

**NEW DELHI SUNDAY 15 DECEMBER 2024**



DELHI AGE | 11

## Priyanka Chopra receives award from Sarah Jessica Parker at Red Sea festival

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restore his powers. If he's thrown out of office, a national election to choose his successor must be held within 60 days.

It was the second National Assembly vote on Mr Yoon's impeachment after ruling party lawmakers boycotted the first floor vote last Saturday. Some People Power Party lawmakers had since said they would vote for Mr Yoon's impeachment as public protests intensified and his approval rating plummeted.

Mr Yoon issued a statement saying he would "never give up" and calling for officials to maintain stability in government functions during what he described as a "temporary" pause of his presidency.

"I will carry with me all the criticisms, encouragement and support directed toward me, and I will continue to do my utmost for the country until the last moment," Mr Yoon said.

—AP

More on Page 6



## SHORT TAKES

## 19 booked for sand mining in Yamuna

**Noida:** A case was registered against 19 people, suspected to be part of an organised gang, for illegal sand mining in the Yamuna River in Uttar Pradesh's Gautam Buddha Nagar district, the police said on Saturday. According to a police spokesperson, the case was registered at the Ecotech-First police station here on Friday under the Gangster Act against miscreants involved in illegal sand mining on the banks of the Yamuna River. These individuals form an organised gang and mine sand from the Yamuna for their economic and material benefits, he said. The spokesperson also mentioned that the gang had damaged the embankment of the Yamuna river and public property is being affected by their criminal activities. An investigation into the matter is underway, he added. — PTI

## BJP writes to Mann on Mahila yojana

**New Delhi:** The Delhi BJP on Saturday wrote a letter to Punjab chief minister Bhagwant Mann enquiring about the update on the Mahila Samman Yojana, announced by the AAP during the state polls in 2022. The Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva asked why the AAP government had delayed implementing the scheme in Punjab. Mr Sachdeva said, "Before misleading Delhi women with the announcement of monthly allowances, the AAP should remember their Punjab government hasn't even started it even after almost three years.". The BJP leader said, the AAP is nothing but a party of deception. In his letter, Mr Sachdeva expressed hope that the Punjab government has already begun distributing monthly allowances to women and has requested the CM to provide clear answers.

## Noida man duped of ₹56L in cyber fraud

**Noida:** Cyber fraudsters allegedly duped a man of ₹56.88 lakh in Uttar Pradesh's Gautam Buddha Nagar district on the pretext of helping him earn huge profits by investing in the stock market, the police said on Saturday. The victim, Anil Raina, a railway officer, lodged an FIR at the district's cyber crime police station on Friday, said inspector-in-charge Vijay Kumar Gautam. In his complaint, Mr Raina said he received a message tempting him with the opportunity to earn huge profits by investing in the stock market. According to the complaint, the accused showed Mr Raina significant profits from the alleged investment in the initial phase and persuaded him to transfer ₹56.88 lakh in several installments, Gautam said. — PTI

## RELIEF TO FIRM OWNERS: MCD EASES LICENSING

**New Delhi:** The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has rationalised its floor-wise factory licensing policy, offering relief to the factory owners, an official statement said on Saturday. The move is a part of two major reforms approved by MCD commissioner Ashwani Kumar to simplify the factory licensing ecosystem and promote ease of doing business. Under the new policy, the factory owners operating on multiple floors of a building will now require a single factory license if the manufacturing process is integral to one factory and linked to a single GST number. However, separate licenses will be needed if different GST numbers or owners are associated with each floor. This rationalisation ensures compliance with building regulations, fire safety norms and environmental guidelines, the statement said. Additionally, the MCD has addressed a long-standing demand by allowing factory licenses to be issued to tenants and occupiers of industrial plots under the relocation scheme in areas like Narela, Bawana and Badli. Earlier, such licenses were denied due to lease restrictions. The new policy mandates adherence to environmental and safety norms and submission of an affidavit confirming that the old industrial site is no longer operational.

■ 'It's so shameful that under your watch, our capital, is being called crime capital'

## Kejriwal slams Shah over rising crime

AVINASH PRABHAKAR  
JHA  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 14

Stepping up his attack on the BJP-led Central government over the "deteriorating" law and order situation in the national capital, AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday wrote to Union home minister Amit Shah seeking a meeting to discuss the rising concerns in the city.

In his letter to Mr Shah, the former chief minister wrote, "Delhi's law and order is under the Central government but Delhi is now known as the capital of crime."

He cited the recent bomb threats to numerous schools as well as the IGI airport in his letter to the Union minister.

The letter comes ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls scheduled to be held in February 2025.

Raising concerns about public safety, Mr Kejriwal said, "In the past six months, there have been over 300 bomb threat calls



Delhi CM and AAP leader Atishi during 'Rewri Pe Charcha' in New Delhi on Saturday.

— PTI

at Delhi's schools and colleges and over 100 at hospitals, airports, and malls. Why are these fake threat callers not being apprehended? Can you imagine what a child and their parents go through when schools are evacuated due to bomb threats and children are sent home in panic? Today, every parent and child in Delhi lives under the shadow of fear."

He claimed that crimes against women are rising, extortion gangs are active everywhere, drug mafia is spreading across the city, and people are harassed

by mobile phone and chain snatching incidents.

Mr Kejriwal claimed that among the 19 metro cities, Delhi is the number one in terms of crimes against women and murders.

Drug-related crimes registered a 350 per cent rise since 2019, an average of three women are raped every day, and businesspersons regularly receive extortion calls, Mr Kejriwal claimed.

"These statistics are evidence of the dilapidated law and order situation," he said.

Underlining that he was going among the people and found "deep concern" among them towards law and order, Mr Kejriwal said, "Now the biggest question of the people is if they don't deserve a better law and order condition in the national capital?"

Seeking time to discuss the issues with the Union home minister, he said the situation is very poor and law and order must be brought back on track by rising above politics.

## 'Delhiites have faith in Kejriwal, they don't need anyone else'

**Katra (J&K), Dec. 14:** Senior AAP leader Manish Sisodia on Saturday expressed confidence of former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal returning to power in the national capital after the Assembly elections, saying "the people of Delhi have faith in Kejriwal and they do not need anyone else". Talking to media on his return from the Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine, the former deputy chief minister of Delhi slammed the BJP over Delhi's "deteriorating law and order situation".

"We have fought all the elections without any alliance with the Congress, whether it was in 2013, 2015 or 2019 and we will fight the upcoming (Assembly) election alone as well," Mr Sisodia, who had reached the shrine atop Trikuta hills in Reasi district on Friday evening, said.

He said it is the people of Delhi who make the AAP leaders fight the elections. "Kejriwal's work on electricity, water, education and health fronts is well known and so are the schemes for women empowerment. He had promised ₹1,000 for women but our government is paying them ₹2,100. The people of Delhi have faith in Kejriwal and they do not need anyone else."

The AAP leader said every individual wants a government which would take care of their children's education, ensure good hospitals, jobs and security.



Manish Sisodia



Visitors at the India Gate on a sunny day in New Delhi on Saturday.

— G.N. JHA

## Centre scales up curbs, revises plan to check pollution

Hybrid school must on days with severe AQI, diesel buses banned under stage 2

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 14

The Centre's panel on Delhi-NCR air quality CAQM (Commission for Air Quality Management) has issued a revised plan to tackle winter pollution, asking states to implement stricter measures when the air quality deteriorates and making it mandatory for schools to shift to hybrid learning on days with severe air pollution.

Due to unfavourable weather conditions, the poor air quality usually persists for long periods during winter, from November to January.

During this time, Delhi frequently enforces restrictions under the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP), which categorises air quality into four stages — Stage 1 (poor) with AQI between 201 and 300, Stage 2 (very poor) between 301 and 400, Stage 3 (severe) between 401 and 450, and Stage 4 (severe plus) for AQI above 450.

As per the revised plan, inter-state buses from NCR states, except EVs and those running on CNG or BS-VI diesel, will

not be allowed to enter Delhi under Stage 2. This provision earlier came into effect under Stage 3.

Resident welfare associations (RWAs) will also be required to provide electric heaters to staff involved in sanitation, gardening, and other services, in addition to the security staff, to prevent open burning of biomass or solid waste during winters.

Persons with disabilities are exempt from restrictions imposed on BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel cars in Delhi and the districts of Gurgaon, Faridabad, Ghaziabad, and Gautam Buddha Nagar under Stage 3.

The Delhi government has been directed to ban diesel medium goods vehicles (MGVs) with BS-IV or older standards, except those carrying essential goods or services, within the city under Stage 3.

Similarly, non-essential diesel light commercial vehicles (LCVs) of BS-IV or older standards registered outside Delhi will not be allowed to enter the city. Previously, such restrictions applied only to BS-III vehicles.

## New Delhi seat to witness fierce battle

Kejriwal faces off against ex-CMs sons Sahib Singh Verma, Sandeep Dikshit

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 14

The New Delhi Assembly seat is likely to witness a fierce electoral contest with sitting MLA and AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal pitted against the sons of former Delhi chief ministers as the BJP and Congress candidates.

The Congress has already announced its candidate Sandeep Dikshit for the seat. He is the son of three-time former Delhi chief minister Sheila Dikshit.

The BJP on the other hand has asked Parvash Verma, the son of former Delhi chief minister Sahib Singh Verma, to prepare for contesting from the New Delhi constituency.

The New Delhi seat before delimitation in 2008 was known as Gole Market Assembly. Sheila Dikshit had won the seat for three consecutive terms between 1998 and 2013. In 2013, Mr Kejriwal defeated her and since then he has also held the seat for three terms.

Though Mr Verma had contested and won the Mehrauli seat during the 2013 Assembly polls, Mr Dikshit will contest the state polls for the first time.

Mr Verma, who had served twice as an MP from west Delhi, has been asked by the BJP to start preparing for the seat. However, the list of BJP candidates is yet to come out.

Earlier on Friday, Mr



Arvind Kejriwal

Kejriwal rejected the rumours that he was going to shift from the New Delhi seat to some other constituency in the upcoming Assembly elections which are due in February next year.

"There will be no change. I will contest from the New Delhi seat and chief minister Atishi from Kalkaji,"

he said when asked about the possibility of changing seats by them.

Referring to Mr Dikshit and Mr Verma, the AAP supremo had said they are the sons of former chief ministers and claimed himself to be an "aam aadmi."

The former Delhi chief minister asserted that the contest in the New Delhi constituency will be a battle between the "CM sons and the common man."

The AAP supremo shot to fame in the political arena of the country by defeating then chief minister Sheila Dikshit from the New Delhi constituency in the 2013 Assembly polls by a margin of over 25,000 votes.

## Hoax threats to city schools continue, at least 6 get mail

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 14

At least six Delhi schools received a bomb threat on Saturday, officials said, marking the third instance of threat emails being sent to schools in the national capital this week. "We received a call about a bomb threat at Delhi Public School, RK Puram, at 6:09 am," a Delhi fire services official said.

The fire department, local police, dog squads and bomb detection teams reached the school and launched a search operation, the official said.

Five more schools, including Ryan International School in Vasant Kunj and Gyan Bharati School in Saket, received the same email from the same sender, he further said.

A police official said

## Student held for sending bomb threat to school, released later

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 14

A 12-year-old student was held for sending a bomb threat e-mail to his school in south Delhi's Vasant Vihar area, the police sources said on Saturday. The school was among the 30 that received bomb threats over email on Friday, the source said, adding that the boy was traced and detained shortly afterwards.

nothing suspicious was found after search and inspection in any of the schools.

The mails were sent from the "childrenofallah@outlook.com" email id at 1:47 am.

wards.

He was given counselling while his parents received a warning. Later, he was allowed to go, the source said.

The boy told police that he sent the mail after seeing media reports about several schools in Delhi getting bomb threats. He believed that he would not get caught as none of the accused in the earlier cases had been caught yet, the source said.

On Friday, about 30 schools received bomb threats over email, triggering a multi-agency search of their premises. Prior to that, at least 44 schools received similar emails on Monday.

## Vama art exhibition showcasing women artists starts in Delhi

**New Delhi, Dec. 14:** The Delhi government on Saturday inaugurated an eight-day art exhibition titled 'Vama' showcasing women artists at Shridharani Gallery, Triveni Kala Sangam. The exhibition organised by Sahitya Kala Parishad of Art and Cultural Department started on December 14 till 21 features the works of 20 eminent women artists from Delhi, aiming to celebrate and empower their artistic brilliance, according to a statement.

Minister of art, culture and language Saurabh Bharadwaj said, "Delhi has always been a hub of artistic expression and this initiative is a testament to our commitment to promoting and celebrating the immense talent of women artists."

"Vama is not just an exhibition but a platform for recognising

and empowering women, who enrich our cultural heritage through their creativity," he added.

The exhibition offers a rich variety of art forms, showcasing unique perspectives and mediums.

The highlights include Nilanjana Nandy's 'this side-that side', a diptych exploring themes of alienation and division, and Angelica Basak's breathe series, ceramic sculptures symbolising balance between chaos and tranquility, it stated.

Rashmi Khurana presents mixed-media works combining paper mache and acrylic, while Shampa Sircar's Mayura Series created acrylic on canvas, celebrates life's interconnectedness through symbolic imagery of peacocks and lotuses.

— PTI

## Hashim Baba gang member dies in firing with cops in UP

**Meerut/New Delhi, Dec 14:** A criminal wanted in connection with several cases in Uttar Pradesh and Delhi was killed in an encounter with police in Uttar Pradesh's Meerut district during the early hours of Saturday, officials said. Anil alias Sonu Matka (39) — a known associate of the Hashim Baba gang in Delhi — had been wanted in multiple cases, including the killings of a man and his nephew in the national capital's Farsh Bazar area on Diwali (October 31).

"The encounter took place in the jurisdiction of TP Nagar police station. The joint operation was conducted by the special task force (STF) of the Uttar Pradesh police and the Delhi police's special cell," said additional director general of police (STF) Amitabh Yash.

— PTI

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SHORT TAKES

### Navy Chief embarks on Indonesia visit

**New Delhi, Dec. 14:** Navy Chief Admiral Dinesh K. Tripathi will begin a four-day visit to Indonesia from Sunday to consolidate a comprehensive strategic partnership, especially in the maritime domain, between the two countries. Admiral Tripathi is scheduled to hold talks with Indonesia's top defence brass, including defence minister Lt. Gen. Sjafrie Sjamsoeuddin (ret'd), commander of Indonesian armed forces Gen. Agus Subiyanto and Navy Chief Admiral Muhammad Ali, officials said."The discussions are expected to cover a broad spectrum of defence cooperation areas, particularly maritime security, joint training initiatives, and exploring avenues for further strengthening the operational collaboration between the two navies," the Navy said. The visit is part of ongoing efforts to further consolidate bilateral defence relations. — PTI

### Haven't resign as Cong chief: Patole

**Nagpur, Dec. 14:** Maharashtra Congress chief Nana Patole on Saturday said he had not tendered resignation from his party post. Party sources had claimed on Friday that following the rout faced by the Congress in the Assembly elections, Mr Patole had emailed a letter to party president Mallikarjun Kharge and expressed the desire to be relieved of his current responsibility."I have not tendered any resignation...rumours are being spread," he told reporters here."Actually, the tenure of MPCC (Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee) chief is of three years, and I have completed four years. I have earlier also said that I fulfilled my responsibilities properly, and it is an internal matter, not to be disclosed. The party will decide on it," Mr Patole said. — PTI

### CBI grills driver in Odisha bribery case

**Bhubaneswar:** Officials of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Saturday questioned Nursingha Satapathy, the driver of senior Odisha bureaucrat Bishnupada Sethi, in connection with the ₹10 lakh bribery money seizure case. The interrogation took place at the CBI office in Bhubaneswar. After emerging from the questioning session, Nursingha revealed that the officials primarily focused on the activities and whereabouts of Bishnupada Sethi. "They asked me about where Bishnupada Sethi goes after his office hours and with whom he interacts. They also asked about his location on December 7," he said.

## SLAPPING OF A BPSC ASPIRANT WRONG: CHIRAG

**Patna, Dec. 14:** Union minister Chirag Paswan, whose party LJP (Ram Vilas) is an alliance partner of the NDA at the Centre, on Saturday condemned the slapping of a BPSC aspirant by the Patna district magistrate during a protest over the alleged leak of the examination's question paper, stating that the act was "not justified at all". Patna DM Chandrashekhar Singh was caught on camera slapping a BPSC aspirant who was among a group of students protesting alleged question paper leak at a centre in Patna on Friday. "It was wrong... indulgence of the Patna DM in such an act of violence at the protest site, where a student was slapped, was not justified at all. I condemn such an act. The matter must be investigated thoroughly. If students have any doubt (about the paper leak)... even one per cent, their doubts must be cleared," Mr Paswan, the chief of Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas), told reporters in Aurangabad. "Our party condemns such incidents... we will not allow anybody to play with the future of students and youth," he added. Videos showed Mr Singh, having an argument with one of the students, gesturing to him to leave and then and slapping him. — PTI

# '11 resolutions hollow, Modi's speech boring'

Zero tolerance for corruption fake as no word on Adani: Cong

**New Delhi, Dec. 14:** The Congress on Saturday termed as "hollow" Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 11 resolutions articulated in his speech in the Lok Sabha and said if the BJP has zero tolerance on corruption then why doesn't it discuss the Adani issue. The Opposition party also questioned why PM Modi, Union home minister Amit Shah and defence minister Rajnath Singh were not present in the House when Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi spoke while participating in a two-day debate on the "Glorious Journey of 75 Years of the Constitution of India".

Mr Modi on Saturday said that the Congress, having "tasted blood", repeatedly wounded the Constitution while his government's policies and decisions, since it took office in 2014, have been aimed at boosting India's strength and unity in line with the vision of the Constitution.

Asked about the PM's remarks, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra likened his over 110-minutes speech in the Lok Sabha to a "double period

## 'Garibi hatao' biggest jumla in history of India, PM says in LS

**New Delhi, Dec. 14:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said the biggest "jumla" in the history of India was "garibi hatao" — a slogan given by former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

Replying to a two-day debate in Lok Sabha on the 75th anniversary of the Constitution, the the PM said, "Their most

of mathematics" from school and said it "bored us".

She slammed PM Modi's 11 resolutions as "hollow" and said if there is zero tolerance towards corruption then why doesn't the BJP agree to a discussion on the Adani issue.

"PM has not spoken one thing which is new, he has bored us. It took me decades back, I felt like I am sitting in that double period of Mathematics," she said.

"(JP) Nadda ji was also rubbing hands but as soon as Modi ji looked at him, he started acting as if he

favourite word, without which they can't live, is 'jumla'," Mr Modi said.

Congress and other opposition parties have attacked the BJP by deriding the promises made by the PM as "jumla" on several occasions.

Jumla is a Hindustani term that refers to a rhetorical statement devoid of sincerity. — PTI

is listening attentively. Amit Shah also had his hand on head, (Piyush) Goyal ji was going off to sleep. It was a new experience for me. I had thought that the PM will say something new, something nice," she said.

Congress general secretary in-charge organisation K.C. Venugopal said, "On a debate about India's Constitution, the PM once again decided to bring out his tired old speech about the Congress instead. While the people were expecting an answer from him on the injustice and inequality. — PTI

### ■ Bills likely to be sent to Parl panel for study, suggestions

## LS to take up 1 nation, 1 poll tomorrow

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 14

Moving swiftly on the "one nation, one election" law, the Union government has listed two bills related to it for introduction in Lok Sabha on Monday. The bills — the Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill — have been listed in the name of Union law minister Arjun Ram Meghwal.

The bills are expected to be sent to a parliamentary committee to study the proposed legislations and give suggestions.

On Thursday, the

Cabinet approved the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024, and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment Bill), 2024, and circulated it to MPs on Friday evening.

The Cabinet, however, put on hold, as of now, plans of holding simultaneous elections in municipality and panchayats along with the national and state elections in a phased manner.

The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024 aims to amend the Constitution to pave way for one nation one election

■ **ON THURSDAY**, the Cabinet approved the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024, and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment Bill), 2024 and circulated it to MPs

and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024 aims to amend the Government of Union Territories Act, 1963, the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991 and the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019 to align with the proposed law.

## Sena-UBT neta kidnapped, released later

**Mumbai, Dec. 14:** A Shiv Sena (UBT) leader from Nanded was allegedly kidnapped by eight to nine persons and then released some time later, prompting police to register an FIR and begin probe, an official said on Saturday.

Nanded Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Gaurav Kotgire was abducted from Bafna area, some 670 kilometres from here, on Friday night, the official said.

"He was bundled into an SUV when he was working in his garage and taken to an unidentified location. He was released a few hours later, after which he approached police.

Mr Kotgire has claimed the accused had covered their faces and threatened him with a weapon. The accused allegedly told him to not indulge much in politics and property deals as well as talk ill of other leaders," an official informed. — PTI

## PM to address Dadia event in Jaipur on Tues

**Jaipur, Dec. 14:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address a programme at Jaipur's Dadia on December 17. The programme will be attended by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) workers and beneficiaries of various schemes of the Rajasthan government.

"At the programme to be held in Jaipur's Dadia on December 17, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan will create a new history of mutual participation in the presence of Prime Minister Modi," a senior BJP leader and the coordinator of the event, Rajendra Rathore, told reporters here on Saturday.

He said BJP workers from 52,000 booths of Rajasthan and beneficiaries of various schemes of the Centre as well as the state government will participate in the event in large numbers.

According to a BJP spokesperson, Mr Rathore said the BJP government in Rajasthan has given excellent results in a year under CM Bhajanlal Sharma's leadership, due to which qualitative decisions have been taken to change the picture and fate of the desert state. — PTI

### ■ MP cites Indira's praise to Savarkar to counter Rahul

Was ex-PM also against Constitution?: Shiv Sena MP

**New Delhi, Dec. 14:** Shiv Sena MP Shrikant Shinde on Saturday invoked in Lok Sabha a letter written by former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi praising V. D. Savarkar, triggering heated exchanges between the treasury benches and Congress members.

Referring to Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi's critical comments earlier on Savarkar, Mr Shinde questioned the Congress' repeated criticism of the freedom fighter.

Reading out Indira Gandhi's letter, Mr Shinde said, "Veer Savarkar's daring defiance of the British government has its own importance in the annals of our freedom movement. I wish success to the plans to celebrate the birth centenary of this remarkable son of India."

Mr Shinde then posed a pointed question to Mr Gandhi, "Was your grandmother, Indira Gandhi, also against the Constitution in praising Savarkar? We take pride in Savarkar ji and his contribution to the nation."

The remarks led to an uproar with Mr Gandhi standing up, seeking to respond.

However, Mr Shinde refused to yield, prompt-



Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi and others stage a protest during the Winter Session of Parliament in New Delhi on Saturday, demanding a relief package for landslide-hit Wayanad. — PTI

# MP cites Indira's praise to Savarkar to counter Rahul

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Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi speaks in the House during the Winter Session of Parliament in New Delhi on Saturday. — PTI

ing Congress MPs to storm the Well of the House, demanding that Mr Gandhi be allowed to speak.

Krishna Prasad Tenneti, who was in the Chair, said that Mr Gandhi would be allowed to respond only after Mr Shinde concluded his speech.

Mr Shinde also accused the Leader of the Opposition of speaking on everything except constitutional matters.

"Rahul ji has talked about everything except the Constitution. But he forgot that in 1984, the Congress was responsible for non-stop violence against Sikh brothers. In 1964, 1,070 communal riots occurred during the

Congress rule. Remember how bullets were fired at 'kar sevaks' and the 1993 Mumbai bomb blasts took place under their tenure? In the last 10 years, not a single bomb blast has happened in the country," he said.

"Indira Gandhi had even funded Savarkar's trust. The Congress should stop spreading lies. Rahul Gandhi can never be Savarkar."

BJP MP Nishikant Dubey said, "Mr Gandhi said, 'I had asked Indira Gandhi ji about her views on Savarkar, and she said, 'Savarkar apologised to the British... Gandhi ji went to jail, Nehru ji went to jail, but Savarkar ji sought forgiveness'. — PTI

# Shah will visit Bastar, interact with ex-Naxals on C'garh visit

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY  
RAIPUR, DEC. 14

Union home minister Amit Shah is scheduled to arrive here late on Saturday night on a 3-day visit to Chhattisgarh to review counterinsurgency strategy.

Mr Shah is scheduled to spend two days in Leftwing extremism-hit Bastar, where he is scheduled to interact with the surrendered Naxals.

There are talks going on in the security circle that Mr Shah is most likely to visit the Maoist hotbed during his stay in Bastar.

His visit to the Naxal stronghold, however, has not been officially confirmed. "Minute-to-minute programme of Mr Shah in Bastar is yet to be received", Bastar range inspector-general (IG) of police P. Sunderraj said on Saturday.

The Union minister is scheduled to land at Raipur airport at 11 pm on Saturday and spend night in a private resort here



Union home minister Amit Shah during the Winter Session of Parliament in New Delhi on Saturday. — PTI

amid tight security, official sources said.

Mr Shah is scheduled to leave for Bastar on Sunday afternoon.

He would attend the closing ceremony of the ongoing Bastar Olympics, in which the local tribes including the surrendered Naxals took part.

He would take stock of the Leftwing insurgency situation in Bastar and the counterinsurgency measures being undertaken by the security person-

nel, and is also scheduled to interact with the surrendered Naxals and jawans during his stay in Bastar.

On the second day of his visit to Bastar on Monday, Mr Shah is scheduled to meet the families of jawans martyred in the Maoist attack in Bastar. He is scheduled to review anti-Naxal strategy at a high-level official meeting in Raipur, before winding up his Chhattisgarh tour on Monday evening.

# Lankan Prez will visit India today

To meet PM, Prez ■ Dissanayake's visit will further bolster bilateral ties: MEA

**Colombo, Dec. 14:** Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake will undertake a three-day visit to India from Sunday — his first overseas visit after assuming office.

During his visit, Mr Dissanayake will meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Droupadi Murmu.

He will be accompanied by foreign minister Vijitha Herath and deputy minister of finance Anil Jayantha Fernando.

Mr Dissanayake's visit to India is expected to further bolster the multifaceted and mutually beneficial bilateral ties, the ministry of external



A.K. Dissanayake

affairs (MEA) said in New Delhi on Friday.

Issues relating to maritime security cooperation are likely to figure in talks during Mr Dissanayake's visit, it said.

The December 15-17 visit is Mr Dissanayake's first

■ **ISSUES RELATING** to maritime security cooperation are likely to figure in talks during Mr Dissanayaka's visit, said ministry of external affairs

■ **DISSANAYAKE WILL** attend a business event in Delhi to promote investment

overseas visit since being elected the island nation's president on September 23.

Apart from his meetings with India's political leadership, Mr Dissanayake will attend a business event in Delhi to promote

investment and commercial linkages between India and Sri Lanka. He is also scheduled to visit Bodh Gaya, a statement from MEA said.

The invitation to visit New Delhi was extended by the external affairs minister S. Jaishankar, who visited Colombo less than a fortnight after Mr Dissanayake's victory and was the first foreign dignitary to visit the island nation since the National People's Power (NPP) government came to power.

Mr Dissanayake's visit was on hold until the completion of the parliamentary election in November. — PTI

## Omar: Cong must earn its INDIA bloc leader status

**New Delhi, Dec. 14:** Acknowledging growing discontent among INDIA bloc partners with the Congress, Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Omar Abdullah has asked the party to justify its leadership role in the alliance instead of taking it for granted.

Mr Abdullah, while recognising the Congress' significant position as a pan-India party and the largest Opposition party in Parliament, emphasised that leadership "has to be earned" and cannot be taken for granted.

He also suggested that the party should raise the issue of restoration of statehood in Jammu and Kashmir.

"By virtue of being the single largest party in Parliament, and also having the Leaders of the Opposition in both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, the fact that they have a pan-India footprint, which no other party can lay claim to, they are natural sort of leaders of an Opposition movement," Mr Abdullah told PTI in his first interview after becoming the CM in October.

Yet there is a sense of disquiet among some of the allies because they feel the Congress is "not doing enough to justify it or to earn it or to keep it. That's something the Congress might wish to consider."

Still, the J&K chief minister praised former Congress president Sonia Gandhi, describing her as a leader of unparalleled stature within the Opposition alliance. "When the INDIA bloc comes together, she plays an important leadership role," he added. — PTI



SHORT TAKES

Disabled woman burnt alive in Nuh

**Gurugram:** A physically challenged woman was burnt to death during a violent clash between two groups in Laharwadi village of Haryana's Nuh district over the arrest of the accused in an eight-month-old murder case, police said on Saturday.

The family of the woman, identified as Shehnaz, alleged that she was set afire by the rival group. The woman suffered from a walking disability and died on the spot. "The death of the woman in clash between two groups is a matter of investigation. We are investigating to find out the truth in the matter," said Pradeep Kumar, deputy SP, Punhana. Tension prevailed after the incident on Friday and a large contingent of police personnel have been deployed to maintain peace, the police said. As per police, a youth named Rizwan was murdered in Laharwadi village eight months ago over a dispute over dumping soil in a field. — *PTI*

B'loru cop ends life, blames wife, her dad

**Bengaluru:** A 33-year-old police head constable died by suicide in Bengaluru on Friday night, allegedly jumping in front of a train in Bya-ppana-halli, police said on Saturday. The incident occurred after Tippanna, who was posted at the Hulimavu police station, returned home after completing his shift. A "heated argument" broke out between him and his wife, which is believed to have led him to take the extreme step, they said.

Tippanna left a one-page death note in Kannada, alleging torture and harassment by his wife and father-in-law, police said. In the purported note, he claimed that on December 12, his father-in-law had threatened him at 7.26 pm, telling him to either die or be killed so that his daughter could live in peace. The police said that following the "dispute" with his wife, he left the house and ended life. — *PTI*

Women thrashed, hijab removed in UP

**Saharanpur, UP:** A Muslim woman and her sister were allegedly beaten by a group and shorn of their hijabs on suspicion of being in the company of a Hindu man, police said on Saturday. Assailants also filmed the act and uploaded video online, they said. In a complaint at Deoband police station, women said they were helping a man with directions when a group of people from Muslim community started harassing them. SP, Rural, Sagor Jain said the it happened Wednesday when complainant was returning home with her sister and was approached by an unknwo-mn man for directions. "The victim opposed the harassment, but the situation escalated as the youths recorded the incident and circulated the video online," Mr Jain said. — *PTI*

Airlines apologises and hails passengers cooperation

IndiGo to send planes to fly back people stuck Istanbul

**New Delhi, Dec. 14:** IndiGo is sending two planes to Istanbul to bring back passengers stranded in the Turkish capital after their flight to Delhi was cancelled on Friday due to a technical issue.

On Thursday, hundreds of IndiGo passengers were stuck at Istanbul airport after their flights to Delhi and Mumbai were delayed. They were stranded for over 24 hours, and many took to social media to complain about the delays and lack of facilities.

There was a cascading effect on the airline's scheduled flights on the two routes.

IndiGo, on Friday evening, said all necessary steps were taken to ensure customers were apprised and provided with refreshments

Jeddah-bound aeroplane makes emergency landing in Karachi

**Karachi/ New Delhi, Dec. 14:** A Jeddah-bound IndiGo plane was diverted to the Karachi airport on Saturday due to a medical emergency on board and later flew back to Delhi. Sources in the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) in Pakistan said the aircraft was in the Pakistani airspace when a male passenger fell seriously ill, following which the plane made an emergency landing at the Jinnah International Airport in Karachi.

"There was a medical emergency on board and accommodation, where possible.

On Saturday, IndiGo said

IndiGo flight 6E 63, operating from Delhi to Jeddah," the airline said in a statement. IndiGo said the captain diverted the flight to Karachi, where a doctor attended to the passenger upon arrival.

"After completing the necessary formalities, the flight departed Karachi and returned to its origin to provide further assistance to the medical passenger," the airline said, adding, after the passenger was deboarded in Delhi, the flight departed for Jeddah. — *PTI*

its flight 6E 12, operating from Istanbul to Delhi, was cancelled due to a technical

issue.

The cancellation happened on Friday.

The airline operates two daily flights to Istanbul with leased Boeing 777 aircraft — one from Delhi and another from Mumbai.

"Alternative aircraft have been arranged to transport passengers to their destination. We sincerely regret the inconvenience caused and appreciate their understanding in this matter," the airline said in a statement on Saturday.

A source in the know the airline will be sending two A321 planes to Istanbul to bring the passengers from there.

Details about the number of passengers who were booked on the cancelled flight on Friday could not be immediately ascertained. — *PTI*

Farm loans up to ₹2 lakh to be collateral free: RBI

**New Delhi, Dec. 14:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has enhanced the collateral-free loan limit for farmers from ₹1.6 lakh to ₹2 lakh, effective January 1, 2025, a move aimed at supporting small and marginal farmers amid rising input costs.

The new directive instructs banks nationwide to waive collateral and margin requirements for agricultural and allied activity loans up to ₹2 lakh per borrower.

As per agriculture ministry, the decision comes in response to the rising input costs and the need to improve credit accessibility for farmers. "This measure will significantly benefit over 86 per cent of farmers who are small and marginal landholders," the statement said.

Banks have been instructed to implement the guidelines swiftly and ensure widespread aware-

► **THE MOVE** is expected to facilitate easier access to Kisan Credit Card loans and complement the government's Modified Interest Subvention Scheme, which offers loans up to ₹3L at a 4% effective interest rate

ness about the new loan provisions. The move is expected to facilitate easier access to Kisan Credit Card (KCC) loans and complement the government's Modified Interest Subvention Scheme, which offers loans up to ₹3 lakh at a 4 per cent effective interest rate.

The initiative is seen as a strategic step to enhance financial inclusion in the agricultural sector, providing farmers with financial flexibility to invest in agricultural operations and improve livelihoods.

Agri experts view the initiative as a critical step

towards enhancing credit inclusivity and supporting agricultural economic growth, addressing inflationary pressures on farming input costs.

The Central bank said agricultural loans would be collateral free up to ₹2 lakh in keeping with current inflation levels and credit requirements of the farm sector. Currently, loans of up to ₹1.6 lakh don't require mortgage but may, in certain cases, attract margin-money deposits.

"Keeping in view the overall inflation and rise in agriculture input cost over the years, it has been decided to raise the limit for collateral free agricultural loans including loans for allied activities from the existing level of 1.6 lakh to 2 lakh per borrower," states a letter from RBI to all commercial banks, including cooperative-based lenders. — *PTI*

Name man accused of sedition as judge, HC directs UP govt

**Prayagraj/Kanpur (UP), Dec. 14:** The Allahabad high court has directed the Uttar Pradesh government to appoint as additional district judge a man who was denied appointment on the ground that he had faced two trials regarding alleged charges of spying for Pakistan as well as for sedition. The court asked the state to issue appointment letter to petitioner Pradeep Kumar by January 15, 2025. He had successfully passed the higher judicial examination in 2017.

Passing the order on a writ petition filed by Mr Kumar, a two-judge bench comprising justices Saumitra Dayal Singh and Donadi Ramesh observed, "The petitioner was 'honourably acquitted' at two criminal trials and no element of truth was found in the prosecution story, in either case."

"In view of the above, the writ petition must succeed. It is allowed. Mandamus is issued to state government to ensure character verification of the petitioner within a period of two weeks. Consequentially, upon completion of all formalities, appointment letter may be issued to the petitioner not later than 15th January 2025. The petitioner may be appointed against existing vacancies, as on date," the court added.

Mr Kumar had applied for selection to the UP

Higher Judicial Service under the UP Higher Judicial Service recruitment Examination, 2016. In that application, he disclosed the facts pertaining to Session Trial No.69 of 2004 under Sections 3, 6, 9 of Official Secrets Act & Section 120-B IPC (allegations of spying) and Session Trial No.236 of 2004 under Section 124-A IPC (sedition) arising out of Case Crime No.268 of 2002, Police Station Kotwali, Kanpur Nagar.

Mr Kumar and his family live in Kanpur's Meston road locality. He is the youngest of five siblings. On March 6, 2014, the additional sessions Judge court of Kanpur Nagar had acquitted Mr Kumar in those trials.

On August 18, 2017, the HC forwarded to the state the list of selected candidates and recommended their appointments. Appointment letter was not issued to him. The HC it its order dated December 6, said, "In view of the aforesaid facts, we dispose of this writ petition with the direction to the respondent No.1 (state government) to place the matter of appointment of the petitioner in the Higher Judicial Service of the State of U.P. pursuant to the recommendation of the HC dated August 18, 2017 before the Hon'ble Governor of the State immediately within two weeks." — *PTI*

Maoists' bureau secy among 7 Naxals killed in Dec 12 gunfight

**RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY**  
RAIPUR, DEC 14

Maoists' west bureau secretary P Mohan Rao alias Ramchandra who carried a bounty of ₹25 lakh was among seven ultras who were gunned down in an encounter with the security forces in south Abujhmad under Narayanpur district in south Bastar in Chhattisgarh on December 12, police said on Saturday. All the seven slain Naxals who included two women have been identified, Bastar police said on Saturday.

One of the deceased ultra has been identified as Maoists' west bureau secretary P Mohan Rao who was also member of Odisha state committee of outlawed CPI (Maoist), Bastar police said.

He had a BTech degree, according to the Bastar police. The other six slain Naxals have been identified as Raini alias Romila Madkam who carried a reward of Rs five lakh on her head and militia members Somari Ayam, Gudsa Kuchha, Rainu Poyam, Kamlesh and Motu who carried a bounty of Rs two lakh each.

Eight weapons including two Barrel Grenade Launchers (BGLs), two numbers of 303 rifles, two numbers of 12 bore rifles and two numbers of country made rifles had been recovered at the encounter site.

Punjab cracks grenade attack case, arrests 3 KZF members

**Chandigarh, Dec. 14:** Punjab Police on Saturday claimed to have solved a hand grenade attack case with the arrest of three members of the Khalistan Zindabad Force (KZF) terror module.

Director general of police (DGP) Gaurav Yadav identified the arrested people as Yugpreet Singh alias Yuvi, a from Mohalla Qazian, Jaskaran Singh alias Shah, a resident of Mohalla Jagoteyan and Harjot Singh alias Jot, from Duglan Mohalla in Rahon.

The police teams also recovered two firearms — a country-made pistol and a revolver — along with six live cartridges from their possession, he said.

The arrests were made in less than two weeks

after some people attacked the police post asron in the Kathgarn police station in Nawanshahr by hurling a hand grenade in its premises on December 2.

The DGP said that the trio are members of the KZF terror module controlled by handlers based in Germany, United Kingdom (UK) and other countries.

They were tasked with targeting police establishments and minority leaders in Punjab and Haryana.

The module had allegedly ₹4.5 lakh in funding over the past six months, he said.

Preliminary investigations revealed that the accused retrieved the hand grenade from a "dead letter box" (DLB) located on GT Road in

Jalandhar on November 28 and later hurled it at police post asron in SBS Nagar on December 2, Yadav said.

A DLB is a secret location used to exchange information or items between two people without meeting in person.

Assistant inspector general Navjot Singh Mahal said that in an intelligence based operation, a police team set up a special check post near railway crossing in SBS Nagar city.

The accused were arrested while they were travelling towards Nawanshahr bus stand on their motor-cycle.

He said further investigation is underway to establish forward and backward linkages in the matter. — *PTI*

Row triggers in MP over suicide note of bizman

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
BHOPAL, DEC. 14

A day after a businessman and his wife in a Madhya Pradesh town ended their lives by allegedly hanging in their home, a suicide note on Saturday surfaced on social media triggering a war of words between the Opposition Congress and the ruling BJP.

Manoj Parmar and his wife Neha were found hanging in their home in Ashta town in Sehore district in Madhya Pradesh on Friday morning.

A purported suicide note surfaced on social media on Saturday urging the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and Congress leaders to take care of their children.

456 pass out from IMA take part in parade

**PRITHVIRAJ SINGH**  
DEHRADUN, DEC. 14

Army and the country on Saturday got 456 new young officers as they displayed magnificent marching order in "passed out parade (PoP)" at the Indian Military Academy (IMA) in Dehradun. Apart from this 35 officers belonging to 13 friendly nations also passed out from the IMA, as Nepal Army Chief Gen. Ashok Raj Sigdel reviewed the parade at drill square of the historic Chetwood building.

Addressing the parade,

reviewing officer Gen. Sigdel thanked his counterpart and Indian Army chief Gen. Upendra Divedi for inviting him to review the IMA PoP. Being honorary General of the Army, by virtue of traditional practice of the Indo-Nepal armies, Gen. Sigdel said that opportunity to review PoP at IMA had meaning for him as more than two hundred cadets from his country have passed out through the same drill square and attained very high ranks including four chiefs in the Nepal Army.

Addressing the passing out IMA cadets, Gen Sigdel quoted renowned political and defence strategist Chankya and said, "Ancient strategist, Chanakya, way back in the 4th Century B.C. said Your Karma decides your future. Hence trust that you will progress, by the merit of your actions, rather than your credentials. You are the future of the great forces and the warriors of tomorrow. Exhorted the cadets to dedicate themselves to the service of the nation he said, "You are just a step away from the

historic and magnificent moment of your commissioning into the most elite forces". Gen. Sigdel mentioned that thirty-seven years ago, he too had experienced the feeling of elation and satisfaction similar to what was being felt by the passing out cadets of the day General Sigdel is also an alumnus of IMA, Dehradun.

Its significant that IMA has the distinction of giving 66 thousand 119 young military officers to the Indian Army and the armies of friendly nations.

‘Cong mutilated Constitution, our govt strengthened it’

■ **Continued From Page 1**

said his government also amended the Constitution but did not do to "further our grip on power".

Hailing India's journey since the adoption of the Constitution in 1949 as "extraordinary," Mr Modi asserted that the country's ancient democratic roots have long been an inspiration for the world. "India is not only a big democracy, but it is the mother of democracy," the Prime Minister said and maintained that India has resolved to become a developed country by 2047, and its unity is the biggest requirement to achieve the goal.

Citing that the Congress imposed the Emergency to mark the 25 years of the Constitution, Mr Modi said that all constitutional provisions were suspended during the period. He said: "Whenever democracy will be discussed in the world, this very sin of the Congress will be remembered."

Taking a swipe at the past Congress governments, Mr Modi accused them of planting "poisonous" seeds in the country's diversity to accentuate its contradictions and damage its unity.

Targeting the Nehru-Gandhi family of the Congress, Mr Modi said, "They left no stone unturned to strike blows to the Constitution...This family challenged the Constitution at every level," while noting that the members of this family were in power for 55 years.

"The family, having tasted blood, repeatedly wounded the Constitution," said Mr Modi and cited several decisions of former Prime Ministers Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi when they held the office.

Without naming anyone, Mr Modi said that "their next generation is also into the same game." Lok Sabha Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi and his MP sister Priyanka Gandhi Vadra were present in the House.

Underlining his commitment to the Constitution, the PM said leaders like him and many others who came from ordinary families could never have reached where they did but for the strength of the Constitution.

Attacking the Congress for not giving due respect to B.R. Ambedkar, Mr Modi recalled how he was awarded the Bharat Ratna only when the Congress was not in power.

Mr Modi also recalled how during his tenure as the Gujarat chief minister, his government celebrated the 60th year of the Constitution's adoption by placing a copy of the document on an elephant while he walked underneath barefoot in a symbolic gesture to highlight its supremacy.

Slamming the Nehru-Gandhi family, he said the first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru amended the country's guiding document to curb freedom of expression. His daughter Indira Gandhi imposed the

Emergency to defy a Supreme Court judgment that annulled her election as an MP.

"She throttled India's democracy and mutilated the Constitution when the 25th year of its adoption was approaching to save her chair," Mr Modi said. He also noted that late Indira Gandhi also effected an amendment to protect the President, vice-president and herself from any legal challenge to their position with a retrospective effect.

"Rajiv Gandhi, who took over as Prime Minister after his mother's assassination, also amended the Constitution," said the PM.

Without naming LoP the Prime Minister said an "arrogant" person tore the decision of the Cabinet when the Congress-led UPA government headed by the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was in power.

The National Advisory Council, which was headed by Sonia Gandhi, was put "above" the Cabinet during the UPA rule, he added.

"While the makers of the Constitution took a considered decision to disallow reservations on the basis of religion and faith in the interest of the country's unity and integrity, the Congress, in its greed for power and to appease its votebank, pushed for it in violation of the constitutional spirit," he said.

His government, the Prime Minister said, repealed Article 370 to unify the country and brought in GST to

rollout the "one nation, one tax" regime.

The Prime Minister said India defied all apprehensions about its democratic future after Independence and added its Constitution has brought the country to this stage. He also paid tributes to the makers of the Constitution and the country's citizens for living up to the spirit of its makers.

Those involved in the making of the Constitution were well aware that India was not born in 1947 or turned democratic in 1950, he said, citing remarks of eminent personalities like Purushottam Das Tandon and Bhim Rao Ambedkar.

Women were given voting rights by the Constitution, Mr Modi said, adding the country is now seeing women-led development. He also lauded the parliamentarians for the unanimous passage of the law to give reservation to women in the Lok Sabha and state Assemblies.

Taking a dig at the Congress, Mr Modi said a party that does not follow its own constitution for dynastic politics and authoritarianism can never respect the Indian Constitution. He cited how Jawaharlal Nehru was made the first PM when the Congress's 12 state committees had backed Sardar Patel for the post. He also cited the ill treatment of its former president Sitaram Kesari.

The PM also took a swipe at the Congress, saying the biggest 'jumla' in the history of India was "Garibi Hatao", a slogan given by former

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. He said there is a word the Congress likes a lot, which led some Opposition MPs to say "Adani".

"Their most favourite word, without which they can't live, is 'jumla'," Mr Modi said.

The Congress and other Opposition parties have attacked the BJP by deriding the promises made by the Prime Minister and the ruling BJP as "jumla" on several occasions. The Opposition has also taken swipes at the BJP by dubbing it the "Bharatiya Jumla Party".

"Our friends in the Congress use this term day and night. But this country knows the biggest jumla in India, which has been used by four generations, is 'garibi hatao'," the Prime Minister said. "It was a jumla that helped them politically, but did not help the poor," Mr Modi said. Citing initiatives by his government, including construction of toilets, Mr Modi said, "Can someone tell, should people not even have toilets? The movement to build toilets has been started by (my) government."

"You have seen the poor and poverty on TV and newspapers, you do not know what poverty is," Mr Modi said in a dig at the Opposition leaders.

Proposing 11 resolutions, including a call for an end to dynastic politics, promoting meritocracy over nepotism in governance and a pledge for having zero tolerance to corruption, the PM said these resolutions are aimed at shaping India's future.

‘BJP violating idea of Constitution’

■ **Continued From Page 1**

book India is run by should be superseded by this book. This is what the fight is about," Mr Gandhi said.

Mr Gandhi asserted that the Congress and the INDIA bloc are the protectors of the Constitution, unlike the BJP and the RSS, which support the Manusmriti.

"The country will function on the basis of the Constitution, not on Manusmriti," he said.

"V.D. Savarkar had called Manusmriti a scripture "most worshipable" for Hindus after the Vedas. It is good that you say you are defending the Constitution, but I want to ask, do you stand by your leader's words? Because when you speak about protecting the Constitution, you are abusing and ridiculing V.D. Savarkar," said Mr Gandhi.

Mr Gandhi began his speech with the story of Eklavya, the young prince of Nishadhs, who had to sacrifice his thumb at the demand of Guru Dronacharya, rendering him incapable of performing archery.

Dronacharya was the teacher of the Pandavas, and he had to incapacitate Eklavya to eliminate competition and threat to Arjun, who too was a great warrior and skilled archer like Eklavya.

Linking the story with the modern-day situation

Mr Gandhi said a battle is taking place in India and accused the government of behaving like Dronacharya and putting the underprivileged under duress and benefiting the capitalists.

"When you give Dharavi to Adani, you chop off the thumb of the small and medium businesses there...You have fired tear-gas shells on farmers outside Delhi. who are asking for fair prices... You are cutting the thumb of that farmer," he said.

Mr Gandhi also mentioned the grievances of the family of the Hathras gang-rape victim, saying the deceased girl is yet to get justice and her family is being threatened and tormented by the accused, who are out on bail.

"The Hathras family told me that the state administration did not allow the victim to be cremated by them."

"The Uttar Pradesh chief minister has been speaking a lie openly in the media. Where is it written in the Constitution that the accused can roam freely and the victim's family should be shut indoors? This must be written in your book the Manusmriti, not in the Constitution."

"If you say there is your government in Uttar Pradesh, then the state functions on the basis of the Manusmriti and not the Constitution," he

said.

The Congress leader also talked about the caste census and supported removing the 50 per cent cap on reservations. "We will end the barrier of the 50 per cent cap on reservations; you say whatever you have to," he said.

Quoting B.R. Ambedkar, the LoP said, "If there is political equality but no social and economic equality, then the political equality will be destroyed. B.R. Ambedkar said. Today, political equality has ended. All institutions of the country have been captured."

"There is no social and financial economic equality. That's why our next step will be to hold a caste census to show people — Dalits, adivasis, farmers, labourers and backwards - where all you have cut their thumbs."

"As promised, we will bring a new kind of politics and development to India," said Mr Gandhi.

Later, chaos prevailed in the House briefly as the LoP was not allowed to respond to Shiv Sena MP Shrikant Eknath Shinde's remarks on Indira Gandhi's views on V.D. Savarkar.

Congress MP K.C. Venugopal accused the Speaker of being partial. "It seems that this House belongs to the BJP only," he said. The Speaker later allowed Mr Gandhi to respond.





THE ASIAN AGE

15 DECEMBER 2024



R. Suresh

Off the beaten track

Papa says I must make him proud...

Son, that is a purple rat, the dad confidently proclaimed. Be careful, might bite. Papa, that looks like Chintu squirrel that eats our chapatis in the morning, only larger. No son, it's a rat. Keep away. It pisses on people. Who knows what diseases could come with that thing... Covid, smallpox, and all that. His mother gripped him with greater fervour and the party edged through the jungle clearing with some trepidation.

Overhead in the canopy, the Malabar giant squirrel moved on in pursuit of more berries.

Chitra and I looked at each other, incredulous.

On the safari trail later that afternoon, Papa scanned the sunlight streaming through the verdant bush and proclaimed, what this country needs is development. Imagine how many more people could enjoy this view if they lived right here?

But Papa, then there wouldn't be any bush, right? With a glint in his eye, Papa said, we can always grow bushes, can't we? Like Arshad does in our garden every Sunday?

But Papa...

Hush child, Mama said, talking loudly could invite the beasts.

Mummy, that's what we came for, right?

Sharing the dinner table, Son came across hesitantly and asked, Uncle, can I look through your binoculars? Sure, I said, but in the morning, when we are out on the trail again. It's too dark now.

Ohhh... Papa says we are leaving in the morning as we have to see the Palace.

That's too bad, I thought your family might stay on for a day more. There are so many lovely birds here. And plants and trees that thrill you with their colours and shapes.

No Uncle, Papa says we will see only tigers in the jungle. We can see sparrows and pigeons in the city, he said. I sighed.

Come along then. Let's see what we can get now.

The two of us wound gingerly across the path leading to the dining room. A few paces off the path I heard a familiar sound. I scanned the canopy intently with my LED torch. Nothing, but faintly, a very light flutter of wings. Hope yet, I thought. We trudged into a thicket, beyond which the moon lit a splendid opening in the forest. It was ringed by sal and eucalyptus trees that gleamed in a white glow.

You try son. Up there, beneath the top, and above the trunks. The light from the torch jagged across the leaves and branches. A light breeze blew up. Not much action, but it was a beautiful and calm night.

No, uncle, I can't see anything.

OK. What did you look for?

Oh, some birds with bright feathers, like a peacock?

Not bad, and there could be a peacock resting now, but they would be difficult to spot in this light. Let's do it together now.

I steadied his hand as we played the beam of light across the web of branch and foliage in the darkness. A lot of to-and-fro. And then we saw it. A gleam. A pinpoint that quickly became two orange-red points in the murk of the forest gloom. I moved the beam lightly across the points of light and there was movement! The points moved laterally and now faced us squarely. A magnificent raptor, a bird of prey.

Now let's be careful son. We don't want to disturb it too much. They need their rest too. That is the Brown Fish Owl. It hunted its prey all day at the small lake we passed this evening on our return from the safari trail. Now it is carefully sheltered and resting for another day of work tomorrow. We spoke on, and I patiently tried to answer Son's feverish queries about the Owl's habits, its love life, food, and the fate of its prey. Hushed whispers, soto voce. A swarm of fireflies flushed into the light and vanished again. Son watched agape.

And then I had to lead him back, both of us reluctant to leave this wonderland in the middle of nowhere.

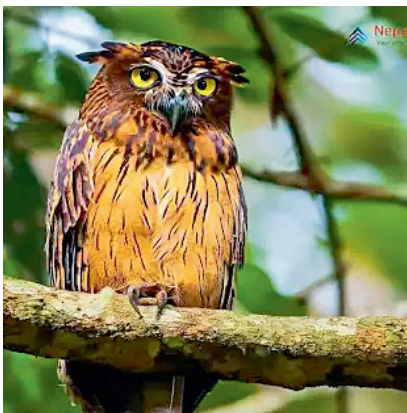
As we sneaked back into the dining room, I saw Chitra in active conversation with Papa. She winked at me and continued a hectic discussion perhaps on the state of the nation. Mama was slumped across the sofa, almost asleep and still clutching her glass of red wine.

Sonny and I decided to call it a day. He wanted to message his friends at home about his encounters with the wild. Or at least let Poorna, the love of his life, know about them. Chitra wound the discussion up pleading fatigue, quickly grabbed my arm and we climbed the stairs to our room.

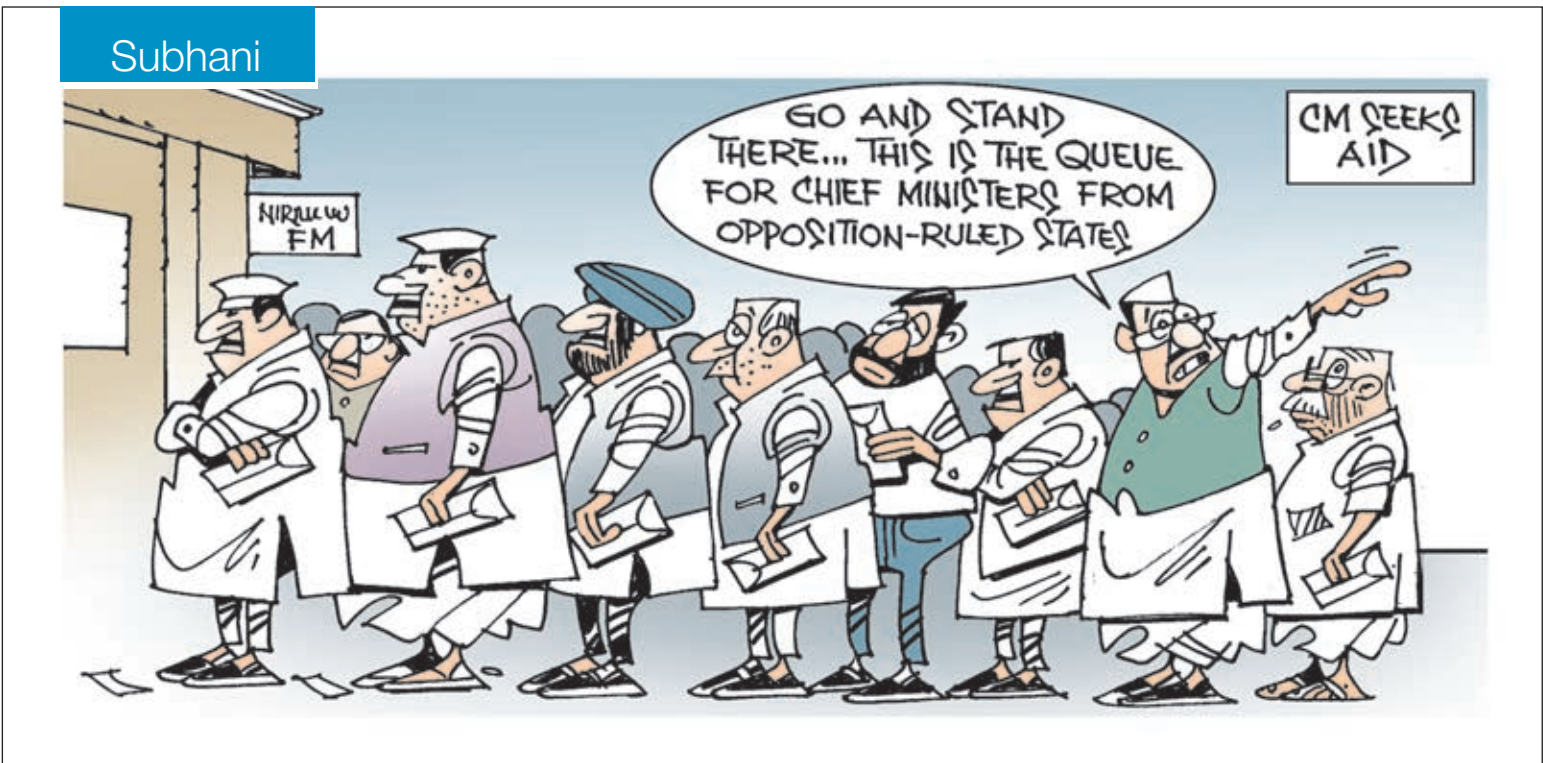
I had to cover for you. Endured Papa's theories of race and religion, and...

Never mind, I interjected, you did good. The little fellow learnt something new today, and I may have left my spoor on him! In a nice way. He'll go beyond sparrows and pigeons now, whatever Papa says.

After four decades in social change and public policy, Suresh now spends time with books, music, birds and movies



And then we saw it. A gleam. A pinpoint that quickly became two orange-red points in the forest gloom. I moved the beam lightly across the points of light and there was movement! The points moved laterally and now faced us squarely. A magnificent raptor, a bird of prey.



Assad exit a new chapter or uncertain tomorrow?



Manish Tewari

State of the Union

After over five decades of authoritarian rule, the Assad dynasty's grip on Syria has collapsed in a dramatic turn of events. A swift military offensive led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), a group with roots in the Al-Qaeda-linked Al-Nusra Front, along with allied factions, swept through the country, capturing major cities and culminating in the fall of Damascus. President Bashar al-Assad has fled to Russia, marking it a pivotal moment in Syria's 13-year conflict.

There is however a strategic school of thought that holds that Bashar-Al-Assad's exit was not a collapse but a modus vivendi brokered by Iran, Russia and Turkey to ensure a transition of power to the HTS that involved Assad leaving the country while key regime figures led by Prime Minister Mohammed al-Jalali would stay back to hand over the country to the new rulers. How much of this is true would depend upon whether the apparatchiks of the Baath party escape retribution when the HTS and its allies assume full control and command.

As Syrians witness the end of an era, emotions are a mix. The new leadership's history and objectives cast a shadow over the path ahead for a nation scarred by decades of turbulence.

**A Nation's Descent into Turmoil:** The fall of the Assad dynasty marks a turning point in Syria's history, but to grasp its full significance, one must reflect on the nation's troubled past. Bashar al-Assad assumed power in 2000, succeeding his father, Hafez al-Assad, who had ruled with an iron fist for three decades. Hopes for reform under Bashar quickly faded as he perpetuated his father's autocratic governance.

The Arab Spring in 2011 inspired Syrians to call for political change and greater freedoms, but Assad's violent

The situation is fragmented. Doubts linger over HTS's long-term intentions. Its Islamist ideology and authoritarian tendencies risk plunging Syria into another cycle of oppression.

Islamist ideology and authoritarian tendencies risk plunging Syria into another cycle of oppression. **Global Ripples of Assad's Fall:** The collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime has triggered seismic reactions worldwide. For Russia, which intervened in 2015 to bolster Assad, this represents a significant setback. Strategic assets like the Tartus naval base and Hmeimim airbase in Latakia are crucial to Moscow's regional influence. Yet, with its focus on the war in Ukraine, Russia's capacity to retain a strong presence in Syria is now in question.

Iran faces a major disruption to its "Axis of Resistance," a critical corridor connecting Tehran to Hezbollah in Lebanon via Syria.

Turkey, hosting over three million Syrian refugees, finds itself in a complex situation. While Ankara officially denies involvement in the HTS offensive, experts suggest indirect support or tacit approval may have played a role. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan aims to address the refugee crisis and counter Kurdish militias in northern Syria, but HTS's rise adds unpredictability to these plans.

Israel, too, confronts a shifting landscape. The ascendance of HTS raises fresh security concerns. Israel has strengthened its defences along the Golan Heights, wary of the risk of extremists gaining access to advanced weaponry.

In Europe, the response has been cautious. Countries like Germany, Austria and the UK have paused asylum applications for Syrians, citing concerns about the safety of returning refugees. The European Union has emphasised the importance of stable conditions before repatriation can be considered.

India's Stakes in a Changing

Syria: India and Syria share a relationship rooted in history, with diplomatic ties established in 1950. This connection is symbolised by a Damascus street named after Jawaharlal Nehru. Over the years, Syria supported India on the Kashmir issue, while India backed Syria's claim over the Golan Heights.

The fall of the Assad regime now casts a shadow over India's political and economic interests. Significant investments, such as joint oil exploration projects and a \$240 million line of credit for the Tishreen Thermal Power Plant, face uncertainty. Additionally, India's plans for an India-Gulf-Suez Canal-Mediterranean trade corridor, in which Syria plays a role, could encounter obstacles.

Another pressing concern is the potential resurgence of ISIS amid Syria's instability. For India, this represents a direct security challenge and raises fears of extremist ideologies gaining traction in the region, complicating both national and regional security dynamics.

**A Crossroads for Syria:** The fall of Bashar al-Assad has left Syrians facing a challenging future. The ability of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) to evolve from an extremist organisation into a responsible governing body remains highly questionable.

For India, the evolving crisis highlights the importance of a dynamic foreign policy. Prioritising counterterrorism cooperation, engaging diplomatically with Syria's transitional authorities and protecting economic investments will be critical. India's active role in fostering regional stability during this pivotal period could prove significant.

While Assad's fall marks the end of a long and tumultuous chapter, its aftermath will determine whether Syria moves toward peace or endures further suffering. For its people, weary from years of conflict, the hope of reclaiming their country rests on the tenuous possibility of a brighter future.

Manish Tewari is a third-term Lok Sabha MP and former Union minister of information and broadcasting, Government of India. Twitter handle @ManishTewari.

LETTERS AI STEALING PATENT

Suchir Balaji, a 26-year-old former OpenAI researcher, was found dead in his San Francisco apartment on November 26. Balaji had gained prominence as a whistleblower, accusing OpenAI of violating copyright laws by collecting vast amounts of web data, including copyright-protected material, to train its AI models. His allegations, which were published in *The New York Times* three months prior to his death, had sparked a renewed debate about the ethics of AI development and the responsibility of tech companies to protect intellectual property, leaving the tech community in shock. His death is currently under investigation.

Amarjeet Kumar Hazaribagh

JUDGE OR TERRORIST

**IF JUDGES** are like Justice Shekhar K. Yadav then God save our pluralism and secular ethos. Referring to a community using derogatory words wasn't just shameful but highly condemnable too. Shouldn't strictest action be taken against him? In olden days it would have resulted in his suspension, and maybe harsher punishment, too, but in today's communal atmosphere one will see him getting a cushy post-retirement job. By the way, shouldn't he be treated at par with a terrorist because the end result of the actions of both is the same, viz. weakening of the social fabric.

Syed Abdul Monim Navi Mumbai

ONE NATION, ONE LAW

**MORE THAN** one nation one election, we need one application of the laws that govern it. Look at the case of Allu Arjun. A woman died and her son is in coma during a stampede to have a glimpse of the star. He was quickly arrested but managed to get bail. But nothing has happened to the godman at whose meeting 120 people died and many more were injured some months back. Apparently, he has not been arrested yet. Why the difference in treatment of those responsible for the stampede which caused 121 deaths and the movie star.. If anything, the godman should have been facing greater trouble than the film star. Those who profess their allegiance to the Hindu interests are silent on the issue when they should have been demanding justice for the victims!

Anthony Henriques Mumbai

Saeed Naqvi Wide Angle



Syria's collapse to shift focus from Gaza genocide & defeat in Ukraine

Donald Trump was quite clear: "Assad has fled his country. His protector Russia isn't interested in protecting him any longer."

How will this echo with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, fighting with his back to the wall in Ukraine? If Russia can drop Assad, will Mr Trump keep an albatross around his neck? Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu exulted: "Assad's fall reverses the most important part of the Shia axis with Iran." This would ring true if Iran hadn't sent a polite goodbye to Assad. With usual subtlety, Iran distinguished between Assad and Syria.

The refrain by the key rebel leader, Abu Mohammad al Jolani, that "Syria is for all Sunnis, Alawis, Christians, Druze", has found wide traction. Assad's fall led to the abrupt disappearance from the front page two wars which kept the world in their thrall. Why should a war heading towards a nuclear exchange be abruptly taken off the airwaves? Because the West was losing?

Not only are the Syrian developments a welcome diversion for the West from wars that weren't going their way. Assad's fall also has potential of being spun as a vindication of the Arab Spring. Hil-

lary Clinton, then US secretary of state, can claim to be vindicated, even though 2011's circumstances were different.

The growing consensus among non-mainstream media experts is this: The Western effort in Ukraine is not to accept an obvious defeat. The new treasure trove in cash and weaponry to Kyiv would, in Mr Trump's parlance, be tantamount to throwing good money after bad. He is quiet for a simple reason: he would like to negotiate honourably with Russia's Vladimir Putin. He wouldn't like to throw in the towel but have Volodymyr Zelenskyy walk towards Mr Putin to strike a bargain, however degrading, which the pliant media will sell with favourable headlines.

Of course, there is a pall of mist on the rapidity with which Assad fell. The almost cheerful appearance of Assad and his wife granted asylum in Moscow tells its own tale. The Russian bases in Syria have been promised full protection by the new regime in Damascus.

The stories of vandalism of the Iranian embassy appear to be stray incidents, without any organisational support. There are so many fingers in the Syrian pie that it is difficult to spot the master choreographer. That Russia has vital

interests in Syria, as it does in Ukraine, might make it the key author of the surprising turn.

Two other developments in the region have been marked by their masterly stealth: The Riyadh-Tehran rapprochement and the coming together of all Palestinian groups, from Hamas to the Palestinian Authority. Both these were painstakingly stitched together by China. Never in history have China and Russia been closer.

There have been plenty of agreements on issues stretching from Ukraine to the Eastern Mediterranean. Take the Astana process for Syria, for instance, between Russia, Iran and Turkey. In this, Turkey was a crucial player. Standing solidly behind Hamas as it faces history's first live televised genocide are the following: Iran, Hezbollah, Hazb al-Shaabi (Iraq) and Yemen's Houthis — all Shia variants. A prominent role given to Turkey in Syrian affairs brings a major Sunni nation into focus. Recep Tayyip Erdogan's profile gets a boost. Is Azerbaijan part of the deal with Turkey where Iran has considerable interests? Russia, along with Turkey and Iran, appear to have played an amazing hand. Assad's fall provides a

face-saver for Israel and the US in West Asia and for the West in Ukraine.

Georgia faces a chaotic situation — where President Salome Zourabichvili refuses to accept the pro-Russia verdict in the October national elections. This isn't the only flashpoint Mr Trump faces as he enters the White House. America's key interest in the Pacific Basin has been blown to smithereens by inept politics in South Korea.

Former state department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland's handiwork is tearing Ukraine apart. Likewise, Donald Lu, US undersecretary of state for South Asia, has egg on his face for the explosive situation developing in Bangladesh. Pakistan and Afghanistan are on edge as are Romania and Moldova. After calling snap elections, Emmanuel Macron finds himself without a government in France as he will not accept a leftist Prime Minister. Fascism stares Germany in the face.

This incomplete list of the world's chaotic spots is to place in balance the dwindling G-7 and the expanding Brics.

Is isolationism implicit in Donald Trump's clarion call to "Make America Great Again"? The US had faced decline earlier, but it bounced back under Ronald

Reagan. The fall of the Soviet Union, for reasons of its own, brought the US into focus as the sole superpower. The collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008 signalled the flaws in the neo-cons' mismanagement of globalisation.

Mr Trump would do well to remember his conversation with Jimmy Carter. "The Chinese are going ahead of us", Mr Trump lamented. "What should we do?" Mr Carter's reply was succinct. "Except for one skirmish with Vietnam in 1979, China has not fought a war. We have never stopped being at war."

America's 760 bases worldwide and wars without end were glibly explained: the military-industrial complex has to be kept busy. The defeats in Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan and Ukraine should cause military analysts to pause. The recent relentless bombardment of the Gaza Strip by one of the great military powers, without achieving any of its war aims and heaping on itself the odium of being an apartheid state committing genocide for over a year on live TV, defies all description. How will Donald Trump cope?

The writer is a senior journalist and commentator based in New Delhi



SHORT TAKES

IRANIAN ACTIVIST REZA KHANDAN'S ARREST ASSAILED

Dubai, Dec. 14: PEN America condemned the arrest of Reza Khandan, Iranian activist and husband of leading human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh, and demanded his immediate release.

Karin Deutsch Karlekar, director of Writers at Risk at the literary and human rights organisation said in a statement on Friday: "We are appalled at the arrest of Reza Khandan and urge Iranian authorities to release him immediately."

Khandan was sentenced in 2019 over spreading propaganda against the system.

CHINA TO INVEST \$1 BN IN PAK FOR MEDICAL CITY

Karachi, Dec. 14: A Chinese business delegation has met with President Asif Ali Zardari here and expressed interest in investing \$1 billion to establish a medical city in Pakistan, according to a media report.

Pakistan has held strong bilateral relations with China which has supported it through many investments and development projects such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project, termed as a lifeline for the country's economy.

The medical city would be Pakistan's first fully integrated pharmaceutical and medical ecosystem.

FOUR NEW POLIO CASES IN PAK, YEAR'S TALLY 63

Islamabad, Dec. 14: Pakistan has reported four new polio cases, bringing the crippling disease's total in the country for the year to 63 — more than a ten-fold increase from last year's tally of just 6 cases.

Despite repeated countrywide polio vaccination campaigns, two new cases were detected on Friday in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh provinces each. "On Friday, the lab confirmed one polio case each from Dera Ismail Khan, Tank, and Jacobabad, where female children are affected, and Sukkur, where a male child is affected," the statement said.

17 PIA AIRCRAFT GROUNDED DUE TO PARTS' SHORTAGE

Karachi, Dec. 14: A shortage of essential components and spare parts has grounded 17 of the Pakistan International Airlines' 34 aircraft, leaving them out of service.

The position is that 17 aircraft of the PIA fleet remain out of service.

At present, seven out of 12 planes in the airline's Boeing 777 fleet are grounded. Additionally, seven out of 17 Airbus A320 planes are also non-operational.

The airline's smaller ATR aircraft have not been spared, with only two of the five aircraft currently active.

FOUR ZIMBABWE RHINOS DIE OVER POLLUTED WATER

Harare, Dec. 14: Four white rhinos have died in Zimbabwe after drinking from a sewage-polluted lake that is also the main supplier of water to the nearby capital.

Three zebra, four wildebeest, four fish eagles and several goats and cattle also died over the past week after drinking from Lake Chivero, 30 km (19 miles) from Harare.

The animals had been poisoned by cyanobacteria, which is also toxic to humans.

"Cyanobacteria is caused by water pollution," ZimParks spokesperson Tinashé Farawo told AFP.

UN TALKS OVER BUT NO RESPONSE TO DROUGHT DEAL

Riyadh, Dec. 14: Saudi-hosted UN talks failed to produce an agreement on how to respond to drought, participants said on Saturday, falling short of hopes for a binding protocol addressing the growing scourge.

The 12-day meeting of parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), concluded. UNCCD executive secretary Ibrahim Thiaw said the world expected negotiators "to adopt a bold decision that can help turn the tide on the most pervasive and the most disruptive environmental disaster: Drought".

South Korea impeaches President for martial law

Acting Prez Han vows to ensure no vacuum in state affairs

Seoul, Dec. 14: South Korea's Parliament on Saturday impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol over his stunning and short-lived martial law decree, a move that ended days of political paralysis but set up an intense debate over Yoon's fate, as jubilant crowds roared to celebrate another defiant moment in the country's democracy.

South Korea's acting President Han Duck-soo vowed on Saturday to leave no vacuum in state affairs.

In a public address after the Parliament passed a motion to impeach President Yoon Suk Yeol, Han said that the entire Cabinet would work hard to maintain trust with the United States, Japan and other partners.

The National Assembly passed the motion 204-85. Yoon's presidential powers and duties were subsequently suspended and Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, the country's No. 2 official, took over presidential powers.

The Constitutional Court has up to 180 days to determine whether to dismiss Yoon as President or restore his powers. If he's thrown out of office, a national election to choose his successor must be held within 60 days.

It was the second National Assembly vote on Yoon's impeachment after ruling party lawmakers boycotted it last Saturday.



Protesters calling for the ouster of South Korea President Yoon Suk Yeol react after the result of the second martial law impeachment vote outside the National Assembly in Seoul, on Saturday.

Some People Power Party lawmakers had since said they would vote for Yoon's impeachment as public protests intensified and his approval rating plummeted. National Assembly Speaker Woo Won Shik said Yoon's impeachment was an outcome driven by the people's ardent desire for democracy, courage and dedication.

Hundreds of thousands of people gathered near the Parliament roared in jubilation, waved banners and brandished colourful K-pop glow sticks, as a

lead activist shouted on stage, "We have preserved the constitutional order!"

In a Seoul plaza, another huge crowd gathered supporting Yoon, but they grew subdued after hearing he had been impeached. Both rallies have largely been peaceful.

Yoon issued a statement saying he would never give up and calling for officials to maintain stability in government functions during what he described as a temporary pause of his presidency.

"I will carry with me all

the criticisms, encouragement and support directed toward me, and I will continue to do my utmost for the country until the very last moment," Yoon said.

Yoon's December 3 imposition of martial law, the first of its kind in more than four decades in South Korea, lasted only six hours, but has caused massive political tumult, halted diplomatic activities and rattled financial markets. Yoon was forced to lift his decree after parliament unanimously voted to overturn it. — Agencies



Rebel fighters play football with kids at the entrance of the Syrian General Intelligence Directorate Branch 251, in the capital Damascus, on Saturday.

US presses Iraq on Iran-backed groups

Aqaba, Dec. 14: US secretary of state Antony Blinken pressed Iraq to crack down on Iranian-backed militias, seeing an opening after the downfall of Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad put Tehran on the back foot, a US official said.

Blinken met Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani in Baghdad on Friday as part of a last-minute regional tour after Islamist-led Syrian rebels ended a half-century of rule by the Assad clan, a major ally of Iran.

A US official said Blinken told Sudani that Iran was at its weakest in some time and that Iraq had an opportunity to reduce Tehran's influence. Specifically, Blinken asked Sudani to clamp down on Iranian-backed Iraqi Shiite armed groups, who for years have periodically attacked US forces in Iraq.

Blinken also asked Sudani to help prevent the transfer of Iranian weapons across Iraqi territory to any affiliated groups in Syria, the official said.

TURKEY REOPENED ITS SYRIA EMBASSY FIRST TIME SINCE '12

Ankara, Dec. 14: Turkish foreign minister Hakan Fidan said that Turkey's Embassy in Syria's capital of Damascus reopened on Saturday, for the first time since 2012.

Fidan said a newly appointed interim charge d'affaires had left for Damascus on Friday with his delegation. "It will be operational as of tomorrow," he said. — AP

Blinken was more circumspect in his public remarks, saying after their meeting in Baghdad that the US was committed to "working for Iraq's sovereignty to make sure that that is strengthened and preserved".

"I think this is a moment as well for Iraq to reinforce its own sovereignty as well as its stability, security and success going forward," he said, without naming Iran. — AFP

INDIGO PLANE'S EMERGENCY LANDING IN PAK

Karachi, New Delhi, Dec. 14: A Jeddah-bound IndiGo plane was diverted to the Karachi airport on Saturday due to a medical emergency on board and later flew back to Delhi.

Sources in the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) in Pakistan said the aircraft was in the Pakistani airspace when a male passenger fell seriously ill, following which the plane was forced to make an emergency landing at the Jinnah International Airport in Karachi.

"There was a medical emergency on board IndiGo flight 6E 63, operating from Delhi to Jeddah," the airline said in a statement.

IndiGo said the captain diverted the flight to Karachi, where a doctor attended to the passenger upon arrival. — PTI

18 killed in Israeli Gaza strikes

Cairo, Dec. 14: At least 18 Palestinians were killed in Israeli airstrikes in Gaza on Saturday, medics said, while the Israeli military said it targeted gunmen operating from shelters and aid storages.

At least 10 people were killed in an airstrike near the municipality building in Deir Al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip where people gathered to receive aid, medics said.

Casualties were being carried by foot, on rickshaws and private cars from the site of the attack to the hospital, medics said. The strike killed the head of the Hamas-run administrative committee in cent-

Trump vows to end daylight saving time

New York, Dec. 14: President-elect Donald Trump wants to turn the lights out on daylight saving time. In a post on his social media site Friday, Trump said his party would try to end the practice when he returns to office.

"The Republican Party will use its best efforts to eliminate Daylight Saving Time, which has a small but strong constituency, but shouldn't! Daylight Saving Time is inconvenient, and very costly to our Nation," he wrote.

Setting clocks forward one hour in the spring and back an hour in the fall is intended to maximise daylight during summer months, but has long been subject to scrutiny. Daylight saving time was first adopted as a wartime measure in 1942.

Lawmakers have occasionally proposed getting rid of the time change altogether. The most prominent recent attempt, a now-stalled bipartisan bill named the Sunshine Protection Act, had proposed making daylight saving time permanent.

The measure was sponsored by Florida Sen. Marco Rubio, whom Trump has tapped to helm the state department. "Changing the clock twice a year is outdated and unnecessary," Republican Sen. Rick Scott of Florida said as the Senate voted in favour of the measure.

Health experts have said that lawmakers have it backward and that standard time should be made permanent. Some health groups, including the American Medical Association and American Academy of Sleep Medicine, have said that it's time to do away with time switches and that sticking with standard time aligns better with the sun — and human biology. Most countries do not observe daylight saving time. For those that do, the date that clocks are changed varies, creating a complicated tapestry of changing time differences. Arizona and Hawaii don't change their clocks at all. — AP

SHOOT THEM DOWN: TRUMP ON MYSTERY DRONE SIGHTINGS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

US President-elect Donald Trump has called for the "shooting down" of the mystery drones that have been appearing in various parts of the country. These drones were first spotted in New Jersey a few days ago and are now being seen in other areas as well.



PREPARE TO REMOVE TIKTOK FROM APP STORES: U.S. LAWMAKERS TO GOOGLE, APPLE

Two influential US lawmakers, including Indian-American Raja Krishnamoorthi, have asked Google and Apple to remove TikTok from their app stores ahead of a potential ban on the video-sharing platform next month. A bill signed by President Joe Biden into law in April requires China-based ByteDance, which owns TikTok, to divest from it by January 19 or face a US ban.



TRUMP HOSTS APPLE CEO AT MAR-A-LAGO AS BIG TECH LEADERS CONTINUE OUTREACH TO PRESIDENT-ELECT

Donald Trump hosted Apple CEO Tim Cook for a Friday evening dinner at the President-elect's Mar-a-Lago resort. Cook is the latest in a string of big tech leaders, including OpenAI's Sam Altman, Meta's Mark Zuckerberg and Amazon's Jeff Bezos, who have sought to improve their standing with the incoming President.

TRUMP CONSIDERS PRIVATIZING U.S. POSTAL SERVICE: WASHINGTON POST

Washington, Dec. 14: US President-elect Donald Trump has expressed a keen interest in privatising the US Postal Service in recent weeks, the Washington Post reported on Saturday, citing three people with knowledge of the matter.

The US Post Office, which has lost more than \$100 billion since 2007, reported a net loss of \$9.5 billion for its fiscal year ending September 30, a \$3-

billion bigger loss than last year, largely due to a year-over-year increase in non-cash workers' compensation expense.

When told of the agency's annual losses, Trump said the government should not subsidise the organisation. Trump has discussed his desire to privatise the postal service with Howard Lutnick, his pick for commerce secretary. — Reuters

Tehran, Dec. 14: Iran will not impede UN nuclear watchdog's access and inspection of its sites, the head of the country's Atomic Energy Organisation said on Saturday.

According to a report by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) earlier this week, Iran has agreed to tougher monitoring by the agency at its Fordow site after it greatly accelerated uranium enrichment to close to weapons grade there.

Last week, the IAEA reported that Iran had multiplied the pace of its enrichment to up to 60% purity, close to the 90% of weapons grade, at Fordow. "We have not created

and will not create any obstacle for the agency's inspections and access," Atomic Energy Organisation head Mohammad Eslami was quoted as saying by Iranian media. "We operate within the framework of safeguards, and the agency also acts according to regulations — no more, no less." — Reuters



People inspect the damage following an Israeli strike on the UNWRA Al-Majda Wasila Governmental School housing displaced Palestinians, on al-Jalaa Street in Gaza City on Saturday. — AFP

seven people were killed in that attack, Palestinian medics said, including a woman and her baby.

It was unclear whether any of the other people killed were fighters. The military said it had taken precautions to reduce risk of harm to civilians.

A separate strike in Gaza City killed a local journalist, medics said. The military was looking into the report. The war in Gaza began when the Palestinian militant group Hamas stormed into Israel on October 7, 2023, killing 1,200, mostly civilians, people and taking more than 250 hostages back to Gaza. — Reuters

MANNING | THE SKIES

The trio said in Nov. they were discussing opening up the project to other countries

UK, Italy, Japan launch joint bid to build stealth jet

London, Dec. 14: Britain, Italy and Japan will set up a joint company to develop, design and build an advanced stealth jet, they said on Friday, moving forward with a major defence project at a time of political turmoil and regional conflict across the world.

The deal comes as European nations are scrambling to build up their militaries following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and calls from US President-elect Donald Trump for higher defence spending, while Japan also wants to

bolster its forces given what it sees as a growing threat from China.

The announcement is a major step forward from an initial agreement in 2022 to develop a common fighter jet, named Global Combat Air Programme (GCAP), and aims to bring to life a successor to the Eurofighter jet, scheduled to go out of service in 2040, and Japan's F-2 fighter.

The new company, in which Britain's BAE Systems, Italy's Leonardo and Japan's Aircraft Industrial Enhancement (JAIEC)

will each hold a 33.3% share, will be headquartered in Britain, while its first CEO will be from Italy.

"Peace must be defended and defending peace has a cost, that's why synergies among governments and companies are fundamental, nobody can make it on its own... and (the GCAP) is a terrific example," Leonardo CEO Roberto Cingolani said at the deal signing. The three countries said in November they were discussing opening up the project to other countries.



Britain, Italy and Japan will set up a joint company to develop, design and build an advanced stealth jet. — AP

Italy's foreign minister said the programme would likely be extended to Saudi Arabia. BAE managing director

Herman Claesen said the new company, expected to be established by the middle of 2025, allows for new entrants. "The door is

open to other partners to join, and that includes Saudi Arabia, but ultimately it is the call of the three governments," he told reporters.

By working together on the project, which in Britain was formerly known as Tempest, the three countries will be able to share the tens of billions of dollars in costs and secure orders for the jet, while looking to international markets for sales so as to boost volumes.

Some analysts have said full Saudi participation

could make it harder for nations to reach a consensus over export policy.

Claesen said it was too early to put a value on the project, but it would generate "hundreds of billions over multiple years" in development, manufacturing and other work.

Meanwhile France, Germany and Spain are working on their own next-generation fighter project, prompting some in the industry to question whether Europe could sustain two decades-long programmes. — Reuters



## INDIAN TOP 10

## NON-FICTION

- THE GOLDEN ROAD**  
William Dalrymple, Bloomsbury, ₹999
- 2024: THE ELECTION THAT SURPRISED INDIA**  
Rajdeep Sardesai, HarperCollins, ₹799
- NEXUS**  
Yuval Noah Harari, Fern Press, ₹1,099
- GODS, GUNS AND MISSIONARIES**  
Manu S. Pillai, Penguin, ₹999
- RATAN TATA: A LIFE**  
Thomas Mathew, HarperCollins, ₹1,499
- TIPU SULTAN**  
Vikram Sampath, Penguin, ₹1,499
- CHHAUNK: ON FOOD, ECONOMICS AND SOCIETY**  
Abhijit Banerjee, Juggernaut, ₹899
- VISHWA SHASTRA: INDIA & THE WORLD**  
Dhruva Jaishankar, Penguin, ₹699
- WHY THE HECK NOT**  
K.P. Singh, Penguin, ₹799
- THE MONEY TRAP**  
Alok Sarna, Pan Macmillan, ₹699

## FICTION

- ORBITAL**  
Samantha Harvey, Penguin, ₹550
- THE FULL MOON COFFEE SHOP**  
Mai Mochizuki, Hachette, ₹699
- HUMAN ACTS**  
Han Kang, Granta, ₹499
- INTERMEZZO**  
Sally Rooney, Faber, ₹699
- THERE ARE RIVERS IN THE SKY**  
Elif Shafak, Penguin, ₹899
- THE CITY AND ITS UNCERTAIN WALLS**  
Haruki Murakami, Harvill Secker, ₹1,399
- AN EYE FOR AN EYE**  
Jeffrey Archer, HarperCollins, ₹499
- THE BOOK OF EVERLASTING THINGS**  
Aanchal Malhotra, HarperCollins, ₹799
- LORENZO SEARCHES FOR THE MEANING OF LIFE**  
Upamanyu Chatterjee, Speaking Tiger, ₹699
- THE LIFE IMPOSSIBLE**  
Matt Haig, Penguin, ₹799

Bahrsons, New Delhi

## Boris cuts corners, omits facts



Sunanda K. Datta-Ray

review

Two days before she died, Britain's Queen Elizabeth II told Boris Johnson, who was holding forth on the difficulty of persuading India to take a tougher line with Russia over Ukraine, that Jawaharlal Nehru had told her in the 1950s "that India will always side with Russia, and that some things will never change."

For Indian readers this is another reminder both of Nehru's gratitude for Soviet help and — more to the point — his tremendous admiration for Moscow's achievement in transforming a backward eastern autocracy into one of the world's two industrialised superpowers. India's first PM hoped that his country, too, would blaze a similar trail. Taking a

very different view of Russians ("Never believe anything Moscow says until it has been officially denied") Johnson recounts the Ukraine anecdote only to illustrate the late Queen's "amazing ability to reassure and to contextualise."

Desperate for a tourist attraction in London's post-Olympic Park, something "to make you say, cor, Doris, look at that", he collared Lakshmi Mittal whom he spied washing his hands in the gents in Davos. The two men hadn't met but knew each other by sight and it took resourceful Boris 45 seconds flat to wheedle a promise out of Mittal to provide the steel for the 376-ft ArcelorMittal Orbit with the world's longest and tallest tunnel slide.

Since *Unleashed* bristles with

such triumphs despite the tone of petulant anger, it has been called "self-serving". The criticism recalls the story about Ronald Reagan saying when asked if it was all right for an actor to become US President, "show me one President who wasn't!" As memorialists address posterity, it's hardly realistic to expect Johnson not to blow his own trumpet. But his version of Paritygate or of Dominic Cummings' activities in this first draft of history should be checked with other accounts and recollections.

Some obvious inaccuracies and infelicities may jar even on casual readers. Far from being a Beijing district, a hutong (not capital H) is an alley serving traditional courtyard homes that are back in fashion. The UK-India trade talks foundered on India's demand for easier visas but there's nary a word about that in four pages on the subject. Saying that John Kerry, the US secretary of

state, is full of beans because Teresa Heinz is his "stunkingly rich wife" may be excused as a poor joke, but the condescending folksiness of "cor, Doris, look at that" is the larger than life Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson, King's Scholar at Eton who read Classics at Balliol, playing down his Turkish roots and playing at being hoi-polloi. At 772 pages, the book is far too long for a prime ministership of just over three years.

Perhaps Johnson seeks another stint as leader of what he calls Global Britain. But far from being his own brilliant creation, Global Britain was what Pax Britannica was all about. In short, Johnson's *Tomorrow is the Yesterday* that Jan Morris evoked so movingly in her empire trilogy.

The writer is a senior journalist, columnist and author

## Stunning glimpse of every slave's heaven



Shashi Warriar

review

For those who have read Mark Twain's masterpiece, *Huckleberry Finn*, this is familiar territory, yet strange. It's mostly *Huck Finn*, with a very few additions, but narrated by Jim, Miss Watson's slave, the James of the title.

James the narrator and Jim the slave are as chalk and cheese. James is cerebral and educated, an expert on keeping the white man happy: he teaches children to translate their language into a pidgin that won't threaten white, less educated masters, and mistresses, for Jim's owner is Miss Watson. Jim is skilled in many ways, unlettered, and not bright.

Miss Watson decides to sell Jim, but not his wife and daughter: Jim gets to know, and decides to leave while he can. He packs some food and takes off for Jackson's Island, in the Mississippi, where he intends to hide until he finds a way to take his family along. On the morning after, he troubles: Huck, unable to bear his alcoholic father's beatings any longer, has fled. He has killed a pig and spread its blood all over their cabin to make it look as if someone has killed him, and takes off for — where else — Jackson's Island. So now there are people hunting for Huck's corpse and Jim the killer. They have no choice: they flee along the river on a raft. James finds that Huck, with his youthful innocence — and incompetence — won't last long on his own, and decides to protect the white boy from all kinds of predators.

They find a sinking houseboat, from which, to Huck's surprise, James rescues a stack of books. They're not quite the books James wants to read, but he thinks any book is better than none, and grabs the whole

stack, reading them one by one, surreptitiously. Shortly after, James encounters John Locke, one of the framers of the American constitution, in a dream: their brief conversation brings out something fundamental in human nature.

They meet two predatory tricksters, one claiming to be the Duke of Bridgewater and the other the King of France, both deprived of their positions by people of evil intent. As they go along, there's some mayhem: a plantation set afire, a murder, but at the end of the journey lies freedom.

Everett writes with verve and wit, and even humour a kind different from Twain's. His mastery of the argot shines through, as does his liberal philosophy and wisdom, to which, no doubt, the history of slavery has contributed much.



JAMES  
By PERCIVAL EVERETT  
Pan Macmillan  
pp. 320; ₹750

Would the happy inhabitants of South America, gentler, richer, and wiser far than the Europeans who colonised them, have felt as James did? Or the Indians who bore the brunt of British rule? Or Asians who felt the whip of the Ottomans? Or, for that matter, women put down by the mere fact that men are stronger? I think so. *James* is a must-read for anyone who's been at the receiving end of slavery or of colonisation by a cruder, coarser, more ignorant, people whose strength lies in their skill with organised violence.

*Shashi Warriar has written fairy tales, thrillers, a semi-fictional biography, satires, and a love story. Teaching is his favourite pastime.*

## ‘India a Begumpura of reason &amp; compassion’

Writer and editor GITHA HARIHARAN, who successfully challenged the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act in 1995 to uphold the rights of the mother, has an idea of India that she explores in her new book, *This Too Is India: Conversations on Diversity and Dissent* (Westland, 2024). In this conversation, she shares a bit of it with *Sucheta Dasgupta*.

Why would you want to centre dissent in your idea of India?

All of us agree that diversity is the ground India stands on. Indeed, to acquire any kind of knowledge, we need to begin with doubt, test received notions. At the day-to-day level, this is what dissent is — asking questions to gain a better understanding of a what a just society may be.

The book is my tribute to the Indian Cultural Forum which many of us from the cultural and academic communities were part of, from 2015 to 2022. I was lucky enough to have many conversations in the process. I chose the 20 conversations in this book because they hang together:

In your conversation with Shashi Deshpande, you open up the *atmabhasa* versus *matribhasa* debate. Where do you locate yourself in this binary? How bilingual (multilingual) are you and have you ever faced any identity dilemmas?

All of us are bilingual if not multilingual in our daily lives, whether we would pass an exam in any of these languages or not. As for linguistic identity dilemmas: I think of the fact that my Tamil mixes Malayalam and Tamil, or that my Hindi is 'Bambayya', as 'normal Indian hybridity', rather than a dilemma!

Two autobiographies, Bama's '*Karukku*' and Eknath Awad's '*Strike a Blow to Change the World*, act as conversation starters in your book. Can autobiography be a more powerful tool of social change than journalism or fiction?

There is an entire body of autobiographies and 'witness literature' around the world which inspires us

with testimony to the courage and resilience of the human spirit. In India, dalit autobiographies are very much a part of this body of literature that each of us should read as part of our education, in and outside classrooms. This includes the work of Bama, Eknath Awad and Aravind Malagatti who are part of this book, but it also includes a long list of work ranging from books by Baby Kamble and P. Sivakami to those by Daya Pawar, Devanoor Mahadeva and Sharankumar Limbale. And this is just to name a few.

I must add though that any genre, whether an autobiography or a novel or a poem, and writing by anyone from any community can carry a call for social change if it speaks powerfully to people and their deepest hopes and dreams.

Your conversation on Mahasweta



Githa Hariharan

## Kyiv replaces commander as Moscow advances fast

Kyiv, Dec. 14: Ukraine's military leadership has replaced the commander overseeing defences in the eastern Donetsk region where Russian forces are making swift advances, a military official said on Saturday.

General Oleksandr Tarnavskiy, 54, was appointed to head the operational and tactical group Donetsk, replacing General Oleksandr Lutsenko, the official at the General Staff told *Reuters*.

Lutsenko was criticised by Ukrainian military bloggers and some lawmakers for failing to stop Russian troops' relentless push toward the strategic Ukrainian city of Pokrovsk. The battles around Pokrovsk, a key logistic hub for Ukrainian military and civilians in the eastern Donetsk region, come at a critical juncture of the war.

Ukraine is on the back foot on the battlefield as Russian troops advance at their fastest pace since the early days of Moscow's invasion in February 2022.

Last month President Volodymyr Zelenskyy replaced several other generals, saying changes were needed. Kyiv is also trying to build ties with US President-elect Donald Trump, whose promise to end the war swiftly has raised concerns in Ukraine that it could be largely



A Ukrainian tank crew member of the 68th Jaeger Brigade smokes next to a Leopard 1A5 tank at the position where they take a break in fighting, near Pokrovsk, the eastern Donetsk region. — AFP

on Moscow's terms.

Ukraine's Khortytsiya military command said on Saturday that Russian troops had destroyed several Ukrainian positions in villages around Pokrovsk, improving their tactical positions after "exhausting battles" and forcing Kyiv forces to retreat.

In its daily report, the Ukrainian military reported a total of 62 combat clashes near Pokrovsk in the last 24 hours.

Ukrainian officials said that about 11,000 people still remain in Pokrovsk, which has been under constant shelling for months and where all critical

infrastructure — electricity, water, and gas supplies were destroyed.

Pokrovsk lies at the intersection of several important roads and rail lines and is just about 20 kilometres away from the administrative border of the Donetsk region.

Moscow has been trying to reach that line since the start of the invasion, as its forces aim to seize all of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Military analysts said that for Kyiv, losing Pokrovsk would also potentially mean having the war closer to central Ukraine and its better-protected rear. — *Reuters*

## UKRAINE SAYS IT STRUCK RUSSIAN OIL TERMINAL

Kyiv, Dec. 14: Ukraine said on Saturday it had attacked an oil terminal in the western Russian region of Oryol overnight, sparking a fire. The governor of Oryol said on Telegram that fuel had caught fire at "a facility" in the region after a "massive drone attack".

The Ukrainian chef of staff said Kyiv's forces had attacked a major oil depot in Stalnoy Kon, about 165 km (100 miles) into Russian territory.

"It's one of the largest oil terminals in the suburbs of Oryol city" and is part of a "military industrial complex" that supplies the Russian army. Russian media showed images, purportedly of the attack, showing clouds of smoke billowing up into the night sky. Oryol regional governor Andrey Klychkov said on Telegram on Saturday that Russian anti-air defences had shot down Ukrainian drones during the attack and the fire had been brought under control at 5:00 am (0200 GMT) although it had not yet been extinguished.

He said there had been no casualties. — *AFP*

## US Marines relocating from Japan

Tokyo, Dec. 14: The partial transfer of US Marines from Okinawa to Guam began on Saturday, 12 years after Japan and the US agreed on their realignment to reduce the heavy burden of American troop presence on the southern Japanese island.

The relocation started with 100 members of III Marine Expeditionary Force stationed on Okinawa moving to the Pacific

island for the initial logistical work, the US Marine Corps and Japan's defence ministry said.

Under the plan agreed between Tokyo and Washington in April 2012, about 9,000 of the 19,000 Marines currently stationed on Okinawa are to be moved out of Okinawa, including about 4,000 of them to be moved to Guam in phases. Details, including the size and timing of

the next transfer, were not immediately released.

The Marine Corps is committed to the defence of Japan and meeting operational requirements to maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific, and it will maintain presence in the region through a combination of stationing and rotating Marines in Japan, Guam and Hawaii, the joint statement said. Japan has paid up to \$2.8

billion for the building of infrastructure at the US bases on Guam, and the US government will fund the remaining costs.

The two governments will continue to cooperate on the development of Camp Blaz, which will serve as the main installation for Marines stationed in Guam. The Marines and Japan Self Defence Forces will conduct joint training in Guam. — *AP*

## WORLD

## IN BRIEF

## BRAZIL'S FORMER DEFENCE MIN. ARRESTED

Rio de Janeiro, Dec. 14: Federal police arrested Brazil's former defence minister Walter Braga Netto on Saturday, the army said, after the retired army general was accused in November of plotting a coup to overturn the results of the 2022 election.

Braga Netto also served as chief of staff for former President Jair Bolsonaro and was his running mate for a failed 2022 reelection bid.

Braga Netto, whom police accused of being a central figure in the alleged coup attempt, has denied any role in the event. His lawyers did not immediately reply to a request for comment.

In a statement that did not name Braga Netto, federal police said it had served two search warrants, an arrest warrant and a precautionary measure.

## ITALY CITIZENSHIP FOR ARGENTINA'S PRESIDENT MILEI

Rome, Dec. 14: The Italian government has granted citizenship to Argentine President Javier Milei, a source said.

Milei is eligible for citizenship due to his Italian ancestors, but the move sparked anger among Italy's opposition politicians who have been fruitlessly campaigning to make it easier for children born in Italy to migrant parents to get it.

A libertarian with dishevelled hair and a rock-star persona, Milei is in Rome to meet Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and take part in a festival run by her far-right Brothers of Italy party. The leaders have established a close relationship, with Milei last month giving Meloni a statuette of himself wielding a chainsaw — a reference to his trademark move when campaigning for the presidency at rallies. Milei's sister Karina also received citizenship, according to ANSA news agency, which said the applications were fast-tracked by Rome.



Georgian President-elect Mikheil Kavelashvili (second right) poses for a selfie at the Georgian Parliament, in Tbilisi, Georgia, on Saturday. — AP

## Hardline critic of West Georgia Prez

Protests over halt to join EU talks continue

Tbilisi, Dec. 14: Georgian lawmakers elected Mikheil Kavelashvili, a hardline critic of the West, as President on Saturday, setting him up to replace a pro-Western incumbent amid major protests against the government over a halt to the country's European Union accession talks.

The ruling Georgian Dream party's move to freeze the EU accession process until 2028, abruptly halting a long-standing national goal that is written into the country's constitution, has provoked widespread anger in Georgia, where opinion polls show that seeking EU membership is overwhelmingly popular.

Kavelashvili, an ex-professional soccer player, has strongly anti-Western, often conspiratorial views. In public speeches this year, he has repeatedly alleged that Western intelligence agencies are seeking to drive Georgia into war with Russia, which ruled Georgia until 1991.

Treason against Georgians' desire to integrate with the West. Today's election represents the clear wish of the system to bring Georgia back to its Soviet roots."

—VEDI KOKHODZE  
Georgian protester

Hundreds of protesters gathered in light snowfall outside Parliament ahead of the presidential vote. Some played soccer in the street outside and waved red cards at the parliament building, a mocking reference to Kavelashvili's sporting career.

Protester Vezzi Kokhodge described the vote as "treason" against what he said was Georgians' desire to integrate with the West. "Today's poll represents the clear wish of the system to bring Georgia back to its Soviet roots," he said. Georgian Presidents are picked by a college of electors composed of MPs and representatives of local government. Of 225 elec-

tors present, 224 voted for Kavelashvili, who was the only candidate nominated.

All Opposition parties have boycotted Parliament since an October poll in which official results gave Georgian Dream almost 54% of the vote, but which the Opposition says was fraudulent.

Kavelashvili was nominated for the mostly ceremonial presidency last month by Bidzina Ivanishvili, a billionaire ex-prime minister who is widely seen as the country's paramount leader and has moved to deepen ties with neighbouring Russia, which polls show many Georgians dislike.

Kavelashvili is a leader of People's Power, an anti-Western splinter group of the ruling party, and was a co-author of a law on "foreign agents" that requires organisations receiving more than 20 per cent of their funding from overseas to register as agents of foreign influence, and imposes heavy fines for violations. — *AFP*



## SHORT TAKES

## Pak pacer Amir retires, again

**Karachi:** Pakistan fast bowler Mohammad Amir on Saturday announced his retirement from international cricket, ending a controversial career which saw him jailed on spot-fixing charges. The 32-year-old came out of retirement earlier this year to play in the Twenty20 World Cup in the United States and West Indies. "After careful consideration I have taken the difficult decision to retire from international cricket," Amir said in a post on X.

"These decisions are never easy, but are inevitable. I feel this is the right time for the next generation to take the baton and elevate Pakistan cricket to new heights," he added. He retired from all forms of international cricket in December 2021 after being dropped from a tour of New Zealand, but continued to feature in franchise T20 leagues across the world. He played 36 Tests taking 119 wickets. He took 81 wickets in 61 ODIs and in 62 T20Is he grabbed 71 wickets. In 2010 he was banned from the sport for five years for spot-fixing during a Test match in England, along with then skipper Salman Butt and Mohammad Asif. — AFP

## Gillespie quits as Pakistan coach

**Karachi:** Jason Gillespie decided to step down from his role as Pakistan's red-ball coach after not being consulted on the selection of the national squad for the upcoming two-Test series in South Africa. A well-informed source, familiar with the developments, revealed that some officials in the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) had created a difficult environment for Gillespie, who just a month ago had even been offered the job of head coach of the white-ball squad "Circumstances were created to make the former Australian player feel alienated in major decisions about the team. First despite his request the board didn't renew the contract of high performance coach Tim Nielsen and then the Test squad for the SA series was announced without consulting him," the source said. The source said that while Gillespie was aware that the board had stripped him of say in the selection matters, he expected as head coach, he would be consulted by the selectors in the selection of any series. — PTI

## Afghan Naib is fined for dissent

**Dubai:** Afghanistan allrounder Gulbadin Naib was on Saturday fined 15 per cent of his match fee for showing dissent at an umpire's decision during the second T20I against Zimbabwe in Harare on Friday. "Afghanistan's Gulbadin Naib has been fined 15 per cent of his match fee for breaching Level 1 of the ICC Code of Conduct during the second T20I against Zimbabwe in Harare on Friday," said the International Cricket Council (ICC) in a statement. "Naib has been penalised for violating Article 2.8 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel, which pertains to "showing dissent at an umpire's decision during an international match." The incident occurred during the 11th over of Zimbabwe's innings when an lbw appeal against Tashinga Musekiwa was turned down off the bowling of captain Rashid Khan. — PTI

## Ex-footballer is Georgia president

**Tbilisi, Georgia:** Former soccer player Mikheil Kavelashvili became president of Georgia on Saturday, as the ruling party tightened its grip in what the opposition calls a blow to the country's EU aspirations and a victory for former imperial ruler Russia. Kavelashvili, 53, easily won the vote given the Georgian Dream party's control of a 300-seat electoral college. Kavelashvili was a striker in the English Premier League for Manchester City and in several clubs in the Swiss Super League. He was elected to Parliament in 2016 on the Georgian Dream ticket and in 2022 co-founded the Peoples Power political movement, which was allied with Georgian Dream and become known for its strong anti-Western rhetoric. Kavelashvili was one of the authors of a controversial law requiring organisations that receive more than 20% of their funding from abroad to register as pursuing the interest of a foreign power, similar to a Russian law. — AP

## DRIZZY DAY

## Rain restricts first day's play to just 13.2 overs

**Brisbane, Dec. 14:** Local hero Usman Khawaja and young Nathan McSweeney displayed sound defensive technique against Jasprit Bumrah but persistent rain played havoc with the opening day of the third Test, allowing only 13.2 overs of play in which Australia scored 28 for no loss against India, here Saturday.

The gloomy weather didn't allow any action after the rain-curtailed first session. The weather in Brisbane indicates a start-stop game throughout the next four days.

Khawaja (19 batting, 47 balls) and McSweeney (4 batting, 33 balls) traded aggression with caution but the senior left-hander still got a couple of boundaries when Mohammed Siraj pitched it short.

While India skipper Rohit Sharma would be happy that Australia didn't score way too many runs, his bowlers did not force the opposition openers to play more deliveries. A lot of deliveries were left from length.

Just when it seemed that Indian attack was getting into its groove, heavens opened up, putting brakes on the bowling momentum.

Bumrah (0/8 in 6 overs) bowled his least potent opening spell of the series so far.

Despite overcast conditions and enough bounce on offer, he didn't bowl too many wicket-taking deliveries in that six-over first spell while Siraj (0/13 in 4 overs) was guilty of occasionally pitching it short.

In case of Bumrah, he rightly pitched it up but there was very little hint of swing on offer due to high humidity and only on few occasions he was able to square up Khawaja while coming round the wicket. The lines that they bowled, drifted towards the leg-side more often than not.

With not many probing questions asked, the first 25 minutes before the steady drizzle stopped proceedings saw Australia reach 19 for no loss.

While McSweeney defended dourly, Khawaja did pull Siraj for a bound-



Indian fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah reaches fields a ball off his own bowling during Day One of the third Test against Australia at the Gabba in Brisbane on Saturday. — AP

ary before the break and added one more after play resumed.

Before the first break, even Bumrah pitched more deliveries back of length, allowing the batters to leave them easily, trusting the bounce of the surface.

Siraj was removed after a three-over initial spell. It was Akash Deep (0/2 in 3.2 overs), who looked good

first up, keeping the ball on the off-stump channel with his stock delivery that would dart in to put batters in uncomfortable positions.

During the hour's play, the highlight was how Khawaja dealt with Bumrah's first spell. He defended well by dropping his bottom hand and trying to play as late as possible. — PTI

## SCOREBOARD

**Australia 1st Innings:** Usman Khawaja batting 19, Nathan McSweeney batting 4, Extras (lb-5) 5. **Total (for no loss in 13.2 Overs) 28.**  
**Bowling:** Jasprit Bumrah 6-3-8-0, Mohammed Siraj 4-2-13-0, Akash Deep 3.2-2-2-0.

## FANS TO GET BACK MONEY FOR 1ST DAY FLOP SHOW

**Brisbane, Dec. 14:** Spectators who left the Gabba frustrated on Saturday will have something to cheer about as they will receive full refunds from Cricket Australia after only 13.2 overs could be bowled on the opening day of the third Test.

The fans, who made it to the venue, will benefit due to a rule that entitles them to get a full refund for tickets when less than 15 overs are bowled during a day's play. This means Cricket Australia was just 10 balls away from potentially saving itself more than Australian 1 million in refunds.

Cricket Australia said that 30,145 fans would receive full refunds since less than 15 overs were completed. The sport's governing body in the country has insurance to cover losses caused by bad weather.

Invited to bat by India, Australia ended the rain-marred day on 28 for no loss.

A steady drizzle had stopped play briefly in the sixth over before a second spell of heavy showers prevented further action on day one.

With the rain refusing to relent, play was finally called off at 4.15 pm local time.

According to CA's ticketing policy, single-match ticket holders are eligible for a 100 per cent refund on their tickets for a full day of a Test match if 15 overs are not completed and also if there is no result.

The five-match series remains locked at 1-1, with India winning the first game in Perth by 295 runs before Australia fought back with a 10-wicket victory in Adelaide. — PTI



India's High Commissioner to Singapore Shilpak Ambule (right) felicitates World chess champion Gukesh Dommaraju in Singapore on Saturday. — PTI

## Singapore laps up Gukesh win

**Singapore, Dec. 14:** Newly crowned chess world champion D. Gukesh was felicitated by the Indian community here on Saturday, marking his historic achievement of becoming the youngest ever to win the title in the sport's history.

The 18-year-old claimed the world title by beating China's Ding Liren in Singapore on Thursday. The two faced each other in a fourteen-game classical chess match.

At a reception organised by the Indian High Commission here, he was felicitated by about 150 members of the Indian diaspora, led by High Commissioner Dr Shilpak Ambule.

Speaking on the occasion, the envoy said, "It was a Gukesh win no matter what others say."

Wishing the young champion many wins in his endeavour, Ambule said, "We are proud of Gukesh and the win."

During the event, the world champion obliged

all diaspora members with personal photos.

"We are proud of his win. It was very magical moment his calm and focussed approach won him the championship," said Shiwani Khirwal, President of Bijhar Singapore, a society of the Bihari and Jharkhand community in the city-state.

All youths should learn to be calm and focus in their endeavours as they approach life long Journey, said the homemaker, who has been in Singapore for 16 years.

Sandhya Singh, a professor at the National University of Singapore, said, "It was wonderful win. The Indian diaspora is proud of the win in the city state he is an inspiration to the global youths."

Kriti Narang, who attended the final match, said, "It seemed to be heading for a draw. But Gukesh scored in the 14 amazing game. We witnessed history." — PTI

## JAVELIN CHOPRA T-SHIRT IN HERITAGE COLLECTION

**Monaco, Dec. 14:** Star Indian javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra is among 23 athletes whose competition artefacts have been inducted into the World Athletics Heritage Collection, currently on display in the online 3D platform of the Museum of World Athletics (MOWA).

Chopra, who became India's first Olympic gold medalist in athletics when he clinched the top podium finish at the Tokyo Games in 2021, has donated the competition t-shirt he wore at the Paris Games this year. With his second round throw of 89.45 metres, Chopra secured the silver medal in Paris behind Pakistan's Arshad Nadeem, who created an Olympic record with a 92.97 metres effort.

Besides Chopra, Ukraine's Yaroslava Mahuchikh, the World Athletics (WA) women's field event athlete of the year, and her fellow Paris Olympic medalist Thea LaFond are among the athletes whose competition artefacts have been inducted into the heritage collection. — PTI

## JUNIOR ASIA | CUP HOCKEY

## Indian girls beat Japan, in final

**Muscat, Dec. 14:** Defending champions India asserted their dominance with a 3-1 victory over Japan to secure a place in the final of the Women's Junior Asia Cup hockey tournament here on Saturday.

Mumtaz Khan (4th minute), Sakshi Rana (5th), Deepika (13th) were on target in the first quarter, while Niko Mariyama scored a consolation goal for Japan in the 23rd minute.

India will take on the winner of the second semifinal between China and South Korea in the title showdown.

It was a one-way traffic for the Jyoti Singh-led India in the opening quarter after Sunelita Toppo foiled Japan's drag-flick opportunity by making a quick run to intercept a threatening ball in the second minute of play.

India took the lead two minutes later by capitalising on a defensive error: A move from the right flank saw the Japanese defenders and goalkeeper

● It was a one-way traffic for the Jyoti Singh-led India in the opening quarter after Sunelita Toppo foiled Japan's drag-flick opportunity by making a quick run to intercept a threatening ball in the 2nd minute.

● India will now take on the winner of the second semifinal between China and South Korea.

advance to intercept the forwards, but the ball was quickly relayed to an unmarked Mumtaz Khan, who deftly pushed it into an empty goal.

A minute later Sakshi Rana was on target, scoring another field goal to put the defending champions 2-0 up.

India's relentless attacks saw the midfield stitch another splendid move in the seventh minute but the forwards fumbled inside the circle. — PTI

## Kiwis squander start vs English

**Hamilton (New Zealand), Dec. 14:** New Zealand steadily squandered a good start, slumping from 172/2 to 231/7 before rallying to 315/9 at stumps Saturday on the first day of the third test against England.

Mitchell Santner hit the last ball of the day for six to reach his fourth test half century and was 50 not out while Will O'Rourke had yet to score. The New Zealand tail added 76 runs in the last eight overs of the day to bring some balance back into the game after the failure of the middle order.

After a 105-run opening partnership between Tom Latham and Will Young, New Zealand enjoyed the rare experience of holding the upper hand over England in a series which so far has been one-sided in favor of the tourists.

England holds an unsailable 2-0 lead, winning the first test in four days by eight wickets and the second in three days by 323 runs. In those seven days, New Zealand only occasionally had a domi-

nant session.

But England won the toss and chose to bowl and by lunch New Zealand was 93 for no loss. At that point it appeared England captain Ben Stokes might have misread or over-estimated the conditions when he decided to send New Zealand in. The pitch at Seddon Park had a slight green hue and warm conditions and puffy clouds seemed to offer the promise the ball would swing.

Instead, there was a firm brown surface under a thin cover of grass and the day warmed quickly, burning off the overcast so that the ball neither seamed or swung to any great extent.

Latham and Young set a sound platform for the New Zealand innings when they put on 105 for the first wicket, the Kiwis' best opening partnership in 28 Tests. — AP

**Brief Scores:** New Zealand 315/9 in 82 overs (Tom Latham 63, Mitchell Santner 50 batting, Matthew Potts 3/75, Gus Atkinson 3/55) vs England.

## SOUTHEE EQUALS GAYLE TALLY OF SIXES IN TEST

**Hamilton, Dec. 14:** New Zealand veteran Tim Southee on Saturday equalled West Indies great Chris Gayle's tally of sixes in Test cricket to move to joint-fourth spot in the all-time list, with his 98th hit over the fence here.

Southee, playing his 107th and final Test for New Zealand, reached the milestone in the match against England at the Seddon Park. Southee hammered three sixes in his quick-fire 10-ball 23 which also included one four as New Zealand reached 315 for 9 at stumps on the opening day. — PTI



Captain Harmanpreet Kaur (right) shares a light moment with a teammate during a training session of the Indian women's cricket team ahead of their T20 match against West Indies at D. Y. Patil Stadium in Navi Mumbai on Saturday. — DEBASISH DEY

## Under-fire Harman leads India against West Indies

**Navi Mumbai, Dec. 14:** Her poor leadership under constant scanner, a beleaguered Indian captain Harmanpreet Kaur will need to quickly pick up pieces from the Australia series debacle as hosts take on West Indies in the opening game of the three-match WT20I series starting here on Sunday.

India have won each of their last eight T20Is against the West Indies in the shortest format since November 2019.

But to maintain this dominating run, India will have to dig deep from rapidly depleting reser-

voirs of both resources and confidence to keep the ship afloat.

It has not been a smooth ride for the Indian skipper whose questionable selection calls during the Australia ODI series left everyone wondering as to how long the national selectors will persist with her despite Smriti Mandhana well and truly ready to take over the mantle.

This is India's first T20 series after the inglorious T20 World Cup exit where the only consolation was a hard-earned win against Pakistan. India after that won an

ODI series against New Zealand at home and were blanked by Australia during the subsequent 50 over series Down Under.

While Harmanpreet's own batting form has been better than many, it is her unimaginative leadership that is causing a lot of problems as the team is still playing archaic brand of cricket across both white ball formats.

The profligate Shafali Verma has been ignored by the selectors once again even though her chances of doing well in T20Is in Indian conditions is way better. — PTI

