THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI MONDAY 30 DECEMBER 2024



NATION 3

Jairam: Cong to begin drive seeking Shah's resignation after Jan. 3



WORLD 6

Azerbaijan Prez Ilham Aliyev claims plane that crashed was shot at from Russian soil

DELHI AGE 11

Nitish Kumar Reddy's dad touches Sunil Gavaskar's feet in emotional meeting



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

Actor Sonu Sood offers prayers at the Golden Temple in Amritsar on Sunday.

MeT predicts very dense fog in Delhi today; AQI is 'poor'

New Delhi: Delhi recorded a maximum temperature of 18°C, two degrees below nor mal, according to the India meteorological department. The minimum temperature stood at 13°C on Sunday. The weather department has predicted very dense fog on Monday, with the maximum and minimum temperatures expected to settle around 18 and 6°C, respectively. The 24hour AQI was recorded at 225 in the "poor" category at 4 pm on Sunday. On Saturday, the city's AQI was in the "moderate" category. Out of 28 monitoring stations, Anand Vihar, Sirifort, and Vivek Vihar reported AQI levels in the "very poor" category, with readings exceeding 300. Full report on Page 2

Official refutes AAP's claim of probe on CM

New Delhi: Refuting AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal's claims that chief minister Atishi was likely to be booked in some cases related to the transport department, additional chief secretary (transport) Prashant Goyal said neither any inquiry has been initiated against her. Full report on Page 2

Exam row: Bihar cops lathicharge protesters

Patna: The Bihar police on Sunday used water cannons and lathicharge to disperse protesters demanding the cancellation of the Bihar **Public Service Commission** exam held here on Dec. 13. The protesters attempted to march towards the CM's residence in the evening. Full report on Page 3



Not for a New Year's party... It's an invitation from our rebels to start a new political party!





Min: 8°C **RH:** 68% **Rain:** 10%

Forecast: Sunny

ASTROGUIDE

Shobhakrut: Dakshinayana Tithi: Margasira Bahula Amavasya till 3.55 am (Tue) Star: Moola till 11.54 pm Varjyam: 10.15 pm to 11.54 pm **Durmuhurtam:** 12.40 pm to 1.24 pm; 2.52 pm to 3.36 pm Rahukalam: 7.30 am to 9 am

SUNSET TODAY 5.34 PM SUNRISE TOMORROW 7.14 AM MOONRISE TOMORROW 7.41 AM MOONSET TODAY 4.50 PM

■ PM calls for end of hate from society in Mann ki Baat show ■ Remembers cinema icons, says India to host WAVES in Feb

Constitution our guiding light, stood every test of time: Modi

SHASHI BHUSHAN NEW DELHI, DEC. 29

Calling the Constitution a "guiding light", Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said it is a mat-ter of pride that it has stood every test of time. Speaking in his monthly radio broadcast "Mann ki Baat", Mr Modi also described the upcoming Maha Kumbh as the "Maha Kumbh of unity" and urged the people to take a vow to banish hate and division from the society at the grand reli-

gious congregation.

In his address, Mr Modi
noted that the next
Republic Day will mark the 75th anniversary of the implementation of the Constitution. He said: "On January 26, 2025, our Constitution is complet-ing 75 years. It is a matter of great honour for all of The Constitution, handed over to us by our Constitution makers, has stood the test of time in every sense of the term. The Constitution is our guiding light, our guide. It is on account of the Constitution of India that I am here today, being able to talk to you."

The Prime Minister mentioned that this year,

November Constitution Day, many activities have commenced that will go on for

a year. "A special website named constitution75.com has also been created to connect the citizens of the country with the legacy of

Let us also make a resolve to annihilate the feeling of division and hatred in the society. If I have to say it in a few words, then I will say... Maha Kumbh ka sandesh, ek ho poora desh and putting it in another way, l will say Ġanga ki aviral dhara, na bante samaj hamara. - Narendra Modi. Prime Minister

THE PRIME Minister noted that this time in Prayagraj, devotees from the country and the world will also be witness to the digital Maha Kumbh

you can read the Preamble of the Constitution and upload your video. You can read the Constitution in myriad languages; you can also ask questions pertaining to the Constitution," Mr Modi said and urged the listen-ers of 'Mann Ki Baat to visit this website and become a part of it.

Talking about the Maha Kumbh beginning from January 13 in Uttar Pradesh's Prayagraj, the Prime Minister noted that the speciality of the Maha Kumbh is not only in its vastness but is also in its

diversity. "There is no discrimination anywhere. No one is big and no one is small. Such a scene of unity in diversity will not be seen anywhere else in the world. Therefore, our Kumbh is also the Maha Kumbh of unity. This time's Maha Kumbh will

also bolster the mantra of Maha Kumbh of unity,' he said.

The Prime Minister urged the devotees who are planning to visit to take a vow to banish hate and division from the society. "Let us also make a resolve to annihilate the feeling of division and hatred in the society. If I have to say it in a few words, then I will say... Maha Kumbh ka sandesh, ek ho poora desh and putting it in another way, I will say *Ganga ki aviral* dhara, na bante samaj hamara," Mr Modi said. The Prime Minister fur-

ther noted that this time in Prayagraj, devotees from the country and the world will also be witness to the digital Maha Kumbh. "With the help of digital navigation, you will be able to reach different ghats, temples, and 'akharas' of sadhus. The same navigation system will also help you reach parking spaces. For the first time, an AI chatbot will be used in the Kumbh event. All kinds of information related to Kumbh will be available in 11

Turn to Page 4

PM: Bastar Olympics a platform for youngsters

New Delhi, Dec. 29: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday lauded the recently concluded Bastar Olympics 2024, saying the event has given a platform for youngsters to hone their talent and build a new Bharat. The Bastar Olympics 2024, held in the eponymous district, was organised organised by the Chhattisgarh government last month. The multi-sport event was aimed at spotting local talents, integrating tribal youths of Naxal-hit Bastar into the mainstream and enhancing relations between people and administration.

Referring to the Bastar Olympics in his monthly "Mann ki Baat" broad-cast, Mr Modi said it was a unique event and a symbol that a change was taking place in the country.

"Do you know that a unique Olympic has started in our Bastar! Yes, a new revolution is coming into being in Bastar through the first Bastar Olympics. Friends, the Bastar Olympics is not just a sports event," the Prime Minister said.

— PTI
■ More on Page 3



plane at Muan International Airport in South Korea on Sunday.

179 dead in S. Korea's deadliest plane crash

■ 2 crew members survive ■ Black boxes of flight found

Seoul, Dec. 29: A passenger plane skidded off a runway at a South Korean airport on Sunday, slammed into a concrete fence and burst into flames after its front landing gear apparently failed to deploy. All but two of the 181 people on board died in one of the country's worst aviation disasters.

The Jeju Air plane crashed while landing in the town of Muan, about 290 kilometres south of Seoul. The transport ministry said the plane was a 15-year-old Boeing 737-800 jet that had arrived from Bangkok and that the crash happened at 9.03 am. A total of 179 people — 85

women, 84 men and 10 others whose genders weren't immediately identifiable — died in the fire, the South Korean fire agency

AGE CORRESPONDENT

Referring to challenges

on the northern and west-

ern borders, defence min-

ister Rajnath Singh on

Sunday urged soldiers to

stay vigilant against both

enemies, who he said are

Besides the external

threats, the defence min-

ister said that the coun-

try also faces challenges on the internal fronts. "In

such a situation, we can-

not be reluctant at all.

Our enemies, whether external or internal, are

always active. In such a

situation, we will have to

keep a close eye on their

activities and take timely

and effective steps against them," Mr Singh said at the Army War College (AWC) in Mhow

cantonment, 25 km from

Indore, Madhya Pradesh.

Mr Singh, accompanied

Washington, Dec. 29: Elon

Musk has received sup-

port from President-elect

Donald Trump on his stance on H-1B visas, a

day after the tech billion-aire vowed to "go to war"

to defend the programme

used to bring skilled for-

Mr Musk, who along with Indian-American

tech entrepreneur Vivek

that foreign workers are

eign workers to the US.

always active.

internal and external

NEW DELHI, DEC. 29

India's foes active,

watch out: Rajnath

DefMin urges soldiers to stay vigilant

▶ THE PLANE was a 15-year-old Boeing 737-800 jet that had arrived from Bangkok and that the crash happened at 9.03 am

said. Emergency workers pulled two people, both crew members, to safety. Health officials said they are conscious and not in life-threatening condition. Among the 177 bodies so far found, officials

have so far identified 88 of them, the fire agency said. The passengers were predominantly South Korean, as well as two. Thai nationals two Thai nationals. Thailand's foreign ministry said its embassy in Seoul received confirmation from South Korean authorities that the two Thai passengers were among the fatalities.

The fire

deployed 32 fire trucks and several helicopters to contain the blaze. About 1,570 firefighters, police officers, soldiers and other officials were also sent to the site, according to the fire agency and transport

ministry.
Senior transport ministry official Joo Jongwan said workers have retrieved the flight data and cockpit voice recorders of the plane's black box, which will be examined by government experts investigate ing the cause of the crash and fire. He said it may take months for investi-gators to complete their probe. The runway at the Muan airport will be closed until January 1, the ministry said.

Footage of the crash aired by South Korean

agency

the Army S t a f f

General

Ùpendra

Dwivedi

and other

senior offi-

Indian

Rajnath Singh cers of the

Army, was on a visit to

the three premier train-

ing institutes of the Indian Army—the AWC, the Infantry School and the Military College of Telecommunication &

Engineering (MCTE) — in

Mhow. During the visit,

he lauded the contribu-

tion of the training insti-tutions of the Indian

Army in making the per-

sonnel proficient in mili-

tary strategies and skills

The defence minister was briefed by the offici-

ating Commandant on

the establishment of the

Advanced Incubation and
Turn to Page 4

'Always in favour': Trump backs

Elon Musk in row on H-1B visas

of warfare.

■ Turn to Page 4

Arunachal CM

vows rules to

stop religious

In a significant develop-

ment, Arunachal Pradesh

chief minister Pema

Khandu has announced

that his government was

framing rules to implement the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of

Religion Act, which

would prohibit religious

conversion by use of force

or inducement or by

It is significant that the

Act was passed by the

state Assembly and

received the President's

assent in 1978 amid

debates on the effects of

missionary activities in

foothill areas on the

"indigenous religions"

of the region. The act

remained dormant since

then as the state had

failed to frame rule to

More on Page 4

state's tribes

implement it.

fraudulent means.

conversions

MANOJ ANAND

GUWAHATI, DEC. 29

Manmohan Singh's ashes immersed in Yamuna river

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA NEW DELHI, DEC. 29

The ashes of former Prime Manmohan Singh were immersed in the Yamuna river, near the Majnu ka Tila gurd-wara, by his family members following Sikh rituals on Sunday.

The ashes were collected from the Nigambodh Ghat by Singh's family members and later taken to the "Asth Ghat" on the Yamuna riverbank near the gurdwara. The former Prime Minister's Gursharan Kaur, their daughters Upinder Singh, Daman Singh and Amrit Singh - along with other rela-

tives, were present at the immersion site. As part of Sikh rituals, As part of Siki Tituals, the family will hold an "Akhand Path" at its official residence at 3 Motilal Nehru Marg on January 1. A "bhog" ceremony, "Antim Ardas" and "kirtan" will be held on January 3 at the Rakab Ganj Gurdwara near the Parliament complex.

Singh passed away at AIIMS Delhi on December 26 due to agerelated medical complications. He was 92.

The former Prime Minister, who ushered in an era of economic liberalisation in the 1990s, was accorded a state funeral at the Nigambodh Ghat on Saturday. President Droupadi Murmu led the nation in paying last respects to the former Prime Minister. "We all will always

■ Turn to Page 4

Baseless, attempt to distract from govt failures: BJP

AAP accuses BJP of altering 12% of votes in Kejriwal seat

SANJAY KAW NEW DELHI, DEC. 29

The BJP's "Operation Lotus" is in action Lotus" is in action, claimed AAP convenor Kejriwal Sunday, alleging that the saffron party is planning to manipulate electoral rolls data by deleting over 5,000 names from the voters' list of the New Delhi Assembly constituency, from where the former chief minister is contesting. He also alleged that the BJP has been orchestrating this operation since December 15 to influence the result of the upcoming state Assembly elections. The BJP hit back, calling the allegation "baseless" and "an attempt to distract from the AAP's failures".

Speaking at a press con-ference alongside Delhi chief minister Atishi and Rajya Sabha MP Raghav Chadha at the party's



AAP convenor Arvind Kejriwal, Delhi chief minister Atishi and AAP MP Raghav Chadha address a press conference in New Delhi on Sunday.

headquarters, Kejriwal said, "The BJP is trying to win this election by any means.

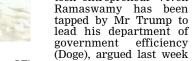
The AAP chief said: "The BJP neither has any CM face nor any candidates. Last time, they tried to remove the names of 11,000 voters from another constituency, from where we won the polls by 5,000 votes. If they had been successful, we would have lost the elec-

tion. The staff of the election offices had even started working on the deletion, but due to the intervention of the Chief Election Commissioner, this was stopped.

In a separate press conference, AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh also claimed that the BJP submitted an application to delete the vote of his wife Anita, who resides in the Turn to Page 4



Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's ashes being immersed at Astha Ghat, Majnu ka Tila, in New Delhi on Sunday.



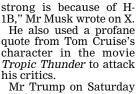




Donald Trump Elon Musk

needed for tech companies like Mr Musk's SpaceX and Tesla. 'The reason I'm in

America along with so many critical people who built SpaceX, Tesla and hundreds of other compa-nies that made America



sided with Mr Musk, saying he fully backs the programme opposed by some of his supporters. "I've always liked the

visas, I have always been in favour of the visas. That's why we have them," Mr Trump told the New York Post newspaper.



SHORT TAKES

2 criminals wanted

in 80 cases nabbed

New Delhi: The Delhi police on Sunday arrested two wanted criminals involved in about 80 cases, including that of armed robbery, after a shootout in west Delhi, officials said. Acting on a tip-off about the duo's location in Madipur, multiple teams were formed to cover all possible exit routes in the area, deputy commissioner of police (west), Vichitra Veer, said. "The suspects were spotted at around 4:30 am. They opened fire when the police asked them to stop, hitting the bulletproof jackets of some police personnel though no one was injured,' the DCP said. The duo sustained gunshot injuries on their legs when the police fired back, and they are being treated at a nearby hospital, the officer said. The accused have been identified as Rohit Kapoor, a known criminal from Dwarka district, and Rinku, a history-sheeter from Khyala in west Delhi, the DCP said.

Delhi youth dies on

1st day of Goa fest

New Delhi: A Delhi resident collapsed and died while attending the Sunburn electronic dance music festival in Dhargal village in north Goa, a police official said on Sunday. The Goa police spokesperson identified the deceased as Karan Kashyap (26), a resident of Rohini in west Delhi. "The incident took place at 9:45pm on Saturday, Kashyap collapsed and lost consciousness and was immediately taken to a private hospital in Mapusa. He died while undergoing treatment," the official said. The post mortem will be carried out at Goa Medical College and Hospital and action will follow if any foul play is detected, the police spokesperson added.

Man who jumped

parole arrested New Delhi: A 46-year-old murder convict who jumped parole during the Covid pandemic was apprehended from Mumbai, the police said on Sunday. Ajay Kumar Tripathi was found working in the Metro city's Ghatkopar area with a food app as a delivery executive. He was serving a life sentence for killing a boy he had kidnapped from northeast Delhi's Bhajanpura area. Tripathi was convicted of kidnapping and murdering a child in 2000 in Delhi. He was serving a life sentence when he was granted parole on July 23, 2021, during the Covid-19 pandemic," a police officer said. On September 19, 2021, when his parole ended, Tripathi did not

JUVENILE WHO STOLE DIAMOND JEWELLERY HELD

return. The police discovered that he had changed his

identity to Akshay Kumar

his three-year-old son.

and moved to Mumbai with

New Delhi: The Delhi police has arrested a juvenile accused of stealing diamond jewellery valued at ₹16.44 lakh from the Karol Bagh area here, an official said on Sunday. The stolen jewellery, including two diamond necklace sets and four diamond earring sets, was taken in a daylight theft in Karol Bagh.

The theft took place on December 11 when an employee was transporting a bag containing 10 diamond necklace sets from one shop to another," said a police officer. "According to the complainant, a group of individuals, including a young boy on a scooter, created a deliberate commotion near Karol Bagh, obstructing the employee's movement.

Amidst the confusion, two diamond necklace sets worth ₹16,44 lakh were stolen," he added. The officer said that a case was reg-istered at the Karol Bagh police station and further investigation was taken up.

The team analysed over 150 CCTV cameras along the route from Karol Bagh to the New Delhi Railway Station, he added. The officer further said that the accused, a 17year-old juvenile, was appre-

hended near the New Delhi Railway Station on December 20. During interrogation, the juvenile confessed to his involvement in • No such inquiry has even been contemplated by transport department'

Govt staff refutes Kejriwal's claims of probe against CM

Refuting AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal's claims that chief minister Atishi was likely to be booked in some cases related to the transport department, additional chief secretary Prashant (transport) Goyal said neither any inquiry has been initiated against her nor any communication in this connection has been received from the vigilance department.

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva on Sunday said that the administrative note clearly stating that there is no investigation ongoing against her in the transdepartment has exposed the false claims of Mr Kejriwal.

The letter by the ACS categorically denied allegations made by the AAP chief that an inquiry is being planned against her in connection with the free bus ride scheme for women.

"My attention is drawn to news reports on television and social media wherein former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal is seen alleging that an inquiry is being contemplated in the transport department implicating your good self. I would like to place on record that no such inquiry has even been contemplated by the transport department," he said in the letter dated December 26.

No communication has been received from the vigilance department, GNCTD, in this regard and the aforesaid claim is absolutely misplaced and misleading, the letter

Mr Sachdeva stated that we have been asserting that the former keeps his colleagues intimidated

edu manifesto

for Jangpura

constituency



AAP MP Sanjay Singh with wife Anita Singh addresses a press conference in New Delhi on Sunday.

BJP, AAP spreading fake schemes, claims Congress

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 29

The Congress on Sunday alleged that both the BJP and the AAP are spreading fake schemes and lies to influence the voters as they are facing an imminent rout in the upcoming Delhi polls scheduled early next year. Delhi Congress chief Devender Yadav said, both

and politically misled for quite some time.

"He tried to spread similar confusion regarding the investigation and the possible arrest of Atishi. However, the transport department's officer has exposed Kejriwal's con-

The BJP leader said it is regrettable that the AAP supremo, for his petty politics, first degraded the dignity of the chief minister's office and is now dragging his successor into controversial mat-

Addressing a press conearlier December 25, Mr Kejriwal, flanked by Ms these parties cheated and deceived people over the past 10 years and now the people are looking at Congress as their only option.

He said that Congress had made Delhi a world class city during the 15 years when the party was in power, but the BJP and AAP, with their mutual bickering and incompetence, destroyed the capital.

Atishi, alleged that the BJP-led Central government is pressuring the investigative agencies to frame Ms Atishi in a fab-

ricated case.
"We got to know from our sources that a meeting was held and the investigative agencies have been ordered by the BJP to arrest CM Atishi in a fake case. They are trying to distract the AAP from campaigning for the upcoming Assembly polls," he claimed.

Mr Kejriwal asserted that the free bus ride scheme for women, a flagship initiative of the AAP government, would con-

BJP trying to get my wife's vote deleted: **Sanjay Singh**

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 29

AAP Rajya Sabha (RS) MP Sanjay Singh on Sunday alleged that the BJP was trying to get his wife's name deleted from the voters list of the New Delhi Assembly constituency ahead of the polls in February.

Addressing a press conference, the senior AAP leader accompanied by his wife Anita Singh alleged that the BJP was trying to delete the names of Purvanchali people set-

tled in Delhi. Mr Singh claimed that two applications were filed on December 25 and 26 for deletion of his wife's name from the voters list of the New Delhi seat represented by AAP

supremo Arvind Kejriwal. He claimed that the BJP was trying to teach him a lesson for raising in the RS the issue of names of Purvanchali voters being deleted from the voters list in Delhi.

The BJP has alleged that the names of Rohingya and Bangladeshi people illegally staying in Delhi were added to the voters list at the AAP's behest. The BJP has accused the

AAP of helping illegal immigrants with documents to use them as a votebank in the elections. Earlier in the day, Mr Kejriwal alleged that applications were filed for deletion of over 5,000 votes in New Delhi since mid December.



AQI is back to poor in city, very dense fog predicted today

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 29

Delhi recorded a maximum temperature of 18°C, two degrees below normal, according to the India meteorologidepartment. The minimum temperature stood at 13°C on Sunday. six notches above the season's average for this time of the month.

The weather department has predicted very dense fog on Monday, with the maxi-mum and minimum temperatures expected to settle around 18 and 6°C, respectively.

The 24-hour Quality Index (AQI) was recorded at 225 in the 'poor' category at 4 pm on Sunday. On Saturday, the city's AQI was in the 'moderate' category.

Out of 28 monitoring stations, Anand Vihar, Sirifort, and Vihar reported AQI lev-

els in the 'very poor'

OUT OF 28 monitoring stations. Anand Vihar, Sirifort, and Vivek Vihar reported AQI levels in the 'very poor' category, with readings exceeding

category, with readings exceeding 300.
The remaining sta-

tions recorded AQI levels in the 'moderate' 'poor' categories, as per the Sameer App. An AQI between 0 and 50 is classified as 'good,' 51 to 100 as 'satisfactory,' 101 to 200 as 'moderate, 201 to 300 as 'poor,' 301 to 400 as 'very poor,' and 401 to 500 as 'severe.'

Cold conditions prevailed in Punjab and Haryana as maximum temperatures hovered below normal.The higher reaches of Himachal Pradesh experienced snowfall, with Kalpa and Kufri recording the highest precipitation.

Sachdeva: AAP trying to register **'illegal voters'**

AGE CORRESPONDENT

The BJP on Sunday accused the Arvind Kejriwal-led AAP of trying to register "illegal voters", fearing defeat in the Delhi Assembly polls. The BJP's city unit chief Virendra Sachdeva said in a press conference that his party would not allow "fake votes" to be cast in Delhi.

"We have provided multiple pieces of evidence but Mr Kejriwal is merely attempting to cover up his 'wrongdoings' by creating confusion among the people," he charged.

Mr Sachdeva charged that applications submitted after December 23, when updating electoral rolls was frozen, reflected Mr Kejriwal's ongoing "manipulation plan" in the 70 constituencies.

नाम परिवर्तन

में कुंवर अभ्युदय पुत्र श्री पीयूष कुमार सिंह निवासी-शिव वास, प्लॉट नं0-26, नवनीत विहार कॉलोनी, सैक्टर-9, इन्द्र नगर, लखनऊ, उ०प्र०-226012 ने अपना नाम कंवर अभ्यदर (Kunwar Abhuday) से बदलकर कुंवर अभ्युदय सिंह (Kunwar Abhuday Singh) कर लिय है। अब से भविष्य के सभी उद्देश्यों के लिए मुझे कुंव अभ्यदय सिंह (Kunwar Abhuday Singh)

Sisodia unveils

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 29

Senior AAP leader Manish Sisodia Sunday announced the education manifesto for stituency ahead of the uncoming Delhi Assembly elections.

The manifesto outlines a comprehensive plan to enhance education infrastructure, improve opportunities for the students and involve the parents and educators in shaping the children's future, said a statement.

Speaking on the importance of quality educa-tion, Mr Sisodia said, 'Quality education for children is the key to the progress of any family. We all aspire our children to grow up to be successful and respected individuals. To achieve this, access to quality education is crucial."

The manifesto focuses on building two fully equipped new schools in Sarai Kale Khan and Hazrat Nizamuddin along with modernising facilities in the existing schools in Feroz Shah Kotla and Hari Nagar

After L-G's order, cops to look into AAP scheme row

The Delhi police has formed multiple teams to identify camps that are allegedly gathering personal details of women in the name of Samman Yojana, a senior official said on Sunday.

ruling AAP in Delhi.

AGE CORRESPONDENT

The Delhi high court has

acquitted a man in a Pocso (Protection of

Children from Sexual

Offences) case, saying the use of the phrase

'physical relations' by a

minor survivor cannot

automatically mean sex-

A bench of justices

Prathiba M. Singh and

Amit Sharma allowed

the appeal by the

accused, who was award-

ed imprisonment for the

remainder of his life,

and observed that it was

unclear how the trial

ual assault.

NEW DELHI, DEC. 29

NEW DELHI, DEC. 29

The move comes after Delhi lieutenant-governor V.K. Saxena ordered an inquiry Saxena against private persons allegedly collecting personal details of women in the name of enrolling them for the proposed scheme of the

'There are 15 police districts in Delhī. We have ordered senior officers to form teams and investigate the entire matter properly. Teams will coordinate and work under the close supervision of DCPs," the senior

police officer said. Mr Saxena ordered the inquiry based on a complaint by Congress leader and party's New Delhi Assembly seat

HC: 'Physical relations' cannot

automatically mean sex assault

there was any sexual assault when the sur-

vivor had voluntarily

The court asserted that

the leap from physical

relations or 'samband' to

sexual assault and then

assault must be estab-

'physical relations,' but

there is no clarity as to

penetrative sexual

gone with the accused.

AGE CORRESPONDENT Dikshit, who recently met Mr Saxena.

in a letter addressed to the chief secretary and police commissioner, L G's principal secretary had said, "Hon'ble lieutenant-governor has desired the chief secretary to get an inquiry conducted through divisional commissioner in the matter of collection of personal details and forms by non-govern-

ment people." It said the police commissioner may direct the field officers to take action as per law against any person found breaching the privacy of citizens by collecting their personal details in the name of enrolling

them for "benefits." AAP volunteers are allegedly registering women under

scheme. On December 25, Mr Dikshit met the L-G and expressed his apprehensions about the Mahila Samman Yojana, under which the AAP has promised to give every eligible woman aged above 18



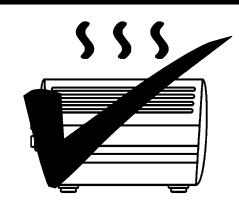
KIND ATTENTION

RESIDENT WELFARE ASSOCIATIONS/BUILDERS/ PROJECT PROPONENTS/ NGOs/ CITIZENS

AVOID OPEN BURNING AVOID AIR POLLUTION

PROVIDE ELECTRIC HEATERS **AND WARM CLOTHING TO SECURITY AND OTHER STAFF**





✓ Avoid open burning of biomass & solid waste

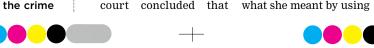
✓ Do not use coal and wood for heating purpose

LET'S PROTECT OUR AIR TOGETHER!

Delhi Pollution Control Committee https://dpcc.delhigovt.nic.in

Scan QR code to Download **Green Delhi App**





lished by evidence and cannot be deduced as an inference. "The mere fact that the survivor is below 18 years cannot lead to a conclusion that there was penetrative sexual assault. The survivor, in fact, used the phrase

court said in the judgement passed December 23. "Even the use of the

words 'samband banaya' is not sufficient to establish an offence under Section 3 of the Pocso Act or under Section 376 of the IPC. Though consent would not matter if the girl is a minor under the Pocso Act, the phrase 'physical relations' cannot be converted automatically into sexual intercourse, let alone sexual assault," it held. The court said the benefit of the doubt ought to be in favour of

Retired IPS officer

A.K. Kunal dies at 74

Patna: Retired IPS officer Acharya Kishore Kunal died of cardiac arrest in Patna on Sunday, his family said. An IPS officer of the 1972 batch, he was the chief of the Bihar State Board of Religious Trust (BSBRT) and founder secretary of Patna's Mahavir Mandir Trust, which runs several hospitals in the state. Kunal. 74. suffered cardiac arrest in the early hours and was immediately taken to a hospital where he passed away around 8 am, his family said. His son Saayan Kunal and daughterin-law Shambhavi Chaudhary, LJP (Ram Vilas) MP from Samastipur, were present at the hospital where he breathed last. Later, his body was taken to his residence at Gusain Tola in Patna where people gathered in large numbers to pay their last respects to the former police officer. Several state ministers, including Shambhavi's father

Mumbai boy found

Ashok Choudhary, also visited

his residence to pay their last

dead inside madrasa

Mumbai: An 11-year-old boy was found hanging inside the kitchen of a madrasa in Malvani area of Mumbai, the police said on Sunday. The police suspect the boy hanged himself from the iron rod of the ceiling using clothes, allegedly after he was scolded by a madrasa teacher for trying to go out to play, a Malwani police station official said. The boy was found hanging on Saturday evening by other students of the madrasa, he said. He was rushed to a nearby hospital where he was declared dead. "It is suspected that he took the extreme step after his teacher scolded him when he was going out to play," he added. The police has filed a case of accidental death and begun probe, the official said. - PTI

Dalit man dies in MP police station

Dewas: The death of a 35year-old Dalit man inside a police station in Madhya Pradesh's Dewas district triggered protests from his kin who alleged murder, while the Opposition Congress on Sunday slammed the Mohan Yadavled Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government for "jungle raj"in the state. Mukesh Longre died on Saturday after being called to Satwas police station here for questioning in a complaint submitted against him by a woman on December 26, superintendent of police Puneet Gehlot said. "While inspector Ashish Raiput was reading his statement, Longre made a noose around his neck with a gamcha, tied it to a window grill in the lock-up and began yanking his neck. The police stopped him and rushed him to a hospital where doctors declared him dead,"

'NO DEVELOPMENT **BUT DESTRUCTION UNDER YOGI GOVT'**

the SP said. - PTI

Lucknow, Dec. 29: Launching a scathing attack on Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Aditvanath, Samaiwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday said there is no development but destruction under the present regime. The former CM said the BJP government is making Uttar

Pradesh number one in borrowing and debt. Escalating his attack, Mr Yadav said the treasury has been emptied. Speaking to reporters at Dr

Ram Manohar Lohia auditorium

at the party office, the Samaiwadi Party chief accused the government of cheating the farmers. "Has the income of farmers doubled?" he asked. Mr Yadav said the "houses of

innocent people are being demolished illegally by bulldozers". "This is not development but destruction. There is no line of development in the hands of the

chief minister, there is a line of destruction ('mukhyamantree jee ke haath mein vikaas kee rekha nahin hai, vinaash kee rekha hai')," he said, according to a state-

ment issued by the Samajwadi Party. Mr Yadav said the BJP government has

not done any development work. - PTI *Unique event as it symbolises a change taking place in country'

Bastar Olympics platform for youth for honing talent: Modi

Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday lauded the recently concluded Bastar Olympics 2024, saying the event has given platform for youths to hone their talent and build a new Bharat.

The Bastar Olympics 2024, held in the eponymous district, was organised by the Chhattisgarh government last month. The multi-sport event was aimed at spotting local talents, integrating tribal youths of Naxal-hit Bastar into the mainstream and enhancing relations enhancing people and between

administration.
Referring to the Bastar Olympics in his monthly "Mann ki Baat" broadcast, Mr Modi said it was a unique event that symbol-

Our youth have gloriously displayed their talent in everysport: Athletics, Archery, Badminton, Football, Hockey, Weightlifting, Karate, Kabaddi, Kho-Kho and Volleyball. Narendra Modi,

Prime Minister

ises that a change taking place in the country. 'Do you know that a unique Olympic has started in our Bastar! Yes, a

new revolution is coming into being in Bastar through the first Bastar Olympics. Friends, the Bastar Olympics is not just a sports event. It is a platform where development and sports are mergyouth are honing their talent and building a new ' he said.

Mr Modi said it was a matter of "great joy" for him that the dream of the Bastar Olympics had come true. "You will also be happy

place in a region that was once a witness to Maoist violence," he said. Chhattisgarh's undivid

to know that this is taking

has now been bifurcated into seven districts, is geographically bigger than Kerala and is one of the Naxal-affected regions in the country.

The PM said the mascots the Bastar Olympics are "Wild Water Buffalo" and "Hill Myna" which reflect the rich culture of district. "The defining Mantra of this sport Maha Kumbh is *'Karsay Ta* Bastar Barsaye Ta Bastar' i.e. 'Bastar will play Bastar will win'," he said.

"This is not just a statistic, it is the proud story of the resolve of our youth. Athletics, Badminton, Footbar, Weightlifting, Hockey, Weightlifting, Karate, Kabaddi, Kho-Kho and Volleyball," Mr Modi

Cong to launch drive after Jan. 3 for Shah's resignation

Seeks public apology over HM's remark on Ambedkar

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 29

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh announced that the party will launch the "Jai Bapu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhaan" campaign to demand the resignation of Union home minister Amit Shah over alleged disparaging remarks against B.R. Ambedkar. remarks The campaign was initially planned after the Working Committee (CWC) meeting on December 26 but has been postponed due to a 7-day mourning period for former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh.

"The campaign, announced in Belagavi, is on hold until January 3. After that, we will hold rallies," Mr Ramesh said.

take place on January 26 at A m b e d -

kar's birth-

Jairam

place, and Ramesh long "Samvidhaan Bachao Rashtriya Padyatra" will commence from January 25, 2025. The Congress is demanding Amit Shah's resignation and a public apology.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge criti-cised the government for not acknowledging Amit remarks about Ambedkar, while general secretary K.C. Venugopal outlined the CWC's resolutions.

These include launching

He added the "Jai Bapu, Jai Bhim, that anoth- Jai Samvidhaan" campaign and undertaking major massive organisational reforms.
The CWC resolutions

expressed concerns over several issues, including India-China disengagement, communal and ethnic hatred, and the ongoing crisis in Manipur. It also urged the government to conduct a socioeconomic caste census, provide income support to the poor, and offer tax relief to the middle class.

The campaign aims to address pressing issues while commemorating Dr. Ambedkar's due to Singh's Postponed Manmohan demise, the campaign will resume on January 3,

CM interacts with farmers in Odisha, visits rain-hit dists

Opp. leader Patnaik will follow suit

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO BHUBANESWAR, DEC. 29

Odisha's chief minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Sunday visited the districts of Nayagarh, Ganjam, and Gajapati to assess the damage caused by unseasonal rains that have severely affected farmers in the state.

The rains, which lasted from December 20 to December 28, have caused widespread crop damage. During his visit, Mr Majhi interacted with distressed farmers to understand the extent of the devastation and to give assurances of support.

The CM was accompa-nied by Odisha nied by Legislative Assembly Speaker Surama Padhy in Nayagarh. During his visit, Mr Majhi assured the farmers that the state government would extend all possible aid to help them recover from the

The situation is critical, with the Opposition BJD recently claiming that at least four farmers have

DURING HIS visit, the chief minister assured the farmers that the state government would extend all possible aid to help them recover from the losses

Meanwhile, deputy CM Pravati Parida visited the Bhagabanpur Panchayat in Dhamnagar block of Bhadrak district to meet with farmers and assess the impact of the rainfall. She was visibly moved by the sight of farmers showcasing their damaged rice crops, which were crucial for the state's food security. Ms Parida reassured the farmers that the Odisha government is committed to providing adequate compensation

for their losses.

In a show of solidarity,
Opposition leader and former CM Naveen Patnaik will visit several districts, including Puri, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Kendrapada, on December 31 to review the damage and support affected



An aerial view of the Sangam area ahead of the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj Sunday. -PTI

Country's progress dipped during Modi regime: Raut

AGE CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI, DEC. 29

Shiv Sena(UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Sunday slammed Prime Minister Narendra Modi, stating that country's progress has declined under the PM regime. "India's economic condition has clearly deteriorated," he

Mr Raut claimed that India has become a sick and crippled economy. In his weekly column "Rokthok" in party "Rokthok" in party mouthpiece "Saamana",

Mr Raut said that even moral values have gone down during the Modi regime. "India's economic condition has clearly deteriorated. Modi had spoken about making India the world's third largest economy of five trillion, but the World Bank proved Mr Modi a liar," the RS MP said.

Claiming that scams frauds increased in the country, the Shiv Sena (UBT) leader said Mr Modi has failed to stop the devaluation of the Indian rupee.

■ Up to Centre to decide if it wants to forcibly evict Dallewal, say farmer leaders

'Following Gandhian way to continue stir'

Jagjit Singh Dallewal's indefinite hunger strike entering its 34th day on Sunday, farmer leaders at Khanauri said they have following Gandhian way to continue their protest and it is up to the government to decide

whether it wants to use force to evict their senior Their statement comes amid the Supreme Court's strong criticism of the Punjab government for

The farmers have been

protesting at the Punjab-Haryana border to press the Centre for several demands, including a legal guarantee for a minimum support price (MSP) for

Speaking to reporters at Khanauri border protest site, farmer leader Abhimanyu Kohar said, 'We want to make it clear that the Centre, right from day one, has been trying to defame and suppress our

THE FARMERS have been protesting at the Punjab-Haryana border to press the Centre for several demands, including a legal guarantee for a MSP for crops

He said a narrative is being built that farmers are stubborn. "Whereas it is the Centre that is adopting such an attitude, not listening to us and not paying any attention to farmers' demands.

Gandhian principles. Our agitations have

proven that, despite enduring so much due to the government's oppression, we have continued to protest in a Gandhian

manner," he said.
"We are following these principles. Now, it is up to the government to decide whether they want to use force to evict Dallewal ji," Mr Kohar added.

He further said the farmers wanted to make it clear arises, the responsibility will lie with the Centre and constitutional bodies.

We also want to appeal to the people that the agitation seeking a guarantee for MSP has reached a decisive stage. We are on the threshold of victory... We must take a strong stand," he said.

Mr Kohar said it was up to the people of the country to decide whether to stay at home or be present in large numbers at the Khanauri Morcha in sup-

■ Cong accuses govt of mismanagement ■ Baseless claims: BJP War of words over Manmohan funeral

New Delhi, Dec. 29: The row over former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's state funeral spilled into Sunday, with the BJP accusing the Congress of levelling "baseless allega-tions" of disrespect and mismanagement against the Centre. The Opposition party had called the government's arrangements for Singh's state funeral a "shocking display" of disrespect and mismanage-

Hitting back, the BJP asked the Congress to stop "politicising" the former Prime Minister's death by levelling "baseless allegations" and accord him the dignity he deserved.

On Saturday, Congress' media and publicity depa-

MoD (defence ministry) has no role in the coverage of functions. In the past as well, only DD has done the coverage..

- Amit Malviya, BJP IT department head

rtment chief Pawan Khera levelled a host of allegations against the Centre on the arrangements for Singh's funeral, saying it was "a shocking display of disrespect and misman-

"No news agencies except DD (Doordarshan) was allowed; DD focused on Modi and Shah, barely covering Dr Manmohan Singh's family," he had said in a post on X.
"The PM and ministers

agement'

did not stand up when the national flag was handed to the widow of the late PM or during the gun salute," he added.

Mr Khera also alleged that Union home minister Amit Shah's motorcade disrupted the funeral procession.

In a point-by-point rebut-tal to Mr Khera's charges, BJP's IT department head Amit Malviya on Sunday accused the Congress of politicising Singh's death.

"It's a shame that the Congress continues to politicise former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh death," he said.

On Mr Khera's charge that no news agencies except DD was allowed in to cover the event, Mr Malviya said, "MoD (defence ministry) has no role in the coverage of functions. In the past as well, only DD has done the coverage... National functions are also covered by DD."

On Mr Khera's charge that Mr Modi and the Union ministers did not stand up when the national flag was handed to Singh's widow, Mr Malviya said the state funeral was done with "full military honours".

'Trump's ops against drug abuse

Protesters lathicharged in Patna over BPSC row; Kishor joins stir JP Golumber, he added. Patna, Dec. 29: The Bihar

police on Sunday used water cannons and lathicharge to disperse protesters demanding the cancellation of the Bihar Service Commission (BPSC) exam held here on December 13.

The protesters, who were joined earlier in the day by Jan Suraaj founder Prashant Kishor at Gandhi Maidan, attempted to march towards the chief minister's residence in the evening, prompting police to take action, district magistrate Chandrashekhar Singh

The protesters also tried to jump over barricades while marching from Gandhi Maidan towards

"The protesters gathered at Gandhi Maidan despite the administration's warning that any demonstration would be considered unauthorised.

The district police has registered an FIR against 21 known persons, including Mr Kishor, his party president Manoj Bharti, city-based futor Ramanshu Mishra and 600-700 unknown persons for organising a gathering

of students at Gandhi Maidan even after denial of permission by the authorities", the DM said. Mr Kishor, who arrived in the afternoon and left after about an hour, criti-

cised chief minister

Nitish Kumar for "going to Delhi on a private visit but having no time for the youth of his own state." He also suggested that

students start a "relay fast" so that fewer people risk their health for the cause. "The CM does not have time to listen to the grievances of the protesting aspirants and has gone to Delhi. The protest will continue till their demand for the cancellation of the exam is not accepted. I am always with the protesting students", Mr Kishor

Some protestors were detained by police near JP Golumber when they refused to vacate the roads. — PTI

Navi Mumbai airport carries out flight test

Likely to be functional by April 17 SONU SHRIVASTAVA

MUMBAI, DEC. 29

upcoming Navi Mumbai International Airport, which is also referred as Mumbai's second and the country's largest airport with a capacity to cater nine crore passengers, is likely to be functional by April

17, 2025. An IndiGo A320 passenger aircraft on Sunday landed successfully at runway 08/26 of the under-construction airport. This has paved the way for obtaining an aerodrome licence to commercial operations, officials said.

tions are likely to begin in mid of May 2025, said Arun Bansal, chief executive officer, Adani Airport Holdings Ltd. (AAHL). The aircraft was welcomed with the tradition-

al water salute by two crash fire tenders. Senior officials of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), Airports Authority of India (AAI), Customs, Immigration, CISF, CIDCO, IMD, BCAS, as

well as AAHL have also

witnessed the moment. "The successful completion of the validation flight is a milestone, and we are one step closer to operationalising the airport," Mr Bansal said.

failed, could have been avoided' MANOJ ANAND GUWAHATI, DEC. 29 "IN ITS first months, the Trump administra-

The US President-elect Donald Trump's disastrous "Iron Tempest" in his first term sets the backdrop to a new book that documents fastgrowing Afghanistansourced drug trafficking internationally.

"In its first months, the Trump administration was confronted with alarming figures show-ing a surge in crystal meth-induced substance abuse in the US. In 2017, an estimated 1.6 million people reportedly used methamphetamine regularly, and around 964,000 people aged twelve or older had a methamphetamine use disorder,'

tion was confronted with alarming figures showing a surge in drug abuse in the US," said Igbal Chand Malhotra in his book

wrote Iqbal Chand Malhotra in his book The Nukes, the Jihad, the Hawala and Cystal Meth.

Mr Trump, incidentally, raised a war cry against illicit drugs in the US during the electioneering for the presidential elections. He has vowed to dismantle the drug traffick-

The Trump administration seemed to have

Directorate (Pakistan's ISI wing) structural oversight of Afghanistan's narcotics industry was unparalleled. Directorate S had defeated the administra-tions of six successive US Presidents, from Reagan to Trump, and

emerged victorious in America's longest war," added Mr Malhotra in the book. "The failure 'Operation Iron Tempest' could have been avoided if the

Trump administration had studied the reasons behind the failure of another anti-drug campaign 'Operation River soned Mr Malhotra,

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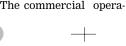


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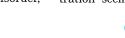
Akhilesh

























SHORT TAKES 4 die after inhaling

toxic gas at Guj unit

Bharuch, Gujarat: Four workers died on Sunday after inhaling toxic fumes following gas leakage at a chemical plant at Dahej in Gujarat's Bharuch district, police said. The victims fell unconscious after inhaling the toxic fumes leaking from a pipe at a production unit of the Gujarat Fluoro-chemicals Limited (GFL) at around 10 pm on Saturday, Dahej police station inspector B.M. Patidar said. They were rushed to a private hospital in Bharuch. Three of them died at around 3 am on Sunday, while another one succumbed at 6 am, the

Malayalam actor found dead in hotel

Thiruvananthapuram: Wellknown film and television actor Dileep Shankar, known

for his varied roles in serials, was found dead in a hotel room here, police said on Sunday. The 50-year-old actor had checked into the hotel. located in the heart of the city, on December 19 for a serial shooting project, police added. He was last seen two days ago by the hotel staff outside his room, a senior police officer said. Repeated calls from the hotel staff and the serial crew went unanswered, prompting them to inform the police. — PTI

Avalanche warning in Chamoli district

Dehradun: The Defence **Geoinformatics Research** Establishment, a laboratory of the Defence Research and **Development Organisation,** on Sunday issued an orange alert for an avalanche at an altitude of over 3,000 metres in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district over the next 24 hours. The alert is for a period of

24 hours from 5 pm on Sunday to 5 pm on Monday. Uttarakhand State Disaster Management Authority Joint chief executive officer Mohammad Obaidullah Ansari wrote to the district magistrate of Chamoli and drew his attention to the DGRE's orange alert (level 3) for the area. - PTI

Manmohan Singh's ashes immersed in Yamuna river

■ Continued from Page 1

remember Manmohan Singh Ji's service to the nation, his dedication and his simplicity," the Congress said on its official X nangle while sharing pictures of the immersion. However, BJP lea

Manjinder Singh Sirsa lamented that there was no one from the Gandhi family when the ashes of the former Prime Minister were immersed.

"It's a sad moment for all of us. However, it's true that no one was there from the Gandhi family today (during the immersion of Singh's ashes)... Today, when there was no camera, there was no one from the Congress. This is a sad thing. Manmohan Singh is highly respected," Mr Sirsa said.

■ Snow in higher reaches of HP ■ Cold day in Haryana, Raj

Kashmir limps back to normal a day after heaviest snowfall

Normality was returning operations resuming and several roads cleared for traffic on Sunday, a day after the season's heaviest snowfall threw daily life out of gear, while cold conditions prevailed in Punjab and Haryana as maximum temperatures hovered below normal.

The higher reaches of Himachal Pradesh experienced snowfall, with Kalpa and Kufri recording the highest precipitation. Narakanda, Keylong and other places in the state's reaches received snow early on

Sunday. In Rajasthan, some places in the state's eastern parts received light rain while dense to very dense fog was recorded at many places



Traffic jam near Solang Nala as tourists rush to Manali after fresh snowfall on Sunday

Some places also witcold-day condinessed

Jammu Kashmir government deployed men machinery to restore services following Saturday's heavy snowfall that disrupted connectivity. snowfall, being dubbed as among the heaviest in recent memory, began on Friday evening and continued into Saturday. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah commended the

efforts of various departments involved in the restoration process.

In a post on X, he praised

effectively managing outages. He also lauded the roads and buildings department for its effective snow clearance opera-

By Sunday morning, air traffic at the Srinagar International Airport had resumed, with Airports Authority of India offi-cials confirming that operations were back to normal following safety checks and runway clearance. The Srinagar-Jammu national highway, crucial for connecting the valley with the rest of the country, was also reopened for vehicular traffic after a day's closure.

commuters However, were advised to exercise particularly caution, Banihal and between Qazigund, where roads remained slippery. -PTI

Arunachal to implement Act to curb religious conversions

Act remained dormant since state received Prez's assent in '78

MANOJ ANAND GUWAHATI, DEC. 29

In a significant development, Arunachal Pradesh minister Pema Khandu has announced that his government was framing rules to imple-ment the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, which would prohibit religious conversion by use of force or inducement or by fraudulent means

It is significant that the Act was passed by the state Assembly and received the President's assent in 1978 amid debates on the effects of missionary activities in foothill areas on the state's tribes and "indigenous religions" of the region. The act remained dormant since then as the state had failed to frame rule to implement it.

Mr Khandu made this

THE ACT defined indigenous faith as religions, beliefs, observances, customs, etc as have been found sanctioned, approved, performed by indigenous communities of AP from these communities have been known

a programme organised by the Indigenous Faith and Cultural Society of AP (IFCSAP) in Itanagar on Friday, Mr Khandu said that the Act would play a significant role in "preserving Arunachal's indigenous faith and cultures' Indicating that on many

occasions issues came up but the state failed to frame the rule to implement the Act. In fact, in 2018, Mr Khandu even stated at an event organised by

the AP Catholic Association that the gov-

ernment was considering the repeal of the Act. He had been reported as saying then that the law "could undermine secularism and is probably targeted towards Christians"

In response to a petition filed by former IFCSAP general secretary Tambo Tamin against the state government for failing to frame the requisite rules for over 45 years after the enactment of the law, the Itanagar bench of the Gauhati high court had in September directed the state to finalise draft rules for the Act within six months from the order.

The 1978 Act defined "indigenous faith" as religions, beliefs, observances, customs, etc "as have been sanctioned. found approved, performed by the indigenous communities of Arunachal Pradesh from these communities have been known..

Bengal DGP hints at BSF 'lapses' at border vigil

RAJIB CHOWDHURI KOLKATA, DEC. 29

West Bengal Police chief Rajeev Kumar indirectly pointed fingers at the Border Security Force (BSF) on Sunday over "lapses" in tackling infiltration Bangladesh in wake of the unrest in the neighbouring country.

He said, "Bengal is the only state having international borders with three countries. Border management is done by BSF. In spite of that, there have been a lot of lapses. People have crossed over Whenever we get infor-

mation about it, we share it with BSF."

Mr Kumar added, "We sensitise them and will Inspite of that, some cross over. Our specialised teams have been very effective in neutralizing, arresting and sending them where they deserve to be. We

are staying alert." He also took credit for the recent arrest of a suspected member of a Jammu and Kashmirbased terror group from Canning in South 24 Parganas where he had been hiding.

As per state DGP, "The accused was traced and tracked on the basis of information provided by us. Later we caught him and handed him over to the J&K police. Our record in tackling terror has been good in the past. It's going good. We will try to maintain



Participants from different parts of West Bengal during the 65th All Bengal Bratacharitraining camp in Kolkata on Sunday. Bangladeshi nationals are not participatingthis year due to the ongoing crisis in the country. - PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

■ Loaded in GPS-enabled trucks with spl containers

40 yrs after Bhopal gas tragedy, 337t toxic waste set for disposal

CHOUDHURY BHOPAL, DEC. 29

Exactly 40 years and 26 days after the Bhopal gas 337 tonnes of toxic waste from the Union Carbide factory site here to the incineration facility in Pithapuram in Dhar district in Madhya Pradesh

The hazardous waste, stored in the premises of the Union Carbide factory here, closed around two decades ago, were being packed and loaded in a dozen GPS enabled trucks with specially reinforced containers since Sunday morning for transportation to the Pithapuram industrial waste management plant through a 'Green Corridor' created for the purpose, for dis-

toxic waste from the site to an incineration facility comes in the wake of the recent directive by the Madhya

Pradesh high court to complete the process by January 6 "The shifting of the 337

tonnes of the toxic waste from the Union Carbide plant to the incineration facility at Pithapuram will begin by Monday morning", Bhopal gas tragedy relief and rehabilitation director Swatantra

newspaper. According to him, workers specially trained for handling toxic substances have been assigned the task of packing the haz-ardous waste and loading

Kumar Singh told this

THE MOVE to shift the them in the containers. They have been provided with the PPE kits.

A team of doctors has also been deployed at the site to provide medical assistance.

Incineration and officials of Central and state pollution control boards were present on tne occasion to monitor the process of packing loading the toxic

waste in the containers.
"We are ensuring a proper and full-proof method of packing and loading the toxic waste which is of international standard", Mr Singh said.

The move to shift the toxic waste from the site to an incineration facility comes in the wake of the recent directive by the Madhya Pradesh high court to complete the process by January 6.

Jilted lover, 21, blows himself up in Mandya

M.B. GIRISH BENGALURU, DEC. 29

incident A tragic occurred Nagamangala, Mandya district, early Sunday when a 21-year-old man, Ramachandru, ended his life by detonating gelatin sticks near his

Kalenahalli. The explosion happened around 3 a.m., leaving the area in

girlfriend's house in

Ramachandru, a truck driver and resident of Basaveshwara Nagar, used gelatin sticks, commonly employed in quarries, to blow him-self up with a deton

He was reportedly in an inebriated state at the time of the incident. The deceased had been in a relationship with a

AGE CORRESPONDENT

A 10-year-old boy, Sumeet

Meena, was pulled out of

a 140 ft-deep borewell in

Pipaliya village, Guna district, Madhya Pradesh,

after a 16-hour rescue

operation on Sunday

extensive efforts, the boy

could not be saved.
Sumeet fell into the borewell on Saturday

afternoon while flying a

kite. His family began

searching for him when

he went missing and later

discovered him trapped at a depth of 39 ft in the

Despite the

BHOPAL, DEC. 29

morning.

arrest a year ago under the Prevention of Children from Sexual Offences (Pocso) Act after he eloped with her. Following six months was released on bail but struggled to reconnect with the

His inability to do so is believed to have driven him to take the extreme

The explosion scat-tered his body into multiple pieces, awakening villagers, who alerted the police. Authorities are investi-

gating how Ramachandru obtained the gelatin sticks used in

A case has been registered, and further investigations are ongo-

borewell. They immedi-

ately informed the police.

began around 6 pm or

Saturday, two-and-a-half

hours after the incident.

Teams from the National

Disaster Response Force

Response Force joined the

effort, digging a parallel

40 ft-deep pit to reach the

boy. Sumeet was pulled

out at approximately 9:30

local hospital but was

declared dead by doc-

tors," Guna district col-

lector Satyendra Singh

"He was rushed to a

am on Sunday.

Disaster

State

and

The rescue operation

After 16 hrs, boy pulled out

of MP borewell, found dead

After days of pursuit, tiger from Odisha caught in WB

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO BHUBANESWAR, DEC. 29

A major wildlife operation culminated successfully on Sunday when Zeenat, a tigress that strayed from Odisha's Similipal Tiger Reserve into West Bengal, was tranquilised in Bankura after multiple attempts. Prem Kumar Jha, principal chief conservator of forests (PCCF), confirmed the safe capture.

Currently housed in a cage, Zeenat will be transported to Kolkata's Alipore Zoo for a detailed examination. "The tigress is safe and under control. Following the check-up, she will be returned to Similipal. We expect her back in the reserve by Monday morning," Mr Jha stated.

The tranquilisation was carried out at 4 am without complications, with the tigress falling unconscious shortly after. Zeenat will remain under observation to ensure her health before being released back into ner naturai nabitat in Similipal.

Zeenat's journey began last month when she was relocated to Similipal Maharashtra's from Tadoba-Andhari Tiger enhance Reserve to diversity. However, she wandered over 120 kilometers, traveling through forests at the tri-junction of Odisha, West Bengal, and Jharkhand in search of territory, sparking concerns among local vil-

BJP altering votes: AAP

■ Continued from Page 1 New Delhi Assembly constituency.

Mr Singh, who was accompanied by his wife, alleged that the BJP is trying to delete the names of Purvanchali people settled in Delhi. Mr Singh and his wife belong to eastern Uttar Pradesh. Purvanchalis are people from eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar settled in Delhi for decades, and form a significant chunk of voters in the

Mr Singh claimed that two applications were filed on December 25 and December 26 for deletion of his wife's name from the voters' list of the New Delhi seat. He claimed that the BJP is trying to teach him a lesson for raising in the Rajya Sabha the issue of names of Purvanchali voters being deleted from the voters list in Delhi.

Earlier in the day, Mr Kejriwal, sharing some data from the New Delhi constituency at the press conference at the AAP headquarters, said, "The BJP started this Operation Lotus and in the last 15 days, applications for deleting nearly 5,000 voters have been submitted, while applications for the addition of 7,500 names have also been received. This is clear manipulation of almost 12 per cent of votes. What is the need of the elections if such kind of activity is going on? They did this in Haryana and Maharashtra, but we will not let them do this in Delhi.

Mr Kejriwal said that the total number of voters in the New Delhi Assembly constituency is 106,873, as per the voter list published on October 29 after the summary revision, which was conducted between 'Operation Lotus has now

reached my constituency. They are attempting to manipulate the electoral rolls to change the election outcome," he alleged.

The AAP supremo said: "This kind of manipulation undermines democracy. We appeal to the Election Commission to continue its strict monitoring to prevent such malpractice." He also wrote a letter to the Election Commissioner in this matter seeking details of individuals (objectors) who have submitted more than five applications for deleting names since October 29, 2024.

Mr Kejriwal said: "Specifically, we seek either their EPIC details or copies of Form 7 filed by them. I have enclosed the list of such individuals who have filed more than 5 forms from October 29 to December 25. Who are these individuals who are so keen to get names of voters deleted at such a large scale? At whose behest are they operating? What are their intentions?... To safeguard the integrity of the electoral process, I strongly urge that no further voter deletions be carried out in the constituency unless it is a case of migration (i.e. Form

8) and a death case.. Responding to Mr Kejriwal's charges, the Delhi chief electoral officer said all objections and claims regarding the draft electoral roll were addressed by December 24. The final roll will be published on January 6, 2025. The Delhi CEO said the draft electoral roll was published on October 29 and all objections to the same were disposed of

by December 24.

179 dead in S. Korea's deadliest plane crash

■ Continued from Page 1

television channels showed the plane skidding across the airstrip at high speed, apparently with its landing gear still closed, overrunning the runway and colliding head-on with a concrete wall on the outskirts of the facility, triggering an explosion. Other local TV stations aired footage showing thick plumes of black smoke billowing from the plane, which was engulfed in flames.

Lee Jeong-hyeon, chief of the Muan fire station, told a televised briefing that the plane was completely destroyed, with only the tail assembly remaining recognisable among the wreckage. Lee said that workers were looking into various possibilities about what caused the crash. including whether the aircraft was struck by birds. Lee said.

Transport ministry officials later said their early assessment of communication records show the airport control tower issued a bird strike warning to the plane shortly before it intended to land and gave its pilot permission to land in a different area. The pilot sent out a distress signal shortly before the plane overshot the end of the runway and skidded across a buffer

zone before hitting the wall, the officials said.
Thailand's PM, Paetongtarn Shinawatra expressed deep condolences to the families of those affected by the accident in a post on social platform X. Ms Paetongtarn said she ordered the ministry of foreign affairs to provide assistance immediately. Kerati Kijmanawat, the director of airports of Thailand, confirmed in a statement that Jeju Air flight 7C 2216 departed from Suvarnabhumi airport with no reports of abnormal conditions with the aircraft or on the runway. Jeju Air in a statement expressed its "deep apology" over the crash and said it will do its "utmost to manage the aftermath of the accident." In a televised news conference. Kim E-bae Jeju Air's president, bowed deeply with other senior company officials as he apologised to bereaved families and said he feels "full responsibility" for the incident.

India's foes active, watch out: Rajnath

■ Continued from Page 1

Research Centre and the various MoUs towards enabling absorption and transformation of technologies.

Singh visited the Army Marksmanship Unit to witness their contribution towards national sports. He also visited the Infantry Museum, where he was briefed on the history of the Infantry as well as the induction of mod-

ernised equipment into the Infantry. The defence minister also interacted with all ranks of the three institutes during the Barakhana organised at the AWC. Addressing the troops, he commended the courage and vigilance of the Indian Army personnel in safeguarding the borders and ensuring national security.

"Your dedication and devotion to duty are an inspiration to all of us. It is due to your hard work and commitment that our country and its borders are becoming increasingly secure and strong," he said. Mr Singh asserted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government's aim is to make India a developed & self-reliant nation by 2047 and the armed forces will play a crucial role in achieving this goal. "You are the protectors of our borders and the forerunners in nation building. I am sure that you will continue securing our borders with courage & dedication and contribute to realising the vision of Viksit Bharat by 2047," he said.

Earlier in the day, Mr Singh visited the Bhim Janm Bhoomi, a memorial dedicated to B.R. Ambedkar in Mhow and paid homage to the Bharat Ratna and the architect of the Indian Constitution at his birthplace. He described B.R. Ambedkar as an epitome of selfless service, who dedicated his life to social equality and empowerment.

Constitution our guiding light, stood every test of time: Modi

■ Continued from Page 1

Indian languages through the AI chatbot," he said. In his radio address, the Prime Minister announced that India will host the "World Audio Visual Entertainment Summit" (WAVES) for the first time from February 5 to 9, next

Comparing the WAVES to global events like Davos, where the world's economic giants gather, the Prime Minister highlighted that a great opportunity is on the way to showcase India's creative talent to the world.

"Giants from the media and entertainment industry, as well as creative minds from across the globe, will gather in India. This summit is an important step towards making India a hub of global content creation," he Mr Modi emphasised the piv-

otal role of young creators in the preparations for WAVES, reflecting the dynamic spirit of India's community expressed pride in the enthusiasm of the country's youth and their contribution to the burgeoning creator economy, a key driver as India advances toward becoming a \$5 trillion

economy.
The Prime Minister said: "Whether you are a young creator or an established artist, associated with Bollywood or regional cinema, a professional from the TV industry, an expert in animation, gaming, or an

innovator in entertainment technology, I encourage you to be a part of the WAVE Summit." He also urged all stakeholders in the entertainment and creative industries to actively participate in the WAVES.

The Prime Minister also remembered four icons of Indian cinema — Raj Kapoor, Mohammed Rafi, Akkineni Nageswara Rao (ANR) and Tapan Sinha — in their birth centenary year and stated that these personalities have accorded Indian cinema recognition at the world level.

Mr Modi said: "Raj Kapoor Ji introduced the world to the soft power of India through films. Rafi sahab's voice had that magic that touched every heart. His voice was amazing. Be it devotional songs, romantic songs or sad songs, he brought every emotion alive with his voice. His greatness as an artiste can be gauged from the fact that even today the young generation listens to his songs with the same passion—this is the distinct mark of timeless art.

"Akkineni Nageswara Rao Garu has taken Telugu cinema to new heights. His films presented Indian traditions and values very well. Tapan Sinha Ji's films gave a new vision to society," Mr Modi said, adding that their films always carried the message of social consciousness and national unity, and the lives of these personalities are an inspiration for our entire film industry.

Subhani

ME WILLED THE SANTA CLAUS RALLY.

WILL WE AT LEAST HAVE A NEW YEAR'S RALLY?

Sunil Gatade

was facing flak over the

Adani issue. "H" is for Haryana, where the Assembly elec-

tion changed the mood in the ruling BJP after an

unexpected hat-trick in

power.
"I" is for the INDIA bloc.
From the "United We
Stand" position before the

Lok Sabha polls, the INDIA

bloc looked rudderless by

the year-end, with Mamata Banerjee pitching herself

for the alliance leadership. "J" — Former CJI D.Y.

tenure ended recently, was

the most controversial of

iudges in the year gone by

for his actions and inac-

tions. Jagan Mohan Reddy

lost power in Andhra

Kejriwal, the former Delhi

CM jailed over the alleged

excise scam, who faces the

most ticklish Assembly

New rules give them more

powers ahead of Assembly

elections, including over

key appointments and ser-

Opposition says won't be

good for democracy. In

J&K, the BJP, which made

a huge issue over Article

370's scrapping, failed to

get a single seat in the Kashmir Valley.

(Narendra) Modi. After the

Lok Sabha setback, the PM

looked off colour. But the

Maharashtra and Haryana

verdicts saw him back as

the "monarch of all I

M is also for Manipur,

which was on the boil for a second year. The PM faced attacks for not visiting the

M is for Madhavi Puri

Buch, too, the controver-

sial Sebi chief who faced

attacks for allegedly shield-

'N" is for Nitish Kumar

Naidu, who became the

PM's obedient crutches

Chandrababu

northeastern state.

ing Gautam Adani.

"M" is undoubtedly for

which

"L" is for lieutenant-gov-

is

poll in the New Year.

ernors (Delhi and

for Arvind

Chandrachud,

Pradesh.

n the year gone by, "A" definitely stands

for Gautam Adani,

businessman was in the news, national

and international, for all

the wrong reasons. No other A, including the Ambanis, could replace

A is also for Dr B.R.

Ambedkar. As the year

rings out, there was a huge

controversy over a remark by Amit Shah on the archi-

"B" is for the BJP, which

remained its aggressive

best despite failing to get a Lok Sabha majority, damaging Brand Modi. Its Haryana and Maharashtra

victories, which left its

opponents perplexed, brought it back into the

political game with a bang. "C" stands for the

Congress. It was a roller-

coaster ride for the party

and its leader, Rahul

Gandhi, who nearly made a

polls, becoming Leader of

the Opposition. By the

yearend, it was a different

story as allies started ques-

tioning his leadership after

he lost crucial states.
"D" undoubtedly stands

for Jagdeep Dhankhar, Raj-

ya Sabha Chairman, who

the Opposition felt was the

main "disruptor". He has the dubious distinction of

being the first vice-presi-

dent against whom a no-

trust motion was initiated.

"E" is for the Election

Commission, which failed to cover itself with glory in the Lok Sabha and some

state polls. EVMs were

sought to be made the

manipulated machine by

the Opposition.
"F" stands for Fadnavis.

The fall and rise of the BJP

leader as the new

prised friends and foes

alike and could have reper-

"G" is for George Soros

and his alleged links with

the Congress, who was tar-

geted by the BJP, which

Maharashtra CM

cussions far beyond.

tect of the Constitution.

controversial

An 'A to Z' guide to India's

politics in the year gone by

'A' definitely stands

for Gautam Adani,

the controversial

businessman who

international, for all

the wrong reasons.

the Ambanis, could

No other A, including

claim that distinction.

after he failed to get a

majority. They dashed the hopes of Modi detractors as

they seemed to be chanti-

ng: "Dal roti khao, Prabhu

"O" is for Om Birla, the

controversial Lok Sabha

Speaker, who was hand-picked by Mr Modi to con-

tinue running the Lower House. The Opposition's

against the Rajya Sabha

Chairman seems to have unnerved him a bit.

O is also for Odisha:

Navin Patnaik, in power

for 25-odd years in the

state, lost power to the BJP,

mainly because he depend-

ed upon a controversial

made mincemeat of the

ke gun gao".

no-confidence

bureaucrat.

was in the news,

national and



THE ASIAN AGE

30 DECEMBER 2024

Bickering over memorial for Manmohan shameful

unseemly controversy around the spot where former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was to be cremated and a memorial for him was to be built must end at the earliest, lest it be seen as a great affront to the memory of a man who always kept the interest of the nation above all else and never engaged in self-promotion.

The Congress had demanded that the government earmark a space for the cremation of the former Prime Minister so that a memorial can be built for him at the same spot. This had been the practice in the case of the father of the nation and some of the former Prime Ministers. However, it must also be recalled that the UPA government headed by Dr Singh had in 2013 decided to scrap the practice of building separate memorials for national leaders and build a common one for all instead. Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee was cremated at the Rashtriya Smriti Sthal

Despite the 2013 decision and the events that followed, the Congress Party to which Dr Singh belonged presented a demand before the Union government for allotting a separate place for his cremation where a memorial can be built later. The government in fact accepted it, too, even though it con-

Whipping up passions based on invented stories of insult to the name of a man who was dignity personified in his private and public lives is really the worst form of tribute to his legacy

tradicted the 2013 decision. As per the government's account, it then decided upon Nigambodh Ghat as the place for cremation in consultation with Dr Singh's family while making it known to the public and the Congress leadership that it will allot a site in the capital for the construction of an appropriate memorial for the former Prime Minister.

Why the choice of Nigambodh Ghat, instead of the Rashtriya Smriti Sthal where Vajpayee had been laid to rest, is a question that then begs an answer from the government.

Unwilling to accept the government's decision, the Opposition party now sees in this an attempt by the BJP to deliberately insult the memory of the country's "first Sikh Prime Minister". The party found fault with the way the last rites of Dr Singh were conducted which served

as another excuse for it to raise the volume of its protests. Nevertheless, whipping up passions based on imagined slights and invented stories of insult to the name of a man who himself was dignity personified in his private, professional and public lives is really the worst form of tribute that can be paid to his legacy. The Congress must immediately desist from further muddying waters. The party must also remember the treatment it itself had meted out to P.V. Narasimha Rao, its own leader and another Prime Minister. After his death, Rao's body was not even allowed inside the AICC headquarters, never mind that he was an elected president of the top decision-making body of the Congress.

In the case of Dr Singh, he should be remembered for the creative contribution he has made to advance the collective intelligence of this country, and his specific contributions as an economist and an expert in public finance. The government and the Congress Party should now bury the hatchet, and try and celebrate the memory of one of India's tallest sons instead in a fitting manner together.

MT: A writer for all time

The renaissance that started a century ago had almost dismantled the feudal remnants in Kerala when M.T. Vasudevan Nair published his first novel, *Nalukett*, in 1958. All of 24 then, MT, as he is known, depicted the crumbling joint family system that thrived in complex architecture in the novel, and ended it with the protagonist telling his mother, a victim of the very same system, that they should demolish the old structure and build a small one that will have "light and wind".

MT went on to become one of the most celebrated, awarded and translated Malayalam writer, editor, filmmaker and script-writer and impacted the lives of at least four generations of Malayalees through his creative contributions. As a writer and as the editor of the most popular Malayalam literary weekly Mathrubhumi, he shaped and nurtured their sensibilities and sensitivities. That he still is one of the most read by the young generation points to his ability to connect with human lives, irrespective of the times they live in. The and Padma Rhushan awards among the countless ma received, are just a pointer to the Colossus-like presence he has had in the Indian

MT's contribution to the then nascent Malayalam film industry must not go unnoticed. He directed six movies, all of which got critical and mass acclaim; his directorial debut Nirmalyam won the national award for best feature film in 1974 and its lead actor P.J. Antony bagged the state award. He scripted the story and screenplays for more than 60 films, several of them got him state and national awards. The characters he penned also got several leading actors, including Mammootty and Mohanlal, awards at the national and state levels.

MT, as he started, remained a staunch supporter and promoter of the liberal and progressive values in society and abhorred the traction communal forces have gained in the nation's polity as time went by. Though a man of few words, MT missed no occasion to warn against the new-found change. He did not mince his words while talking to people in power even if they belonged to the same ideological spectrum as his, as he remained irreverent to power till he breathed his last. In his passing, the country has lost a proponent of the values the Constitution upholds at a time when they are increasingly being undermined.

THE ASIAN AGE

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ust before sitting down to write this column, I was listening to a History Extra podcast about the 'history behind the headlines' of 2024. It was a conversation between Oxford and Harvard academics Hannah Skoda and Rana Mitter,

passing reference to the genocide in Gaza or its antecedents.

What kind of oblivion do such intellects reside in, where they can reference the Nuremberg-adjacent Tokyo trials while ignoring this year's Israel-focused proceedings at The Hague? And how can Christmas be celebrated today without any recognition of the daily atrocities taking place in the land where so many of the traditions on which the Abrahamic faiths are based originated?

who spoke for 45 minutes without even a

And then there are the children, supposedly the chief beneficiaries of Yuletide, who are being robbed of their futures. Both the dead and the living. Earlier this month, a War Child Alliance-sponsored NGO concluded that 96 per cent of the surviving children in the besieged territory consider death to be imminent, and half of them would welcome that outcome. If only a fraction of the folk carving their stuffed turkey or ham roast would consider the starvation in Gaza that is part of the genocidal intent, it might give

them cause for a pause. A token minute of silence, perhaps, followed by a determination to back the kind of boycott, divestment and sanctions that helped to demolish a previous

apartheid regime. Israel's raids on Gaza, resulting in dozens of deaths each day, continued even as it pursued a similar strategy in Lebanon, before going on to destroy the military capabilities of post-Assad Syria, a country that hadn't posed any serious threat to Israel for half a century, notwithstanding its notorious role in Lebanon and serving as a conduit for weapons and other supplies to Hezbollah. Israel routinely attacked some of these Iranian-affiliated conduits, but Bashar al-Assad's military facilities were rarely target-

ed while he was in power. Although it has been suggested that the Qatar-sponsored ceasefire talks between Israel and Hamas are 90pc complete, there is cause for scepticism given similar previous pronouncements, mostly emanating from the US, which bears as much responsibility for the genocide as Israel. No one can say to what extent Kamala Harris's presidential prospects would have been improved by at least pretending to have a spine. Still, those who understandably withheld their votes

find cause for self-flagellation once Donald Trump re-enters the White House. There are, of course, plenty of supplementary causes around the world to reconsider the traditional Yuletide model of 'joy unto the world' - from the massacres in Sudan and the Congo to the continuing death and destruction in Ukraine and the terrorist attack in Magdeburg that has left German authorities struggling to figure out why an evidently Islamophobic and pro-Zionist psychiatrist who came to the country as a Saudi refugee would decide to plough through a Christmas market in his vehicle, killing five women and a child, and injuring more than 230 others. Taleb al-Abdulmohsen abandoned his faith and sought to support potential exiles who wished to escape the Gulf region's version of religious injunctions. At the same time, though, he railed against Middle Eastern immigration to Europe, and absurdly considered the likes of Angela Merkel to be promoting the Islamisation of the

Even the secular-minded Gulf emigres he contacted — especially women — were alarmed by his bullying tactics. Perhaps understandably, the German authorities paid little heed to wa---rnings from Riyadh about

S could also be remem-

Constitution. "T" is for Telangana, which saw the exit of the ambitious K. Chandra-sekhar Rao of TRS from power with the emergence of the Congress under Revanth Reddy. Politics in the southern state is

sus BJP affair.
"U" is for Udhayanidhi
Stalin, the Tamil Nadu
minister and son of DMK
chief M.K. Stalin, who was made the state's deputy CM, ending days of specu-

"P" for (Sharad) Pawar meant power, but this Maratha strongman was upstaged by estranged home turf of Maharashtra. backed by the BJP, which

"Q" — The way the powers that be defended Adani was a reminder of the kidglove treatment meted out to controversial Italian businessman Ottavio Quattrocchi by the Congress four decades ago.

— Rajasthan saw the end of the Ashok Gehlot era in 2024 as the Congress was defeated at the end of 2023. The BJP made greenhorn Bhajan Lal Sharma the chief minister, sidelinveteran leader

Vasundhara Raje. "S" Sambhal in UP became the latest flashpoint in politics over the digging" of masjids in a state that had seen the demolition of the Babri Masjid way back in December 1992.

S also stands for Eknath Shinde, the brand created by the BJP to pull down Úddhav Thackeray in Maharashtra. The year

deputy CM to Devendra Fadnavis, who was his deputy earlier.

bered for Samvidhan as the Lok Sabha polls saw the Opposition make capital of the BJP's slogan "Ab ki baar, 400 paar", contending that it meant the rulers wanted to dump the

becoming a Congress ver-

lation over the move. "V" is for Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar, with

growing talk in Opposition circles that the V-P was targeting them as he wanted to become the next President, with that election over two years away. "W" is for Kerala's Wayanad, which elected

Priyanka Gandhi Vadra to the Lok Sabha in the seat vacated by her brother.

(formerly Twitter), Elon Musk, the world's richest entrepreneur and also Tesla chief, was to visit India during the year and have discussions with the PM. He cancelled the visit at the 11th hour, that was seen in economic circles as a setback to Mr Modi.

"Y" is for Yogi Adityanath, UP's chief minister, who showed his nuisance power in the Lok Sabha polls to the BJP top brass. His controversial "Batenge to Katenge" slogan turned out to be the political hit of the year gone by

"Z" is the zigzag way the year saw. The BJP fell short of a Lok Sabha majority, raising the Opposition's hopes. But the Haryana and Maharashtra electoral verdicts sprang a surprise on them. The New Year will have Assembly polls in Delhi and later in Bihar.

The writer is a journalist based in New Delhi

LETTERS

LEGITIMATE BEEF

Apropos the news report, "Cheap politics: BJP, Cong tiff over last rites escalates" (Dec. 29), I would like to comment that asking the ruling party at the Centre as to why the last rites of Manmohan Singh were not done at the designated memorial site for national leaders does not ipso facto mean that Leader of the **Opposition Rahul Gandhi** has damaged the dignity of the ex-PM. If there is a complete departure from established practice, the Leader of the Opposition has the constitutional and moral authority to ask the government to explain the reasons for such arbitrary action. Mr Sambit Patra is avoiding answering the real question.

> **Arun Gupta** Kolkata

PUNISH FORESTER

MY HOLIDAY at Dalma Pahar was fascinating. We camped at the base of a hill. But here, on the edge of the forest, we saw a full-grown adult elephant kept inside a very small enclosure, shackled with iron chains. The pachyderm was quite helpless. Instead of roaming freely with its herd it ken shuffling one foot forward and the next foot back, because there was no space. In the name of attracting tourists, the forest department had stooped to so low as to deny this majestic animal its natural dignity. The Jharkhand government should look into it immediately. Chanchal Nandy

Durgapur, West Bengal

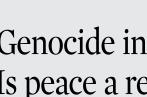
SALUTE CHARITY!

THE MOVIE, 6888, on Netflix is excellent and it deserves an Academy Award. It depicts the pressure a black woman commanding officer of a female battalion in the US Army faces while undertaking against all odds a mission that all others failed to accomplish. A must-watch for women officers of all armies of the world, it is also a lesson in history, sociology and human values. Including it in the curricula of military academies worldwide will help the young inculcate valuable lessons. Captain Charity Adams is the epitome of a true commanding officer.

Col R.S. Narula (retd) Patiala, Pùnjab

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to Bal Govind (Dec. 28). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.





Genocide in Gaza: Is peace a realistic goal for Christmas in coming years?

from the Democratic candidate on this basis

and gave them to her Republican rival will

Meanwhile, as for a peace deal with a Saudi component, it's worth recalling that the US Republicans thwarted a Vietnam settlement in 1968 to benefit Richard Nixon, and delayed the release of American hostages in Iran a decade later to boost Ronald Reagan. That pattern might be repeated ahead of the Trump presidency, eagerly awaited by idiots and fellow proto-fascists around the world.

his extremism. It is not inconceivable,

though, that his horrific, deadly act was

guided by the notion of helping his favourite

party, the neo-Nazi Alternative for Germany

(AfD), to reinforce its case agai-nst immigra-

(AID), to reinforce its case agai-nst immigra-tion. The AfD — unreservedly backed by Elon Musk, seen by some as effectively the next president of the US — has lost little time in capitalising on the obscenity of its kindred spirit's murderous spree. It wouldn't be sur-prising if that had been Abdulmohsen's intention all along

intention all along.

Be that as it may, the relentless genocide in Gaza and its reflections in the region and beyond provide sufficient cause to wonder whether the worthy notion of pacem in terris will remain a realistic aspiration during Christmases to come.

— By arrangement with **Dawn**

SHORT TAKES

KAVELASHVILI INAUGURATED AS GEORGIA PREZ

Tbilisi, Dec. 29: Former soccer player Mikheil Kavelashvili was formally inaugurated as President of Georgia on Sunday, cementing the ruling party's grip in what the opposition calls a blow to the country's EU aspirations and a victory for

former imperial ruler Russia. Outgoing pro-Western Georg ian President Salome Zourabichvili said on Sunday that she would vacate her residence at the Orbeliani Palace in Tbilisi, but insisted she was still the legitimate office holder. "I will come out of here, come out to you and be with you.

SUICIDE BOMBER KILLS POLICE OFFICER IN IRAN

Tehran, Dec. 29: A suicide bomber killed a local police officer and wounded another in a southern Iranian port city, home to a large Sunni Muslim community, local media said on

Sunday.
The hard-line *Javan Daily*, a newspaper close to the country's powerful Revolutionary Guard, said the attacker stopped Capt. Mojtaba Shahid's car on Saturday evening in Bandar Lengeh in the province of Hormozgan before detonating his vest. Shahid's deputy, who was also in the car, has been hospitalised in critical condition, the paper reported.

3 MIGRANTS DIE TRYING TO CROSS ENGLISH CHANNEL

Paris, Dec. 29: At least three migrants died on Sunday while attempting to cross the English Channel to Britain from northern France, authorities said.

The deaths were confirmed after an early morning rescue operation involving French emergency services and the navy's "Dauphin" helicopter. The prefecture described the attempted crossing as "diffi-cult," with around 50 people stranded in the water and on the beach near Sangatte at around 6 am

Rescuers assisted 45 individuals, including four who were

CHARLES DOLAN, HBO FOUNDER,

Washington, Dec. 29: Charles Dolan, who founded some of the most prominent US media companies including Home Box Office Inc and Cablevision Systems Corp., has died at age 98, according to a news report.

A statement issued on Saturday by his family said Dolan died of natural causes, Newsday reported late on Saturday.

"It is with deep sorrow that we announce the passing of our beloved father and patrivisionary founder of HBO and Cablevision," the statement said on Saturday.

BURY 'MUJIBIST' CONSTITUTION: B'DESH STUDENTS

Dhaka, Dec. 29: The Anti-Discrimination Students Movement on Sunday announced to issue a belated Proclamation of July Uprising that seeks to "bury" Bangladesh's 1972 Constitution calling it a "Mujibist" charter that had paved way for

"India's aggression.' The interim government of Muhammad Yunus visibly distanced itself from the "Proclamation" while ex-PM Khaleda Zia's party said it was disappointed and added, if there is anything bad in the Constitution, it can be amended. The platform's convener Hasnat Abdullah told a press conference here, "The Mujibist '72 Constitution will be buried (in the new proclamation) in the very place where the one-point declaration was made during the July uprising." He said it would be made at Central Shaheed Minar premises on December

31 in the afternoon. Weeks of protests led by the students' movement over a controversial quota system in government jobs had escalated into a nationwide campaign calling for the end of the 16-year regime of Sheikh Hasina, 77, resulting in her ouster on August 5. "The Indian aggression was initiated through the principles of the 1972 Constitution (and) the proclamation will make it clear how the Mujibist Constitution destroyed the aspirations of the people and exactly how we want to replace it," Abdullah said.

Experts suspect bird hit as crash cause

Jeju Air says investigation is underway; dy transport min. says runway length not contributing factor

"Regarding the

black boxes, both

the cockpit voice

JOO JONG-WAN

SK dy transport min.

recorder and the flight

data recorder have now

"The entire government

is working closely togeth-

er to manage the after-

dedicating all available

every effort to ensure

resources, while making

thorough support for the

bereaved families."
— CHOI SANG-MOK

"My thoughts are with

the many families in

South Korea who are

mourning today following

the dramatic plane crash.

I join in prayer for the

survivors and the dead."

was educated at one of

Moscow's top universities. Aliyev said he wanted

Russia to accept it was

guilty of downing the

plane and to punish those

responsible for fatally

damaging the aircraft.
Putin and Aliyev held

another telephone call on

Our plane was shot down by accident. Unf-

ortunately, in the first three days we heard

only absurd versions from Russia. We wit-

nessed clear attempts to cover up the matter.

– Ilham Aliyev, Azerbaijan's President

SK's acting President

- POPE FRANCIS

math of the accident,

Seoul, Dec. 29: Uncertainties surround the deadliest crash on South Korean soil, experts said on Sunday, questioning initial suggestions that a bird strike might have brought down the Jeju Air flight.

The apparent absence of landing gear, the timing of the twin-engine Boeing belly-landing at Muan International Airport and the reports of a possible bird strike all raised questions that could not yet be answered. The single-aisle aircraft was seen in video broadcast on local media skidding down the runway with no visible landing gear before slamming into a wall in an explosion of flame and debris.

"Why didn't fire tenders lay foam on the runway? Why weren't they in attendance when the plane tou-ched down? And why did the aircraft touch down so far down the runway? And why was there a brick wall at the end of the runway?" said *Airline News* editor Geoffrey Thomas.

South Korean officials said they were investigating the cause of the crash of Jeju Air Flight 7C2216, including a possible bird strike. The crash killed 179 of the 181 people on board.

A spokesperson for Jeju Air was not immediately available for comments. Jeju Air declined to comment on the cause of the accident during news conferences, saying an investigation is under way.

Under global aviation rules, South Korea will lead a civil investigation into the crash and automatically involve the National Transportation Safety Board in the US where the plane was designed and built. The flight data recorder

Azerbaijani President Ilh-

am Aliyev said on Sunday

that a passenger plane that crashed last week,

killing 38 people, had been

damaged by shooting from

the ground in Russia, and

he said some in Russia

had lied about the cause of

Russian President Vladi-

mir Putin on Saturday

apologised to Aliyev for

Wednesday's "tragic incid-

ent" in Russian airspace involving the plane after

aged Ukrainian attack

air defences eng

the disaster.



Firefighters and rescue team members work near the wreckage of a passenger plane at Muan International Airport in Muan, South Korea, on Sunday.



Firefighters and rescue team members work near the wreckage of a passenger plane at Muan International Airport in Muan, South Korea, on Sunday.

Plane shot from Russia: Azerbaijan

was found at 11:30 am (0230 GMT), about two and a half hours after the crash, and the cockpit voice recorder was found at 2:24 pm., according to South Korea's

transport ministry.
"That gives you all the parameters of all the systems of the plane. The heartbeat of the airplane is on the flight data recorder," Thomas said. "The voice recorder will

ment did not say Russia

had shot down the plane,

only noting a criminal

case had been opened.
"Our plane was shot

down by accident," Aliyev

told state television on

Sunday, adding that the

plane had come under

some sort of elec-

tronic jamming and

had then been shot

at while it was app-

roaching the sou-

thern Russian

probaly provide the most interesting analysis of what went on on this tragic crash." Experts caution that air accidents are usually caused by a cocktail of factors and it can take months to piece together the sequence of events in

In the space of a few minutes, the control tower issued a bird strike warn-

"Unfortunately, in the

first three days we heard

only absurd versions from

Russia," Aliyev said, citing statements in Russia

that attributed the crash

to birds or the explosion of

some sort of gas cylinder.

"We witnessed clear attempts to cover up the matter," said the Azerb-

aijani leader, who has

and outside the plane.

Air Canada plane part catches fire **Ottawa, Dec. 29:** An Air Canada flight coming

from St John's City on Newfoundland Island had a rough landing at the Halifax airport in Goffs in Nova Scotia province that saw the aircraft skid down the runway and part of it catching fire.

A statement issued by the airport said the incident involved Air Canada Flight 2259, which was operated by PAL Airlines, CBC News reported. The incident happened around 9:30 pm local time. The statement does not say how many people were on the plane.

The people on board were evacuated, and then taken to a hangar to be checked out by paramedics, CBC News said. Due to the incident, the Halifax airport was temporarily closed on Saturday night. A passenger told *CBC* News that one of the plane's tyres did not deploy

properly upon landing. The plane started to sit at about a 20-degree angle to the left and, as that happened, we heard a pretty loud — what almost



An Air Canada flight had a rough landing at the Halifax airport in Goffs in Nova Scotia province that saw the aircraft skid down the runway and part of it catching fire.

sounded like a crash sound - as the wing of the plane started to skid along the pavement, along with what I presume was the engine," she said.

The passenger said the plane then skidded down the runway for a "decent" distance as the pilots worked to stop the plane. "The plane shook quite a bit and we started seeing fire on the left side of the plane and smoke started coming in the windows,' she said. The airport said one of its runways has

IRAQI FLIGHTS TO LEBANON WILL RESUME TODAY

Cairo, Dec. 29: Iraq will allow the national carrier to resume flights to Leb-anon on Monday following their suspension earlier this month, the transport minister was quoted as saying by state media on

Saturday. Iraqi Airways halted flights to Lebanon on December 8 due to security concerns about the situation in neighbouring Syria.

Syrian rebels seized control of Damascus on December 8, forcing President Bashar al-Assad to flee to Russia after more than 13 vears of civil war and ending his family's decadeslong rule.

An Israeli airstrike in the outskirts of Damascus on Sunday killed 11 people, according to a war monitor, as Israel continues to target Syrian weapons and military infrastructure even after the ouster of former President Bashar Assad. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the airstrike targeted depot weapons belonged to Assad's forces near the industrial town of Adra, northeast of the cap-

Copter's emergency landing in Nepal

Kathmandu, Dec. 29: A nical test before it becohelicopter en route to Kathmandu carrying five United States nationals made an emergency landing at Banepa, 50 km east of Kathmandu after a bird strike mid-flight.
The 9N-AKG chopper,

belonging to the private Heli Everest airlines, was coming from Lukla, gateway to Mt Everest, when it was struck by the bird at 11 am on Sunday, news agency PTI quoted an official.

The pilot managed to land the aircraft safely, the official added, thereby avoiding any injuries to the passengers or crew. According to the airline, the helicopter was carry-

ing one Nepali pilot. Although the helicopter aid not suffer any damage,

mes ready for another flight, the report added. Authorities and the airline praised the quick response of the pilot, who managed to land the aircraft without further complications, ensuring the safety of all onboard. Earlier in August,

a helicopter had crashed in the mountains northwest region of Kathmandu, killing five people, including four Chinese tourists.

The Nepal-based Air Dynasty helicopter, 9N-AJD, was en route to Rasuwa from Kathmandu when it crashed. The helicopter departed from Kathmandu at 1:54 p.m. and was en route to Syaphrubensi when it crashed it would go through a tech- on August 7. — Agencies

DUTCH AIRLINES FLIGHT SKIDS OFF NORWAY RUNWAY

— Agencies

Oslo, Dec. 29: An Amsterdam-bound flight veered off the runway at Oslo Torp Sandefjord Airport in Norway after an emergency landing, according to reports.

'The incident occurred on Saturday after the KLM Royal Dutch Airlines flight experienced a hydraulic failure shortly after take off from Oslo Airport," said officials, adding that the crew responded to the situation and diverted it to Sandefjord Airport.

According to officials, the Boeing 737-800 jet managed a safe touchdown at the Sandefjord Airport but lost control during the rollout, skidding off to the open grass field, reported Aviation24.be. Officials stated that the

aircraft veered off runway 18 and came to a half in



Netanyahus government and call for the release of hostages held in the Gaza Strip by the Hamas militant

New evacuations in N. Gaza town

Cairo, Dec. 29: Israeli forces carrying out a weeks-long offensive in northern Gaza ordered any residents remaining in Beit Hanoun to leave the town on Sunday, citing Palestinian militant rocket fire from the area, residents said.

The instruction to leave has caused a new wave of displacement, although it was not immediately clear how many people were affected, residents said.

Israel says its almost three-month-old campai-gn in northern Gaza is aimed at Hamas militants and preventing them from regrouping. Its instructions to civilians to evacuate are meant to keep them out of harm's

way, the military says.
Palestinian and UN officials say no place is safe in Gaza and that evacuations worsen the humanitarian conditions. Much of the area around the northern towns of Beit Hanoun, Jabalia and Beit Lahiya has been cleared — Reuters

HOSTAGES FACED TORTURE, SAYS ISRAELI REPORT

Jerusalem, Dec. 29: Hostages held in Gaza were subjected to torture, including sexual and psychological abuse, starvation, burns and medical neglect, according to a new report by the Israeli health ministry that will be submitted to the United Nations this week.

The report is based on interviews with the medical and welfare teams which treated more than 100 Israeli and foreign hostages, most of whom were released in late November 2023, in a brief truce between Israel and Hamas. Eight hostages

were rescued. The hostages include more than 30 children and teenagers, a few of whom were found to have been bound, beaten or branded with a heated — Reuters

Russia to abandon missile moratorium, says Lavrov

will scrap a moratorium on the deployment of intermediate and shorter range nuclear-capable missiles because the United States has deployed such weapons in various regions around the world, Russian foreign minister Serg-

ei Lavrov said on Sunday. Russia's move, long signalled, will kill off all that remains from one of the most significant arms control treaties of the Cold War, amid fears that the world's two biggest nuclear powers could be

entering a new arms race together with China. Russia and the United States, who both admit their relations are worse than at any time since the depths of the Cold War, have both expressed regret about the disintegra-



Relatives and friends of Ukrainian prisoners of war from the Azov Brigade and other units take part in a rally to call for their exchange with Russian prisoners at St Sophia Square in Kyiv, on Sunday.

tion of the tangle of arms control treaties which sought to slow the arms race and reduce the risk of

When asked by state news agency RIA if Russia could withdraw from the New START treaty before its expiry in February 2026, Lavrov said that there were currently "no conditions" for a strategic dialogue with Washington.

"Today it is clear that, for example, our moratorium on the deployment of short- and intermediaterange missiles is no longer practically viable and will have to be abandoned," Lavrov said.
"The United States has

arrogantly ignored the warnings of Russia and China and in practice has moved on to the deployment of weapons of this class in various regions of the world," the foreign minister said. — *Reuters*



China unveiled an updated model of its high-speed bul-

At 450 kmph, China unveils fastest train

Beijing, Dec. 29: China on Sunday unveiled an updated model of its highspeed bullet train which its manufacturer claims reached speeds of 450 kmph during the test runs, making it the world's fastest high-speed train. According to the China State Railway Group Co (China Railway), the new model, known as the CR450 prototype, will further shorten travel time and improve connectivity, making travel more convenient and efficient Railway will arrange a sefor the passengers. Railway will arrange a series of line tests. -PTIfor the passengers.

The CR450 prototype reached a test speed of 450 kmph, with key performance indicators — operational speed, energy consumption, interior noise, and braking distance setting a new international benchmark, official media here reported. It is significantly faster than the CR400 Fuxing highspeed rail (HSR) currently in service, which operates at speeds of 350 kmph, a report by state-

run Xinhua said. China

UNDER | THREAT

Ninth telecom co. in list of entities compromised by hackers

ina cyberespionage targets AT&T

Dallas, Dec. 28: The Chinese-linked Salt Typhoon cyberespionage operation targeted AT&T T.Nand Verizon's systems, but the wireless carriers' US networks are now secure as they work with law enforcement and government officials, the companies said on Saturday in their first acknowledgment of the attacks.

"We detect no activity by nation-state actors in our networks at this time. Based on our current investigation of this attack, the People's Republic of China targeted a small number of individuals of foreign int-We detect no activity by nation-state actors elligence interest," ar AT&T spokesperson said. "While only a few cases were identified,

of compromised informa-AT&T was monitoring and remediating its networks to protect customers data, and continues to work with authorities to assess and mitigate the threat,' the spokesperson said.

'We have not detected threat actor activity in Verizon's network for some time, and after considerable work addressing this in our networks at this time. Based on our current investigation of this attack, the People's Republic of China targeted a small number of individuals of foreign intelligence interest.

— AT&T spokesperson

incident, we can report that Verizon has contained the activities associated with this particular incident," Verizon's chief

legal officer said.

An independent and highly respected cyber security firm has confirmed the containment, Verizon said.

On Friday, United States officials added a ninth unnamed telecom company to the list of entities compromised by the Salt

Typhoon hackers.
They said that the Chinese involved gained access to networks and essentially had broad and full access, giving them the capability to "geolocate millions of individuals, to record phone calls

at will. The US department of defence and the Federal Communications Commission did not immediately respond to Reuters' requests for comment on the company statements. China's foreign ministry could not immediately be

contacted for comment. Chinese officials have previously described the allegations as disinformation and said Beijing "firmly opposes and combats cyber attacks and cyber theft in all forms."

quick

0.29 78,699.07 Nifty 50 23,813.40 0.27 S&P 500* 5,970.84 -1.11 Dollar (₹) 85.02 0.08 1.38 Pound Sterling (₹) 106.22 0.38 88.24 Gold (10gm)* (₹) -0.01 76.536▼8 Brent crude (\$/bbl)* 74.00 -0.23 IN 10-Yr bond yield 6.787 0.004 US 10-Yr T-bill yield* 4.631 0.052 * As of 8:30 PM IST

JSW to buy clean energy projects for \$1.5 billion

JSW Energy Limited has agreed to buy clean energy projects from O2 Power Pooling Pte for about \$1.5 billion in an all-cash deal. The acquisition will allow JSW, controlled by steel-to-cement tycoon Sajjan Jindal, to add a portfolio of 4.7 gigawatts of renewable power projects, the company said. O2 Power, formed in 2020, is a joint venture between Singapore's Temasek Holdings Pte and Sweden's EQT Infrastructure.

Auction of 11 critical mineral blocks cancelled

The government has cancelled the auction of 11 critical mineral blocks in the fourth round due to poor response. While no bids were received for four blocks, the remaining seven mines got less than three technically qualified bidders. according to the annulment notice. The four blocks which include tungsten and glauconite, are located in the states of Chhattisgarh and Arunachal Pradesh.



Liquor cos want fresh standard for single malts

Indian liquor makers are mulling approaching food and beverages regulator FSSAI for a separate standard for the Indian single malt whisky that is rapidly scaling with the ongoing trend of premiumisation. This will help maintain the sanctity and reputation of Indian single malt whisky which is now exported to 60 countries, according to Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies.

Economy to grow at 6.5-6.8%, says Deloitte

Indian economy is likely to grow at 6.5-6.8 per cent this fiscal and slightly higher between 6.7-7.3 per cent in FY2026, boosted by domestic consumption, Deloitte said on Sunday. Deloitte India economist Rumki Majumdar said the growth in the first half of the fiscal year 2025 turned out to be slower than estimated as election uncertainties followed by disruptions in activity due

to heavy rainfall.

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Industry calls for excise cut to fuel consumption

Reduction in marginal tax for personal income needed, says CII

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, DEC. 29

Leading industry body Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) on Sunday urged the government for lowering the excise duty on fuel to boost consumption in the forthcoming budget for 2025-26, especially at the lower income level, arguing that fuel prices significantly drive inflation.

The industry chamber also called for reducing marginal tax rates for personal income up to ₹20 lakh per annum, saying that this would help trigger the virtuous cycle of consumption, higher growth and higher tax revenue as inflation has reduced the buying power of lower and middleincome earners.

'The central excise duty alone accounts for approximately 21 per cent of the retail price for petrol and 18 per cent for diesel. Since May 2022, these duties have not been adjusted in line with the approximately 40 per cent decrease in global crude prices. Lowering excise duty on fuel would help reduce overall inflation and increase disposable incomes," the industry body said.

'Domestic consumption has been critical to India's growth story, but inflationary pressures have somewhat eroded the purchasing power of consumers. The government's interventions could focus on enhancing disposable incomes and stimulating spending to sustain eco-

MARKETS TO TRACK

MACRO DATA, FIIs,

New Delhi, Dec. 29:

announcements, trading

investors and global

trends will guide equity

market movement this

week, which would also

mark the beginning of the

new calendar year and

Movement of rupee, which registered the steepest fall in almost two

vears to hit its lifetime

intra-day low on Friday,

will also be tracked by

"Persistent FIIs (Foreign Institutional Investors) selling has

been a source of pressure

on Indian markets, and

their stance in the new

year could shape near-

term trends. Meanwhile.

monthly auto sales data

will also be closely

watched. As the Q3 earn-

ings season approaches,

corporate quarterly updates will begin trick-ling in, setting the stage

for market expectations,"

Santosh Meena from

Swastika Investmart Ltd,

said. Manufacturing data

from China and the US,

along with US jobless

claims, will play a crucial

role, Meena said. -PTI

month, analysts said.

GLOBAL TRENDS

Macroeconomic

FOCUS ON SHOULD FOCUS ON ENHANCING PEOPLE'S INCOME, SAYS CII CII calls for a cut in marginal tax rates for personal income tax which will trigger virtuous cycle of consumption and lead to higher growth. It said IoT, Al. machine learning robotics, and automation are reshaping the manufacturing landscape, driving innovation, and global competitiveness. Domestic consumption has been critical to India's growth story, but inflationary pressures have somewhat eroded the purchasing power of consumers. The government's interventions could focus on enhancing disposable incomes and stimulating spending to sustain economic momentum."

— Chandrajit Banerjee, CII director-general

momentum. Persistent food inflationpressures also impinge upon low-income rural households who allocate a larger share to food in their consumption basket," CII director general Chandrajit Banerjee, said. Banerjee further said that while recent quarters have shown promising signs of recovery in rural consumption, government interventions, such as increasing per unit benefit under its key schemes like MGNREGS, PM-KISAN and PMAY, and providing consumption vouchers to low-income

households, can further enhance the rural recovery. In its pre-budget proposals, the CII has also recommended an increase in the daily minimum wage under the MGN-REGS from ₹267 to ₹375 as suggested by the 'Expert Committee on fixing national minimum wage in 2017, with the industry body estimating that this will entail an additional expenditure of ₹42,000 crore. "The government should raise the annual payout under the PM-KISAN scheme from KIŠAN scheme from ₹8,000. This will entail an additional expenditure of

DIGITAL INFRA INVESTMENTS HIT HISTORIC HIGH

New Delhi, Dec. 29: Continuous investment in infrastructure, including data centres and high-speed internet, along with policy support, has propelled India's services exports to a "historic" milestone of \$34.31 billion in October, a commerce ministry official

The official said India has established itself as a global leader in digitally delivered services exports, leveraging its robust IT sector and

skilled workforce.
Services traded through computer networks, such as the internet, apps, emails, and digital internediction. mediation platforms, have grown exponentially.

"India's services sector reached a historic milestone in October 2024, recording an all-time high in monthly exports of \$34.31 billion, a 22.3 per cent increase compared to October 2023," the official added. The key enabling factors that are helping sector's growth included continuous investment in digital infrastructure, such as data centres and highspeed internet connectivity; initiatives like Digital India that have fostered a conducive environment for IT and digitally delivered services and partner-

Farm sector eyes 4% growth in 2025 with good rain predicted

is poised to achieve new heights in foodgrain production in 2025, driven by monsoon, though significant chalienges persist in puises and oilseeds production as the country's agricultural sector shows signs of

robust recovery. The agriculture ministry's initial projections paint an optimistic picture, with kharif (summer) foodgrain production estimated at a record 164.7 million tonnes for the 2024-25 crop year end-

ing June 2025. Winter crop planting has maintained steady progress, with wheat sown across 29.31 million hectares as of mid-December 2024, while total rabi (winter) crops cover



55.88 million hectares. "We had a good kharif crop because of normal Agriculture Secretary Chaturvedi told PTI.

"Overall, the crop prospect for the whole year looks promising," he added, though cautioning against potential heat waves in February-March that could affect the winter wheat harvest.

The agricultural sector is projected to bounce back strongly, with growth

cent in 2024-25, up from 1.4 per cent in the previous fiscal vear.

Agri-economist S Mahendra Dev attributes this improvement monsoon and rise in rural

This growth comes despite localised floods and droughts affecting crops in parts of Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan. change-induced weather anomalies have particularly impacted onion and tomato yields in certain

To address the persistent challenge of self-sufficiency in pulses and oilseeds, the government will roll out the National Mission on Edible Oils - Oilseeds

Mumbai, Dec. 29: The Indian rupee tumbled 3 per cent in 2024 as concerns over slower economic growth and the greenweighed, but it was among the least volatile currencies in the world and the headwinds may be less intense in the coming

year. Rupee settled at new

lows as the year closed as

dollar's resurgence weighed on emerging-

market currencies. The action-packed 2024 continued to impact the rupee's exchange rate against major currencies throughout, with a series of geopolitical events ranging from the Russia-Ukraine war and crisis in the Middle East to trade disruptions in the Red Sea and elections across several major economies.

Global factors, including measures taken by major central banks, have hit not only the rupee-dollar dynamics but also disrupted the exchange rates of currencies across all emerging economies.

In fact, the rupee's fall

in '24, relief likely in '25 Wars in Ukraine and Middle East. Trade disruptions in the Red Sea.

Elections in several major economies. REASONS FOR Dependence on crude oil imports. Widened trade deficit **RUPEE IN 2024** The outlook for the

Indian currency next year is relatively stable and projected to range between 82 and 87 against dollar.

with respect to the dollar has been less than its depreciation in terms of other currencies. And it has ended up with gains compared to euro and the Japanese yen.

Rupee withstood storms

WEAKENED

Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) ex-governor Shaktikanta Das also said in the central bank's December bi-monthly monetary policy that the Indian rupee has remained less volatile compared to its peers in emerging markets.

Yet, the RBI has been more active in its efforts towards stabilising the

rupee-dollar rate, thanks to increased demand for the greenback due to India's dependence on oil imports and the widening trade deficit. "RBI was also seen intervening actively in NDF (nondeliverable forward) markets to prevent sharp depreciation of the rupee," said Naveen Mathur, director Anand Rathi Shares and Stock Brokers. This was evident in foreign exchange reserves, which declined from the record high of \$704.89 billion in late

AI CAN IMPEDE **COMPETITION RULES, SAYS CCI**

New Delhi, Dec. 29: Artificial Intelligence (AI) has the potential to aid cartelisation automating collusive behaviour through pre-dictive algorithms, Competition Commission chief Ravneet Kaur has said, asserting that the watchdog is focused on developing ecosystems that ensure algorithmic transparency and accountability while promoting innovation.

The Competition Commission of India (CCI), which works to unfair business practices in the market place, has commenced the study on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and com-petition that is expected to be completed by mid-2025. The study will look at various elements, including AI in the area of logistics and algorithms in general.

In an interview to PTI, Kaur said mere use of algorithms cannot be anti-competitive but in case the algorithms are manipulated, then that is a competition issue.

"AI has the potential to aid cartelisation by automating collusive behaviour through predictive algorithms... our focus is on developing ecosystems that ensure algorithmic transparency and accountability while promoting innovation," she said. She also said the regulator aims to address the concerns through out-

CAD ends up flat in **Q2** after revision

New Delhi, Dec. India's current account deficit stayed largely flat in the July-September period from the previous quarter's number, which was revised up sharply.

The shortfall in the

broadest measure of trade

in goods and services was \$11.2 billion in the quarter, or 1.2 per cent of gross domestic product, the Reserve Bank of India said in a statement on Friday. This compares with a gap of \$11.3 billion in the April-June period, which was revised up from a deficit of \$9.7 billion reported earlier. Median estimate in a Bloomberg survey of 14 economists was for a deficit of \$15.3 billion for the July-September period. Strong domestic demand, particularly for gold, drove the South up during the quarter, which typically sees a jump in spending as Indians prepare for the Diwali festival season. country's deficit had widened unexpectedly in August as a weakness in global



demand slowed exports. while gold imports saw a sharp spike after the government slashed the duty on the metal to 6 per cent from 15 per cent in July.

The current account is likely to widen substantially in the October-December period after India's trade deficit ballooned to a record high in November, driven by a fourfold jump in gold imports. However, there shipments of the precious metal for the month, and attempts are underway to reconcile the data. The latest numbers could bring some relief for the rupee, which fell to all-time low of 85.8150 against the dollar Friday. — Bloomberg

Indian exports to Australia rises 64%

FC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 29

India's exports to its trade agreement partner Australia rose 64.4 per cent year-on-year to \$643.7 million in November on account of healthy growth in sectors such as textiles, chemicals and agricultural products. However, the country's merchandise exports recorded a decline of 5.21 per cent year-onyear to \$5.56 billion during April-November 2024-25,

according to the commerce ministry data.

India and Australia implemented an interim trade pact — Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) — on December 29, 2022 and are now in negotiations to widen the scope of the pact and make it a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA). On the completion of two years of ECTA. commerce and industry

said the agreement has brought with it increased market access for Indian exporters, expanded opportunities for MSMEs and farmers, and generated several employment

avenues.
Goyal also said that it has also enabled growth in exports by 14 per cent in 2023-24; notable boost in IT/ITeS, business and travel services; and portstudy work and work holiday visas. "The expanding trade and investment ties

between the two countries under the agreement reflect the growing business-to-business and people-to-people ments. We are committed to building on the momentum that the Ind-Aus ECTA has generated and achieve the 100 billion Australian dollar trade target by 2030," Goyal said. The ministry also said the key sectors like textiles, chemicals, and agriculture have shown

substantial growth.

New Delhi, Dec. 29: Employee attrition in private sector banks has witnessed an increase to about 25 per cent and this high turnover rate poses significant operational risk, according to the latest Report on Trend and Progress of Banking in

RBI flags high staff

attrition in pvt banks

Employee attrition rates are high across select private sector banks and small finance banks (SFBs), the report, which was released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said.

India 2023-24.

The total number of employees of private banks surpassed that of sector

(PSBs) during 2023-24, but their attrition has increased sharply over the last three years, with average attrition rate of around 25 per cent, the report said.

"High attrition and employee turnover rate pose significant operational risks, including disruption in customer services, besides leading to loss of institutional knowledge and increased recruitment costs. In various interactions with banks, the Reserve Bank has stressed that reducing attrition is not just a human resource function but a strategic imperative," it said.

DIALING IN Global satellite players, led by Elon Musk's Starlink, eyeing a chunk of telecom business in India

Subscriber loss, tariff war to hurt telcos in 2025

Delhi, Dec. 29: Private telecom operators face twin challenges on investment recovery in the New Year customers leaving their network after tariff hikes and satellite players mainly Elon Musk's Starlink eyeing a chunk of their bread and butter data business.

Private operators have

invested around ₹70,000

crore in telecom infra-

structure and radiowave

assets this year to expand

eration 5G services which is one of the main highlights of 2024 for the sector. To recover investments and protect margins, private telcos resorted to tariff hikes in midyear but that move back-

the coverage of next-gen-

Around 2 crore subscribers dropped their connections. Reliance Jio, Airtel Vodafone Idea jointly lost 2.6 crore customers due to



DESPITE SUBSCRIBER LOSS, private players need to recover investment and invest more in 5G to offer new-age services to drive future growth.

a 10-26 per cent price hike. Around 68 customers switched to state-run player BSNL which refrained Despite subscriber loss, from price hike. The lossmaking PSU still offers private players need to

generation-old 3G service and is on the path of rolling out 4G network across the country.

invest more in 5G to offer new-age services to drive future growth. According to EY India

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

Digital Infrastructure Association (DIPA) Director General Manoj Kumar Singh says

recover investment and the telecom infrastructure sector looks at a cumulative investment of ₹92,100 crore to ₹1.41 lakh crore in 2022-2027 to support the 5G ecosystem.

Jyotiraditya Minister Scindia also backed telecom operators on the tariff hike issue citing investments made by companies in the network.

The rollout of 5G services in 2024 has paved the way for the adoption of emerging technologies

like artificial intelligence which offers huge growth potential. "5G deployment has been a game-changer. We've witnessed a significant surge in 5G base transceiver stations, rising from 412,214 in December 2023 to 462,854 by November 2024, says

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

SHORT TAKES

Arshdeep, Smriti in ICC awards list

Dubai: Indian pacer Arshdeep Singh has been nominated for the ICC Men's T20I Cricketer of the Year award following a stellar season in which he emerged as the joint highest wickettaker and played a pivotal role in India's T20 World Cup triumph. The 25-year-old will compete for the prestigious honour alongside Pakistan's Babar Azam, Australia's Travis Head, and Zimbabwe's Sikandar Raza, all of whom are among the standout performers this

year. Stylish Indian opener Smriti Mandhana too will be vying for an ICC award after being nominated for ICC Women's ODI Cricketer of the Year for her standout performance in international cricket.

Laura Wolvaardt (South Africa), Chamari Athapaththu (Sri Lanka) and Annabel Sutherland (Australia) are the other experienced cricketers competing for the award. — PTI

West Bengal storm

into Santosh final

Hyderabad: West Bengal edged past defending champions Services 4-2 to enter the final of the 78th National Football Championship for the Santosh Trophy here on Sunday. The winners led 3-0 at half time. The win marked West Bengal's 47th appearance in the tournament's final, which they have won a record 32 times. The match saw West Bengal asserting their authority early on. Manotos Maji and Naro Hari Shrestha each scored a goal, while Robi Hansda, the tournament's leading scorer with 11 goals, added a brace to his tally to bag the Player-of-the-Match

Services, on the back foot for much of the first half, managed to score through Bikash Thapa and an own goal by West Bengal, which added some suspense to the proceedings in the second half. West Bengal unleashed well-coordinated attacks in the first half. Their organisation in defence also stood out, stifling the Services forwards from making any sig-nificant impact. — PTI

Ashi wins maiden

3P national title

Bhopal: Local shooter Ashi Chouksey overcame a strong field, that had the likes of Olympians Anjum Moudgil and Shriyanka Sadangi, to clinch her maiden national title in the 50m rifle 3-positions event here on Sunday. Ashi shot a superb 466.7, a full 3.1 points clear of two-time Olympian Anjum at her home range, the MP State Academy, during the 67th **National Shooting** Championship. Upcoming shooter Sakshi Sunil

Padekar of Maharashtra won the bronze with an effort of

Ashi, who has been in great form over the past two years and was also a part of the Paris Olympic Games trials, extended her run of good form with a solid 590 in qualifications, to get into the eight-woman match-up in third place. In the final, however, Ashi was in a different league altogether opening up a 2.3 points gap over Anjum at the end of the first 'Kneeling' position round. She maintained the lead after the 15 shots in the second 'Prone' position also. The lead increased to 2.9 after 10-shots of the last 'Standing' position and despite a few high 9s after that, the result was never in doubt. - PTI

Lakshya finishes

third at King Cup Shenzhen, China: India's Lakshya Sen delivered a dominant performance, outplaying rising French star Alex Lanier in straight games to finish third at the inaugural King Cup International Badminton Open here on Sunday. The 23-yearold defeated Lanier 21-17, 21-11, securing a handsome prize purse of around ₹36 lakh. Lakshva had earlier lost in the semifinals to reigning world junior champion Hu Zhe'an of China, going down 19-21, 19-21 in a closely-contested match. In the third place play-off, Lakshva started strong, taking a 6-1 lead, but Lanier fought back to level the score at 10-10, eventually gaining a one-point advantage at the interval. However, Lakshya regained control to move ahead 18-15 and grabbed three game points before sealing the opening game when Lanier went wide. After the break, Lakshya continued with the momentum, establishing an 8-6 lead and quickly extending it to 15-8. He gained

nine match points and wrapped

up the victory when Lanier sent

a shot long. — PTI

BUMHURRAH!

Jasprit stars in India's fight before Oz tail wags

Melbourne, Dec. 29: Jasprit Bumrah left the hosts in a daze with a dream spell but the courageous Australian lower order steered the side to a commanding 333-run lead on Sunday, setting up the Boxing Day Test for an intriguing last-day finish.

Australia finished the fourth day at 228 for nine, leaving India skip-per Rohit Sharma a bit irritated as the home team was in a spot at 156 for 8 at one stage.

Australia's number 8, 10 and 11 batters saw off nearly 35 overs and it could prove decisive if India doesn't bat exceedingly well on a track

which has remained true in all four days.

Bumrah (4/53 in 17 overs) was an artist at work in the first two sessions and found his ally in Mohammed Siraj (3/66 in 22 overs) as momentum suddenly swung in India's favour.

Bumrah unplayable for the better part of the second innings and completed 200 Test wickets on the day at an incredible average of 19.56.

But as luck would have it, he couldn't complete his five-for as he over-stepped when he had Nathan Lyon caught in the slips by KL Rahul. Insult to the injury was the last-ball boundary hit by Lyon.

immaculate With length, awkward bounce and late movement, Bumrah had the Australian line-up in complete tangle but India let slip the advantageous position in the

final session. Pat Cummins (41 off 90 balls), Lyon (41 batting, 54 balls) and Scott Boland (10 batting, 65 balls) beefed up the second innings total, leaving a jittery Indian toporder with a mountain

to climb on the final day. A victory isn't impossible but for it to happen India would need something freakish from Rishabh Pant and at least a couple of senior batters need to shrug off the rust. The pitch has o demons but Indian batters need to clear the cobwebs in their minds.

Marnus Labuschagne played his grittiest knock of the series with 70 but Yashasvi Jaiswal's three dropped catches could cost India dear despite another day of heavylifting by the

peerless Bumrah. Labuschagne fought doggedly but could have been dismissed for 47 if Jaiswal held onto a regulation catch in third slip

off Akash Deep. For the first time since the Perth Test, Bumrah had meaningful support from the other end as Australia lost three wickets in a space of 10 deliveries. The pacer's effort helped India regain a good bit of control despite conceding a 105-run first innings lead even after Nitish Reddy's brilliant 114.



India's Jasprit Bumrah (centre) celebrates the wicket of Australia batter Travis Head on the fourth day of their

Wanted to prove critics, naysayers wrong: Nitish

Melbourne, Dec. 29: Nitish Reddy wanted to confute his critics and the naysayers who doubted his ability to excel in Test format, and the gritty century at the iconic MCG was his way of conveying that he belongs to highest level of cricket. A few former players, including a former chairman of selectors, were sceptical about Reddy's elevation as a Test player but with 293 runs in six innings and a batting average of 58-plus, he has answered them back in a befitting manner.

Reddy's 114 formed the cornerstone of India's first innings score of 369. Did you ever feel that you will be highest scorer

in this team? Some people doubted me, like a youngster who played IPL, can't perform in such a big series. I know a lot of people did talk like that," Reddy said, sharing his frustration after the end of fourth

day's play.
"I just want to make them feel wrong about what they have said about me and that's what I am doing, I want people to know that I am here to

SCORECARD

India 1st innings (overnight 358/9): Yashasvi Jaiswal run out (Cummins/†Carey) 82, Rohit Sharma c Boland b Cummins 3, K.L. Rahul b Cummins 24, Virat Kohli c Carey b Boland 36, Akash Deep c Lyon b Boland O, Rishabh Pant c Lyon b Boland 28, Ravindra Jadeja lbw b Lyon 17, Nitish Kumar Reddy c Starc b Lyon 114, Washington Sundar c Smith b Lyon 50, Jasprit Bumrah c Khawaja k Mohammed Siraj not out 4. Extras (lb-2, nb-4, w-5) 11. Total (all out in 119.3 overs) 369.

Fall of wickets: 1-8, 2-51, 3-153, 4-154, 5-159, 6-191, 7-221, 8-348, 9-

Bowling: Mitchell Starc 25-2-86-0, Pat Cummins 29-6-89-3, Scott Boland 27-7-57-3, Nathan Lyon 28.3-4-96-3, Mitchell Marsh 7-1-28-0, Travis Head 3-0-11-0.

Australia 2nd innings: Sam Konstas b Bumrah 8, Usman Khawaja b Siraj 21, Marnus Labuschagne Ibw Siraj 70, Steve Smith c Pant b Siraj 13, Travis Head c Reddy b Bumrah 1, Mitchell Marsh c Pant b Bumrah 0, Alex Carey b Bumrah 2, Pat Cummins c Rohit b Jadeja 41, Mitchell Starc run out (Reddy/Pant) 5, Nathan Lyon batting 41, Scott Boland batting 10. Extras (lb-9, nb-6, w-1) 16. Total (for 9 wickets in 82

Fall of wickets: 1-20, 2-43, 3-80, 4-85, 5-85, 6-91, 7-148, 8-156, 9-173, **Bowling:** Jasprit Bumrah 24-7-56-4, Akash Deep 17-4-53-0, Mohammed Siraj 22-4-66-3, Ravindra Jadeja 14-2-33-1, Nitish Reddy 1-0-4-0, Washington Sundar 4-0-7-0.

old said and his plain speaking was as aggressive as his purposeful bat-

ting. Asked how he looks at the past one month during which his life changed, he was quick to reply: "I guess for you guys, it is

like one or two months.

For me, it's like, I can see

give my 100 per cent for my my past two to three Indian team," the 21-year- years. How hard I've been working on my batting and bowling.

A lot of people don't know that Reddy had know hired side-arm throwdown experts before the start of 2024 IPL and practised against them with speed of deliveries cranking up to 145 clicks from

time we have also come to

Australia. He made a hun-

dred when we were there

in the stands. I feel very

proud of him. As parents, we express our gratitude to everyone," Reddy said

while speaking in Telugu. Nitish's sister Tejaswi

joined the conversation

and also helped her father

by translating the ques-tions to him. "He prom-

ised us he will make us all

proud, I was confident but

somewhere tense too

because Bumrah *bhai*'s

wicket fell, but he made

it," said Tejaswi and also

explained how her parents were not very comfortable

Both Bumrah and Jadeja achieved the feat in their 44th Test, and overall he is 12th Indian bowler in the format to complete the landmark. — PTI

BUMRAH IS FIRST

SUB-20 AVERAGE

Melbourne, Dec. 29: Pace spearhead Jasprit

the

fastest Indian along with

Ravindra Jadeja to com-

plete 200 Test wickets

and the first bowler ever

to reach that milestone

with a sub-20 average

during the fourth day's

play of the fourth Test

Travis Head (1) for his

200th victim in the post-

lunch session, joining

Jadeja in the list of

bowlers who are fastest

He is also the fastest

Indian pace bowler to

achieve the feat, going

past legendary Kapil

Dev who went past the

mark in 50 matches.

INCONSISTENT

BOUNCE 'TRICKY'

to 200 wickets in Tests.

against Australia here.

Bumrah

Sunday

second

dismissed

Bumrah on

became

BOWLER WITH

FOR AUSTRALIA Melbourne, Dec. 29: India might be in for a very difficult chase on a track which is offering inconsistent with deliveries bowled from back of length coming at stump height, Australia's top scorer Marnus Labuschagne

said on Sunday. Asked how the pitch would behave on Day 5, Labuschagne said, "I think from the first innings, there was some movement, obviously. It was hard work in that first probably, especially the first 40 to 50 overs But as the game's gone on, the bounce has got less and more inconsistent. So we're just getting more balls hitting the stumps. More balls are skidding through."

He feels the degree of lateral movement is still the same but the difference in height could become a factor.

"The seam movement's probably been the same. But just the amount of lower," he added. -PTI



Koneru Humpy after winning the FIDE World Rapid Chess Championship 2024 in women category in New

Humpy grabs 2nd World Rapid title

Grandmaster Koneru Humpy capped a wonderful year for Indian chess, defeating Irene Sukandar of Indonesia to emerge the FIDE Women's World Rapid Chess champion here on Sunday.

Humpy had won the event back in 2019 at Georgia and the Indian No. 1 is only the second player after China's Ju Wenjun to clinch the title more than once. Humpy's achievement

laced a sensational year for the chess fraternity after D. Gukesh defeated China's Ding Liren to emerge champion in the classical format World Championship recently in Singapore.
In September, India had

also won its first-ever gold medals in Open and Women's categories in the Olympiad Chess

The Indian, who started the tournament here with a first-round defeat, was the lone winner in the 11th and final round, helping her to top the tables with 8.5 points, half a point clear of six others including compatriot D. Harika.

"I'm very excited and happy. In fact, I expected it to be a very tough day, like some sort of tie-break. But when I finished the game, the arbitrator told me (about winning), and it was a tense moment for me," said Humpy, who began with black pieces, after her vic-rounds.

Humpy had won the event back in 2019 at Georgia and the Indian No. 1 is only the second player after China's Ju Wenjun to clinch the title more than once.

tory.
"So, this is quite unexpected because the whole year I have been strug-gling and I had very bad tournaments where I just ended up in last place. So,

this came as a surprise,

she added. Ju Wenjun of China fin-ished second as the tiebreak was resolved while Kateryna Lagno of Russia ended third. Harika, who had eight points, had to be content with a fifth-place finish.

Humpy credited her

family for the success. 'I think it was possible because of the support from my family. My husband and my parents they support me a lot. My parents look after my daughter when I travel.

"It's not easy to become World Champion at 37. It's quite difficult when you get older to keep that motivation and stay sharp when required. I'm glad that I made it," she

The seasoned player said she was motivated to round defeat, which saw her eventually slipping to 2.5 points after four



Manchester City's Erling Haaland (right) celebrates with Savinho after scoring against Leicester City during their English Premier League match at the King Power Stadium in Leicester, England, on Sunday.

MAN CITY STOP THE ROT **WITH WIN AT LEICESTER**

Leicester (United Kingdom), Dec. 29: Manchester City provided Pep Guardiola some relief with a 2-0 victory at Leicester to secure just a second win in 14 games for the crisis-hit English champions on Sunday

Savinho and Erling Haaland struck either side of half-time as City ended a run of eight away games without a win. The performance was still far from the standards that Guardiola's side have set in winning an unprecedented four consecutive English top-flight titles. But the effusive celebrations of Haaland's header 16 minutes from time showed that three points was all that mattered for the visitors to at least temporarily halt their remarkable slump.

Victory lifts City up to fifth but they are still 11 points behind leaders Liverpool, who have two games in hand. Defeat leaves Leicester still rooted in the bottom

Guardiola made just one change from the 1-1 Boxing Day draw against Everton as Kevin De Bruyne replaced his Belgian international colleague Jeremy Doku. De Bruyne's fitness struggles have played a part in City's slump and he immediately showed what Guardiola's men have been missing for most of the

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Reddy family meets Gavaskar

Melbourne, Dec. 29: Mutyalu Reddy, the father of India's newest cricketing hero Nitish, was overwhelmed when he touched the feet of his childhood hero Sunil Gavaskar after being escorted to the official broadcaster's box. Gavaskar met the Reddy family, a day after 21-yearold Nitish conjured up his maiden Test hundred. The legendary batter, who is now a revered analyst and commentator, acknowledged the sacrifices made by the Reddy family and told them that Indian cricket has got a 'gem' because of their efforts.

Even the 'little master' seemed gripped by a wave of emotions and gave his blessings to the family.

The video of the meeting went viral on social media. Mutyalu shared how tense the family was when Nitish was batting on 99 and the ninth wicket



Mohammed Siraj (right) pats to applaud batting partner Nitish Kumar Reddy as they leave the field at the end of their innings on Sunday.

fell. "I was a little tense when Siraj came in to bat. How will he play, he might get out. Thanks to Siraj bhai, he played three dot balls and supported my son. Thank you DSP sir,"

Mutyalu said. Siraj held his ground when he faced Pat when he faced Pat Cummins, allowing Nitish to complete his century. "First time Nitish has come to Australia and first

travelling to Australia. "Initially my parents hesitated because of the

language barrier but you don't want to miss the moments. My uncle is also living here. So we decided, we can also stay together and have some family time," Tejaswi said. — *PTI*