twice as fast as its previous version and will power virtual agents that assist users.

The new model, Gemini 2.0, can generate images and audio across languages, and can assist during Google searches and coding projects, the company said. The new capabilities of Gemini "make it possible to build agents that can think, remember, plan, and even take action

PURCHASING POWER

INFLATION IN FOOD BASKET reduced to 9.04% in November from 10.87% in October.

INDUSTRY SAYS GREEN SHOOTS VISIBLE ON THE CONSUMPTION AS FOOD INFLATION IS RECEDING.

REVIVAL IN CONSUMPTION GROWTH EXPECTED.

PRICES OF VEGETABLES, pulses and products, sugar and confectionery, fruits, eggs, milk and products, spices, transport saw a decline.

POWER GENERATION in October slowed to 2% from a 20.4% a year ago.

WE ARE OPTIMISTIC about the rabi crop, considering the favourable impact of high reservoir storage and the ensuing La Nina conditions on sowing and crop yields, even as the low inventory levels of DAP pose a concern.

— ADITI NAYAR, chief economist, Icra

steadily but reduced the cash reserve ratio for banks to ease monetary conditions and support growth. The RBI also raised the inflation projection for the current fiscal to 4.8 per cent from 4.5 per cent, saying that the lingering food price pressures are likely to keep headline inflation elevated in the Dec. quarter.

Outgoing RBI governor Shaktikanta Das also highlighted challenges confronting the Indian economy, including restoring growth-inflation balance.

"We are optimistic about the rabi crop, considering the favourable impact of high reservoir storage and the ensuing La Nina conditions on sowing and crop yields, even as the low inventory levels of DAP pose a concern," said Aditi Nayar, chief economist, Icra.

Dollar, Fed rate cut may drive gold prices in 2025

SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, DEC. 12

Gold made 40 new record highs y-t-d in 2024 and gold price has increased by more than 28 per cent, outperforming most of the global asset classes, finds World Gold Council. In 2025, the actions of the US Federal Reserve and the direction of the US dollar will continue to be important drivers for gold.

In 2024, gold reached 40 new record highs y-t-d and total gold demand in the

third quarter surpassed \$100 billion for the first time.

By appreciating 28 per cent, gold was the best performer among global asset classes, including US stocks, Emerging Market stocks, US bonds, US currency, commodities and Global Treasuries other than US.

"As we look into 2025, market consensus suggests that the Fed will deliver 100 bps in cuts by

year end, with inflation softening but still above target. European central banks will also likely cut rates by a similar amount.

The dollar is expected to remain flat or slightly weaken as conditions normalise, while global growth remains positive but continues to grow below trend," said WGC. The actions of the Fed and the direction of the US dollar will continue to be important drivers for gold.

Irdai considering to rework bancassurance biz norms

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, DEC. 12

The insurance regulator is considering bringing in regulations to cap the share of a parent bank in the bancassurance business of its life insurance subsidiary. According to sources, the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (Irdai) wants insurers to diversify their distribution channels and sell their products to customers of multiple banks instead of selling policies to just promoter bank cus-

WIDER REACH

CURRENTLY, SEVERAL insurance companies promoted by banks get 80-90 per cent of their new sales from parent banks.

EFFORT AIMS to cap share of a parent bank in bancassurance business of its life insurance subsidiary.

REGULATOR wants insurers to diversify distribution channels and sell products to customers of multiple banks.

tomers, a source said on Thursday.

Currently, several insurance companies promoted by banks get 80-90 per cent of their new sales from

parent banks.

The regulator may initially release a draft exposure or consultation paper to gather stakeholder feedback before implementing

any final rules.

According to the source, the IRDAI wants to reduce concentration risk due to over reliance on a bank and encourage insurers to

tions. Google said the AI model could better process images and approximate the human ability to reason.

Google debuted a new web feature called "deep research," which it says will enable Gemini users to use AI to dive into topics with detailed reports. The feature, billed as an AI-powered research assistant, will be available to users of Gemini Advanced, Google's paid AI subscription product. Meanwhile, Gemini users will be able to tap

Sectoral funds, ETFs aid NFOs raise ₹1.02 lakh cr

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, DEC. 12

Sectoral or thematic funds, passive funds both based on index and exchange traded funds (ETFs) dominated new fund launches in the mutual fund industry in calendar year 2024 which saw record new fund offerings (NFOs) and collections during the launch period.

The current year has seen 196 NFOs so far till November compared to 168 NFOs in 2023.

Faster approval from market regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India is also helping fund houses in launching NFOs in a shorter time period.

Some NFOs are still getting launched in December month which would easily take the total NFO tally beyond 200 mark with SBI Quant fund, Union Active Momentum Fund, BOI Consumption Fund, Aditya Birla Sun Life

INVESTMENT CHANNELS

CURRENT YEAR HAS SEEN 196 NFOs TILL NOVEMBER COMPARED TO 168 NFOs IN 2023.

Faster approvals from Sebi helping fund houses to launch NFOs faster.

- In 2023, 168 NFOs had collected ₹63,854 crore.
- Sector or thematic funds in the pure equity fund category are seeing numerous launches with big collections from SBI Energy Opportunities Fund (₹6,700 crore) in February, HDFC Manufacturing Fund (₹9,563 crore) in May setting the pace for other fund houses.
- Edelweiss Business Cycle Fund and ICICI Prudential Energy Opportunities Fund (approximately ₹8,500 crore) together collected about ₹9,790 crore in July.

Conglomerate Fund, Mirae Asset New Age Consumption ETF open for subscription now while DSP Business Cycle Fund NFO closed on Dec.11.

Moreover, NFOs saw much higher collections in 2024 during the crucial launch period, reaching ₹1,02,667 crore as on November 30, as per monthly data released by Association of Mutual Funds in India. In 2023, 168 NFOs had collected ₹63,854 crore.

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Steel mfg capacity usage to hit 78%

SANGEETHA G. WITH AGENCY INPUTS CHENNAI, DEC. 12

The capacity utilisation of the domestic steel industry is set to drop to 78 per cent for the first time in four years. In order to check unprecedented imports, the government is considering imposing a 25 per cent duty on steel imports.

Cheaper imports from China and countries under Free Trade Agreement along with ongoing capacity addition can lead to capacity utilisation of domestic steel mills dropping from 85 per cent in FY2024 to an estimated 78 per cent in the current fiscal, the lowest we have seen in the last four years.

The domestic steel industry witnessed an all-time high capacity addition of 18.2 million tonnes per annum last fiscal, and in the current year, another 15.3 mtpa of new capacity is lined up for commissioning. Further, in the next seven years, domestic mills are targeting to increase the domestic installed capacity by 50 per cent with addition of 90-95 mtpa. This would entail a large investment pipeline of \$45-50 billion.

However, currently steel mills are struggling to protect their market share from cheaper imports as they are expected to see a slower growth of 5 per cent in domestic finished steel production in the current fiscal.

India's finished steel imports during April-October surged to a seven-year high at 5.7 million metric tons. While China accounted for 30 per cent of the steel imports to India in 7M FY2025, 59 per cent of imports were from FTA countries like Japan, South Korea and Vietnam.

Meanwhile, the government is considering a proposal to impose safeguard duty on steel imports.

On Dec.2, the steel ministry in a meeting with the commerce dept had proposed for a 25 per cent safeguard duty on certain steel products imported into the country. PTI reported. A final call on the duty can be taken by the finance ministry on recommendations of the ministry of commerce.



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CENTRE BRINGS GREEN STEEL EMISSION NORMS

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

In a move to cut carbon emissions below the level of 2.2 tonnes per tonne of finished products in the steel sector, the government on Thursday came out with the new definition of green steel and asked the industry to take measures in this regard. The new framework will guide in efforts to decarbonise steel production and encourage green practices across the value chain.

"The steel industry accounts for 7 per cent of global carbon dioxide emissions and India, the second largest producer of steel, has both the responsibility and the opportunity to lead the charge in reducing emissions while maintaining growth," said steel minister HD Kumaraswamy.

"The new framework will guide efforts to decarbonise steel production," he said.

"Anything below 2.2 (CO2 emission) would be considered to be green steel," said steel secretary Sandeep Poundrik.

GOVT WORKING ON MECHANISM TO ASSESS AI SAFETY

New Delhi, Dec. 12: The IT ministry is working on a mechanism to assess safety and trust elements in artificial intelligence (AI) solutions but does not want to start with a regulation as it may hurt innovation in the AI space, said ministry of electronics and IT secretary S Krishnan on Thursday.

Speaking at CII's global economic policy forum, he said the government has broadly addressed key regulations barring a couple of the issues like copyright and existential crisis.

The government has tried to make a subtle distinction between responsible AI and safe and trusted AI.

There is a need for regulation around misrepresentation and deepfakes in the AI domain and there are enough laws to act on misrepresentation.

"Our concerns with regard to job loss in India, particularly with generative AI, are not as intense as in the West, where office jobs and white collar jobs are a lot more than what they are here," Krishnan said. — PTI



SHORT TAKES

Shah meets 2032 Olympics officials

Brisbane: Jay Shah, who took charge as ICC chairman earlier this month, on Thursday met with top officials of the 2032 Brisbane Olympics organising committee to discuss the sport's potential inclusion in the Summer Games. Cricket will make a return to the Olympics after 128 years when it is played in the 2028 Los Angeles Games. The sport is not yet confirmed for the 2032 edition in Brisbane.

"Very exciting time ahead for Cricket's involvement in the Olympics movement - a meeting with the @Brisbane_2032 organizing committee in Brisbane, Australia today," Shah posted on X. The meeting was attended by Brisbane 2032 organising committee chief Cindy Hook and Cricket Australia CEO Nick Hockley. Shah is expected to watch the action of the third Test between India and Australia. Among Shah's immediate priorities is to find a solution to the hosting of Champions Trophy in February-March. A hybrid model has been agreed by all stakeholders but no announcement has been made yet, fuelling speculations over the future of the event. — PTI

Resilient Baroda ready for Mumbai

Bengaluru: Baroda walked through a wall of fire in the group stage to qualify for the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy knockouts, and that grit will be their primary weapon against an explosive Mumbai in their semifinal contest here on Friday. Baroda (NRR: 2.35), Saurashtra (2.26) and Gujarat (1.93) had 24 points each in Group 'B' before a better Net Run Rate propelled the top two teams into the quarterfinals. In a way, it was fate's way of rewarding Baroda's sheer will to negate clutch situations and ability to find multiple heroes in, arguably, the toughest group in this edition of the SMAT. They have high-velocity T20 performers in Hardik and Krunal Pandya, still none of the Baroda players feature in the top-10 list in batting or bowling. Pacer Atit Sheth has taken 13 wickets but he is on 11th slot while newcomer Bhanu Pania is Baroda's top run-getter with 271 runs but he is in 18th place on the batsmen's list. The quarterfinal win over Bengal validated their collective fire power. — PTI

Tendulkars open sports facility

Mumbai: The Sachin Tendulkar Foundation (STF), in collaboration with its partner Mann Deshi Champions, inaugurated a modern sporting facility in Satara, Maharashtra, this week. The event marked Sara Tendulkar's first visit as a director of STF, showcasing her commitment to taking the foundation's mission forward. The new facility, inaugurated by Tendulkar, his wife Anjali and daughter Sara, features world-class amenities including courts for basketball and badminton, indoor wrestling and boxing areas, classrooms, administration offices, and hostels for 150 athletes. — PTI

Treesa & Gayatri win 2nd match

Hangzhou: The Indian women's doubles pair of Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand defeated the Malaysian combination of Pearly Tan and Thinaah Muralitharan in straight games in their second Group 'A' tie to keep alive their semifinal hopes at the BWF World Tour Finals here on Thursday. Treesa and Gayatri, the only Indians to have qualified for the season-ending tournament, beat their opponents 21-19, 21-19 in just 46 minutes to stay aloft in the competition. Earlier on Wednesday, the Indians had lost to world No.1 Liu Sheng Shu and Tan Ning of China in their opening group match. Treesa and Gayatri had lost 20-22, 22-20, 21-14 to Sheng and Tan, who had claimed a silver medal at the Paris Olympics. The Indians are currently placed second behind the Chinese and will need to win against the Japanese pairing of Nami Matsuyama and Chiharu Shida on Friday to book their semifinal berth. — PTI

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GUKESH IS KING

Teen Indian GM becomes youngest world chess champion

Singapore, Dec. 12: Indian Grandmaster D. Gukesh on Thursday became the youngest world chess champion at 18 years after beating title-holder Ding Liren in the last game of a nerve-wracking showdown to herald a new era of dominance for the country's chess players. Taking forward the incredible legacy of the great Viswanathan Anand, Gukesh became only the second Indian to clinch the coveted prize after the iconic player, who owned the crown five times in his career.

After settling into "semi-retirement", the 55-year-old Anand, incidentally, played a pivotal role in shaping Gukesh at his chess academy in Chennai. Gukesh secured the requisite 7.5 points as against 6.5 of his Chinese rival after winning the 14th and last classical time control game of the match that seemed headed for a draw for most part. As winner, he will walk away with a whopping \$1.3 million (approx ₹11.03 crore) from the 2.5 million prize purse.

The reticent teenager grinned widely and raised his arms in celebration after the victory, a stark contrast from the poker face he usually sports while playing.

Even on Thursday, when the analysts had proclaimed that the match, in all likelihood, would go into a tie-breaker, Gukesh's face hardly gave anything away as he gained the upper-hand.

It was a momentary lapse of concentration by Liren in what seemed a drawn endgame and as it happened, the entire chess world was left in a state of shock.

The players were just left with a rook and a bishop and Gukesh had two pawns against one trying to make a foray without much success.

However, the ability to keep pushing for more gave Gukesh a distinct advantage over the Chinese and the latter simply collapsed to give the title to Gukesh.

Before Gukesh's feat on Thursday, the legendary Garry Kasparov of Russia was the youngest world champion when he won the title at the age of 22, dethroning Anatoly Karpov in 1985.

Gukesh had entered the match as the youngest ever challenger to the world crown after winning the Candidates tournament earlier this year. — PTI



Indian Grand Master D. Gukesh (right) reacts after beating title-holder China's Ding Liren in the 14th and last game of the World Chess Championship in Singapore on Thursday.

— PTI

I am living my dream: Gukesh

Singapore, Dec. 12: "I am just living my dream," said newly-crowned world chess champion D. Gukesh on Thursday after realising the goal he conceived as a seven-year-old, his unassuming persona shining through even after a history-scripting performance that made him the youngest ever to achieve the triumph.

"I was dreaming this moment for last 10 years. Happy I realised this dream," Gukesh said after his incredible victory.

"I got a bit emotional because I was not expecting to win. But then I got a chance to press on."

"I've been dreaming about this and living this moment since I was 6 or 7. Every chess player wants to live this moment. I'm living my dream. I'd like to thank God from candidates till the championship."

His dream to be among the best in the world ignited when he watched the world championship match between his idol Viswanathan Anand and another chess great Magnus Carlsen of Norway in 2013 in Chennai.

"In 2013 when I saw Magnus Carlsen and Vishy Sir in the World Championship match, I thought it will be super cool to be inside the Glass room one day, to actually be there and sit there and see the Indian flag next to me would probably be the best moment."

"When Magnus won, I thought I really want to be the one to bring back the title to India. I had said in 2017 that I wanted to be the youngest world champion in history," he said.

Gukesh became only the second Indian to clinch the title after five-time champion Anand, who played a pivotal role in shaping Gukesh's career at his chess academy in Chennai.

Gukesh revealed that it was Anand who calmed him down after his loss to Liren in the opening game.

"I came here and suddenly I lost the first game itself. Luckily while going back, I met Vishy Sir (Anand) in the lift and he said 'I had only 11 games left you have 13 more, you will get your chances'," said Gukesh.

Anand was citing his 2006 victory over Veselin Topalov in a World Championship that he had eventually won after losing the first game. Interestingly enough, Anand had won that match in the last Classical (12th) game and also with black pieces.

"Vishy Sir was never officially part of the team, but we all know that he was supporting me. He attended one of the training camps, but also helped remotely for a few sessions."

Despite the world title, Gukesh sought to keep his feet on the ground, and said Carlsen is currently the best player in the world and he would to play against the Norwegian world number one.

"My goal is to play in the top level for longest time possible. I have just started my career and I want to have a long career and stay on top," Gukesh explained.

"Winning World Chess Championship does not mean I am the best player, obviously that is Magnus Carlsen. I want to reach the level Magnus has achieved. Obviously playing against Magnus in the world championship would be amazing, it would be the toughest challenge there is in chess. It is up to Magnus, but I would love to test myself against the best player in the world," he said. — PTI



A teary-eyed D. Gukesh celebrates his win. — PTI

Kohli addresses team in Brisbane

Brisbane, Dec. 12: He used to be the cynosure of all eyes at training sessions during his captaincy days and Virat Kohli was once again the centre of attention as he addressed his teammates here on Thursday.

After the demoralising 10-wicket defeat in the Adelaide day/night game, the visitors needed a bit of inspiration going into the crucial third Test of the series, and the youngsters in the side couldn't have got a better mentor than 'King' Kohli himself to guide them with his words of wisdom.

The team huddles before the start of the training session has been a constant feature for years now and former captain Virat Kohli used to do a lot of talking during his days in charge.

● The team huddles before the start of the training session have been a constant feature for years now and former captain Virat Kohli used to do a lot of talking during his days in charge.

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He did take a back seat once he left captaincy but with skipper Rohit also under immense pressure after four straight defeats, the senior-most player (in terms of Test debut) had to take the initiative ahead of the match starting here on Saturday.

With vice-captain Jasprit Bumrah by his side, Kohli was seen speaking animatedly to

the group and everyone, including Rohit, listened to him with rapt attention.

ROHIT FACES NEW AND SEMI-NEW BALL IN NETS

Unlike before the pink ball Test, Rohit looked in far better shape during his net session at the Gabba but question marks remain over whether he would be back to opening the innings or stay put at No. 6, which isn't his preferred slot.

On the day, while K. L. Rahul and Yashasvi

Jaiswal once again faced the new ball at the nets, Rohit took on a slightly older Kookaburra at the beginning. Having faced that for some time, he did change nets with Rahul and also played a brand new red cherry for a while.

The Gabba pitch has a decent grass cover and has always been one of the most traditional Australian wickets with both seam and bounce being on offer. Rohit's susceptibility has been against the moving deliveries more than bounce, and hence, it would be interesting to see if he takes on the challenge head on. — PTI

Juve deepen City crisis, Barca reach knockouts

Paris, Dec. 12: Manchester City's crisis continued with a 2-0 defeat away to Juventus in the Champions League on Wednesday, while Pep Guardiola's old club Barcelona beat Borussia Dortmund to clinch a spot in the knockout stage of Europe's elite club competition.

Arsenal, AC Milan, Atletico Madrid, Lille, Feyenoord and Stuttgart were also victorious, but City's latest loss in a miserable run will dominate the headlines.

The 2023 European champions succumbed in Turin as Dusan Vlahovic put Juventus ahead early in the second half when goalkeeper Ederson was unable to keep out his header.

Ilkay Gundogan was denied an equaliser by a fine Michele Di Gregorio save, before Weston McKennie made it 2-0 with a fine acrobatic finish in the 75th minute.

The result leaves Juventus on 11 points with two games left, a tally that is expected to be

enough to guarantee them at least a place in the knockout phase play-offs.

City, meanwhile, have now won just once in 10 in all competitions, with seven defeats in that time.

With just eight points, they currently sit 22nd in the standings, in which the top 24 advance to the knockouts. Their next game will be crucial, as they travel to a Paris Saint-Germain.

Barcelona are second in the standings with 15 points, behind only Liverpool. — AFP



Historic and exemplary! Congratulations to Gukesh D on his remarkable accomplishment. This is the result of his unparalleled talent, hard work and unwavering determination. His triumph has not only etched his name in the annals of chess history but has also inspired millions of young minds to dream big and pursue excellence. My best wishes for his future endeavours

— Narendra Modi Prime Minister

Heartiest congratulations to Gukesh for becoming the youngest player to win the World Chess Championship. He has done India immensely proud. His victory stamps the authority of India as a chess powerhouse. Well done Gukesh! On behalf of every Indian, I wish you sustained glory in the future.

— Droupadi Murmu President

In a game of 64 squares, you've opened a world of endless possibilities. Congratulations, @DGukesh, on becoming the 18th World Champion at just 18! Following in Vishy's footsteps, you're now guiding the next wave of Indian chess prodigies.

— Sachin Tendulkar Cricket legend

It's a great feat. To become the world champion at the age of 18 is no small feat. It was a great sight to see him celebrating after the win. Hopefully, this will inspire a lot of aspiring players.

— Viswanathan Anand Chess legend

Extending my warm wishes to @DGukesh for clinching the prestigious World Chess Championship title and becoming the youngest World Champion in the history of #Chess. Your hard work & dedication has made the entire nation proud!

— Mansukh Mandaviya Sports Minister

Congratulations, Gukesh! The best in the world and the youngest to ever do it. India is proud.

— Neeraj Chopra Champion javelin thrower

Congratulations, Gukesh, on becoming the World Chess Champion! Your brilliance, determination, and grace under pressure have made the entire nation proud. You've not just won a title but inspired a generation to dream big. Wishing you even greater success ahead!

— Abhinav Bindra Olympic gold medalist shooter

Woww, you beauty Gukesh. At just 18, Gukesh Dommaraju becomes the youngest World Chess Champion ever. A great moment for us all and you are an inspiration, Gukesh.

— Virender Sehwag Former star cricketer