

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 return. The police discovered that he had changed his identity to Akshay Kumar and moved to Mumbai with his three-year-old son.

JUVENILE WHO STOLE DIAMOND JEWELLERY HELD

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 registered 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 17-year-old juvenile, was apprehended near the New Delhi Railway Station on December 20. During interrogation, the juvenile confessed to his involvement in the crime

■ 'No such inquiry has even been contemplated by transport department'

Govt staff refutes Kejriwal's claims of probe against CM

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 29

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 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 transport department 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 added.

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



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

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 conspiracy," he said.

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 matters.

Addressing a press conference earlier on 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 fabricated 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 continue.

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 settled 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.



Vehicles move on a road amid fog during a cold winter morning in New Delhi on Sunday. — PTI

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 meteorological department. 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 maximum and minimum temperatures expected to settle around 18 and 6°C, respectively.

The 24-hour Air 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 Vivek Vihar reported AQI levels in the 'very poor' category, with readings exceeding 300.

OUT OF 28 monitoring stations, Anand Vihar, Sirifort, and Vivek Vihar reported AQI levels in the 'very poor' category, with readings exceeding 300.

The remaining stations recorded AQI levels in the 'moderate' and '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
NEW DELHI, DEC. 29

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

मैं कुंवर अभयद पुर श्री योगेश कुमार सिंह निवासी- शिव बास, प्लॉट नं०- 26, नवनीत विहार कॉलोनी, सेक्टर- 9, इन्द्रा नगर, लाहौक, 2090- 226012 ने अपना नाम कुंवर अभयद (Kunwar Abhuday) से बदलकर कुंवर अभयद सिंह (Kunwar Abhuday Singh) कर लिया है। अब से भविष्य के सभी उद्देश्यों के लिए मुझे कुंवर अभयद सिंह (Kunwar Abhuday Singh) के नाम से जाना जाए।



KIND ATTENTION

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

AVOID OPEN BURNING
AVOID AIR POLLUTION

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AND WARM CLOTHING TO
SECURITY AND OTHER STAFF



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✓ Do not use coal and wood for heating purpose

LET'S PROTECT OUR AIR TOGETHER !

Delhi Pollution Control Committee
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SHORT TAKES

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 (BSBT) 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 daughter-in-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 Ashok Choudhary, also visited his residence to pay their last respects. — PTI

Mumbai boy found 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 Malvani 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 35-year-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 Yadav-led 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 Rajput 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," the SP said. — PTI

'NO DEVELOPMENT BUT DESTRUCTION UNDER YOGI GOVT'

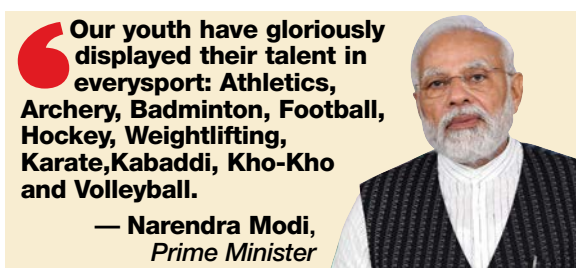
Lucknow, Dec. 29: Launching a scathing attack on Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday said there is no development but destruction under the present regime. The former CM said the BJP government is making Uttar Pradesh number one in borrowing and 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 Samajwadi 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 ('mukhya-mantree jee ke haath mein vikaas kee rekha nahin hai, vinaash kee rekha hai')," he said, according to a statement issued by the Samajwadi Party. Mr Yadav said the BJP government has not done any development work. — PTI



Akhilesh Yadav

Unique event as it symbolises a change taking place in country' **Bastar Olympics platform for youth for honing talent: Modi**

New Delhi, Dec. 29: Prime 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 between people and administration. Referring to the Bastar Olympics in his monthly "Mann ki Baat" broadcast, Mr Modi said it was a unique event that symbol-



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 merging together, where our youth are honing their talent and building a new Bharat," 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 to know that this is taking place in a region that was once a witness to Maoist violence," he said. Chhattisgarh's undivided

Bastar district, which has now been bifurcated into seven districts, is geographically bigger than Kerala and is one of the worst Naxal-affected regions in the country. The PM said the mascots of 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, Archery, Badminton, Football, Hockey, Weightlifting, Karate, Kabaddi, Kho-Kho and Volleyball," Mr Modi said. — PTI

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 accompanied by Odisha 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 losses. The situation is critical, with the Opposition BJD recently claiming that at least four farmers have died due to crop loss in the

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

last eight days. Meanwhile, deputy CM Pravatī 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, and Kendrapada, on December 31 to review the damage and support affected farmers.



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

Up to Centre to decide if it wants to forcibly evict Dallewal, say farmer leaders **'Following Gandhian way to continue stir'**

Chandigarh, Dec. 29: With Jagjit Singh Dallewal's indefinite hunger strike entering its 34th day on Sunday, farmer leaders at Khanauri said they have been following the 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 leader. Their statement comes amid the Supreme Court's strong criticism of the Punjab government for not shifting Mr Dallewal

to a hospital. 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 crops. Speaking to reporters at the 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 agitation."

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

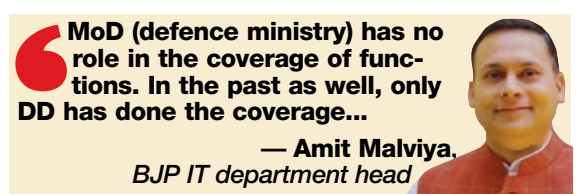
He said a narrative is being built that farmers are stubborn. "Whereas it is the Centre that is adopting such an attitude, not listening to us and not paying any attention to farmers' demands." "We are continuing our

agitation by adopting 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 that whatever situation

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 support of Mr Dallewal. — PTI

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 allegations" 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 mismanagement. 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-



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

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

Protesters lathicharged in Patna over BPSC row; Kishor joins stir

Patna, Dec. 29: The Bihar police on Sunday used water cannons and lathicharge to disperse protesters demanding the cancellation of the Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) exam held here on December 13. The protesters, who were joined earlier in the day by Jan Suraj 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 said. The protesters also tried to jump over barricades while marching from Gandhi Maidan towards

JP Golumber, he added. "The protesters gathered at Gandhi Maidan despite the administration's warning that any demonstration there 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 tutor 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, criticised 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 said. 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

The 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 commence commercial operations, officials said. The commercial opera-

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 traditional 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.

'Trump's ops against drug abuse failed, could have been avoided'

MANOJ ANAND GUWAHATI, DEC. 29

The US President-elect Donald Trump's disastrous "Iron Tempest" in his first term set the backdrop to a new book that documents fast-growing Afghanistan-sourced drug trafficking internationally. "In its first months, the Trump administration was confronted with alarming figures showing 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,"

"IN ITS first months, the Trump administration was confronted with alarming figures showing a surge in drug abuse in the US," said Iqbal Chand Malhotra in his book wrote Iqbal Chand Malhotra in his book *The Nukes, the Jihad, the Hawala and Crystal 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 trafficking cartels. "The Trump administration seemed to have

accepted that Directorate S's (Pakistan's ISI wing) structural oversight of Afghanistan's narcotics industry was unparalleled. Directorate S had defeated the administrations 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 of '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 Dance' in 2007," reasoned Mr Malhotra,

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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 official said. — *PTI*

Malayalam actor found dead in hotel

Thiruvananthapuram: Well-known 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 handle while sharing pictures of the immersion. However, BJP leader 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.

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 city. 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

■ Snow in higher reaches of HP ■ Cold day in Haryana, Raj
Kashmir limps back to normal a day after heaviest snowfall

New Delhi, Dec. 29: Normality was returning to Kashmir with flight 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 higher reaches also 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.

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 from 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 here. Whenever we get information about it, we share it with BSF.” Mr Kumar added, “We sensitise them and will continue to do that. In spite 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 Kashmir-based 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 that.”



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

Some places also witnessed cold-day conditions. The Jammu and Kashmir government deployed men and machinery to restore services following Saturday’s heavy snowfall that disrupted connectivity. The 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

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

By Sunday morning, air traffic at the Srinagar International Airport had resumed, with Airports Authority of India officials 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.

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



Participants from different parts of West Bengal during the 65th All Bengal Bratacharit training camp in Kolkata on Sunday. Bangladeshi nationals are not participating this 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

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, DEC. 29

Exactly 40 years and 26 days after the Bhopal gas tragedy, the move to shift 337 tonnes of toxic waste from the Union Carbide factory site here to the incineration facility in Pithapuram in Dhar district in Madhya Pradesh began on Sunday. 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-

■ **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

posal. “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 Kumar Singh told this newspaper. According to him, workers specially trained for handling toxic substances have been assigned the task of packing the hazardous waste and loading

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 experts, and officials of Central and state pollution control boards were present on the occasion to monitor the process of packing and 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.

India’s foes active, watch out: Rajnath

■ *Continued from Page 1* Research Centre and the various MoUs towards enabling absorption and transformation of technologies. Mr 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 modernised 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.

Arunachal to implement Act to curb religious conversions

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

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, DEC. 29

■ **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 found sanctioned, approved, performed by the indigenous communities of Arunachal Pradesh from these communities have been known...”

Jilted lover, 21, blows himself up in Mandya

M.B. GIRISH
BENGALURU, DEC. 29

A tragic incident occurred in Nagamangala, Mandya district, early Sunday when a 21-year-old man, Ramachandru, ended his life by detonating gelatin sticks near his girlfriend’s house in Kalenahalli.

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

Ramachandru, a truck driver and resident of Basaveshwara Nagar, used gelatin sticks, commonly employed in quarries, to blow himself up with a detonator.

He was reportedly in an inebriated state at the time of the incident.

The deceased had been in a relationship with a

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

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

The explosion scattered his body into multiple pieces, awakening villagers, who alerted the police.

Authorities are investigating how Ramachandru obtained the gelatin sticks used in the incident.

A case has been registered, and further investigations are ongoing.

After 16 hrs, boy pulled out of MP borewell, found dead

AGE CORRESPONDENT
BHOPAL, DEC. 29

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 morning. Despite the 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

borewell. They immediately informed the police.

The rescue operation began around 6 pm on Saturday, two-and-a-half hours after the incident. Teams from the National Disaster Response Force and State Disaster Response Force joined the effort, digging a parallel 40 ft-deep pit to reach the boy. Sumeet was pulled out at approximately 9:30 am on Sunday.

“He was rushed to a local hospital but was declared dead by doctors,” Guna district collector Satyendra Singh said.

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 year.

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 said.

Mr Modi emphasised the pivotal role of young creators in the preparations for WAVES, reflecting the dynamic spirit of India’s creative community and 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.

THE ASIAN AGE

30 DECEMBER 2024

Bickering over memorial for Manmohan shameful

The 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 in 2018.

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 contradicted 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, *Nalukettu*, 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 Jnanpith and Padma Bhushan awards, among the countless many awards he received, are just a pointer to the Colossus-like presence he has had in the Indian literary scene.

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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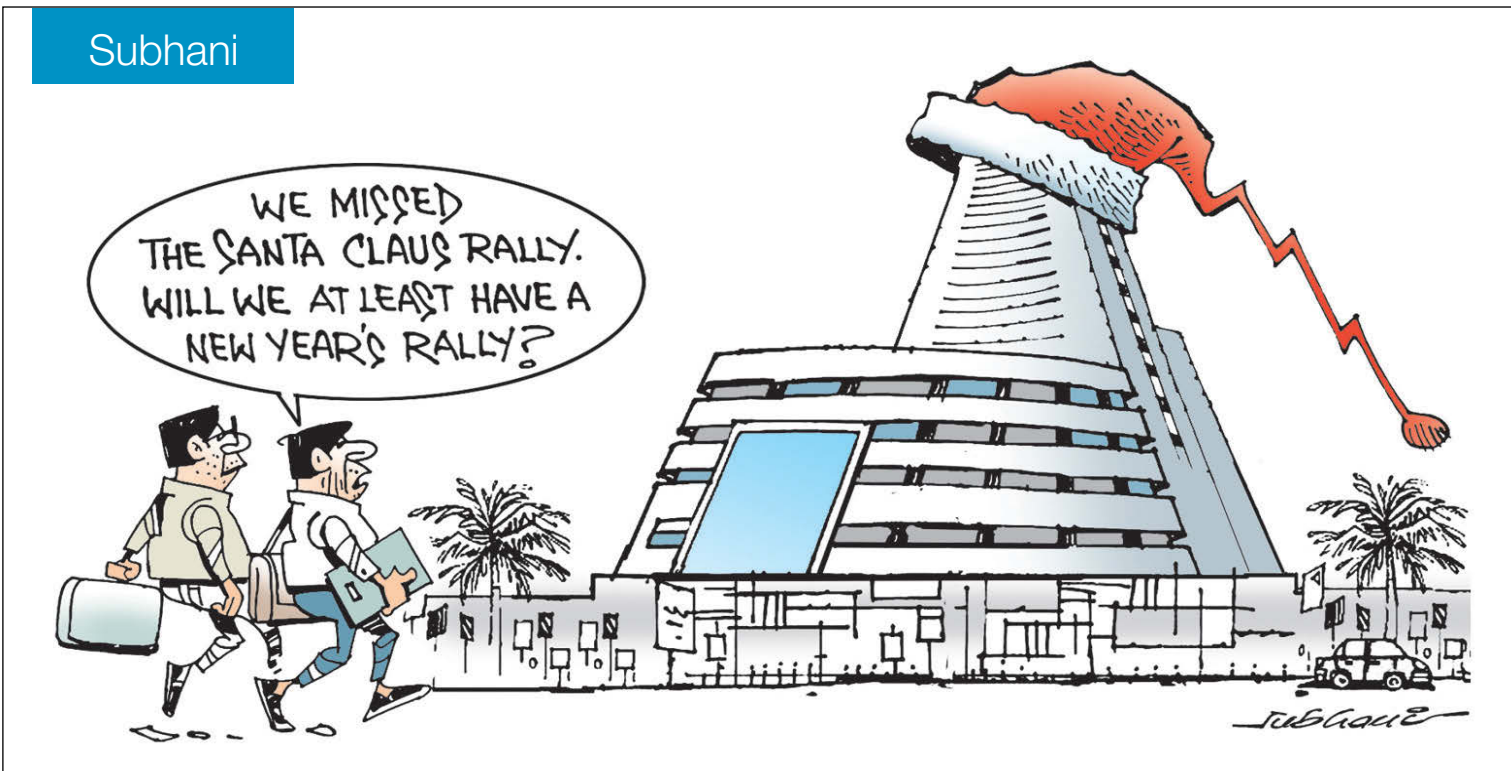
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Subhani



An 'A to Z' guide to India's politics in the year gone by



Sunil Gatade

In the year gone by, "A" definitely stands for Gautam Adani, the controversial businessman who was in the news, national and international, for all the wrong reasons. No other A, including the Ambanis, could replace that.

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 architect of the Constitution.

"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 century in the Lok Sabha polls, becoming Leader of the Opposition. By the year-end, it was a different story as allies started questioning his leadership after he lost crucial states.

"D" undoubtedly stands for Jagdeep Dhankhar, Rajya Sabha Chairman, who the Opposition felt was the main "disruptor". He has the dubious distinction of being the first vice-president 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 Maharashtra CM surprised friends and foes alike and could have repercussions far beyond.

"G" is for George Soros and his alleged links with the Congress, who was targeted by the BJP, which

was facing flak over the Adani issue.

"H" is for Haryana, where the Assembly election 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. Chandrachud, whose tenure ended recently, was the most controversial of judges in the year gone by for his actions and inactions. Jagan Mohan Reddy lost power in Andhra Pradesh.

"K" is for Arvind Kejriwal, the former Delhi CM jailed over the alleged excise scam, who faces the most ticklish Assembly poll in the New Year.

"L" is for lieutenant-governors (Delhi and J&K). New rules give them more powers ahead of Assembly elections, including over key appointments and services, which the 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.

"M" is undoubtedly for (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 survey".

M is also for Manipur, which was on the boil for a second year. The PM faced attacks for not visiting the northeastern state.

M is for Madhavi Puri Buch, too, the controversial Sebi chief who faced attacks for allegedly shielding Gautam Adani.

"N" is for Nitish Kumar and N. Chandrababu Naidu, who became the PM's obedient crutches

'A' definitely stands for Gautam Adani, the controversial businessman who was in the news, national and international, for all the wrong reasons. No other A, including the Ambanis, could claim that distinction.

after he failed to get a majority. They dashed the hopes of Modi detractors as they seemed to be chanting: "Dal roti khao, Prabhu ke gun gao".

"O" is for Om Birla, the controversial Lok Sabha Speaker, who was hand-picked by Mr Modi to continue running the Lower House. The Opposition's no-confidence motion 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 depended upon a controversial bureaucrat.

"P" for (Sharad) Pawar meant power, but this Maratha strongman was upstaged by estranged nephew Ajit Pawar on his home turf of Maharashtra, backed by the BJP, which made mincemeat of the Opposition.

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

"R" — Rajasthan saw the end of the Ashok Gehlot era in 2024 as the Congress was defeated at the end of 2023. The BJP made green-horn Bhajan Lal Sharma the chief minister, sidelining veteran 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 Uddhav Thackeray in Maharashtra. The year

saw the CM becoming deputy CM to Devendra Fadnavis, who was his deputy earlier.

S could also be remembered 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 Constitution.

"T" is for Telangana, which saw the exit of the ambitious K. Chandrasekhar Rao of TRS from power with the emergence of the Congress under Revanth Reddy. Politics in the southern state is becoming a Congress versus 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 speculation 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.

"X" — The owner of X (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 kept 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, Punjab

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

Mahir Ali



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

Just 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, who spoke for 45 minutes without even a passing reference to the genocide in Gaza or its antecedents.

What kind of oblivion do such intellectuals 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?

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 targeted 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 from the Democratic candidate on this basis

and gave them to her Republican rival will 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 continent.

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

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 against immigration. 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 surprising if that had been Abdulmohsen's intention all along.

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.

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 Georgian 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 "difficult," 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 transported to hospitals.

CHARLES DOLAN,
HBO FOUNDER,
DIES AT 98

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 patriarch, Charles Dolan, the visionary 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

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 touched 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



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.

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

probably 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 and outside the plane.

In the space of a few minutes, the control tower issued a bird strike warning.

REACTIONS

“Regarding the black boxes, both the cockpit voice recorder and the flight data recorder have now been retrieve.”

— JOO JONG-WAN
SK dy transport min.

“The entire government is working closely together to manage the aftermath of the accident, dedicating all available resources, while making every effort to ensure thorough support for the bereaved families.”

— CHOI SANG-MOK
SK's acting President

“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.”

— POPE FRANCIS

Plane shot from Russia: Azerbaijan

Baku, Moscow, Dec. 29: Azerbaijani President Ilham 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 the disaster.

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Saturday apologised to Aliyev for Wednesday's "tragic incident" in Russian airspace involving the plane after Russian air defences engaged Ukrainian attack

drones. A Kremlin statement 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 electronic jamming and had then been shot at while it was approaching the southern Russian city of Grozny.



Our plane was shot down by accident. Unfortunately, in the first three days we heard only absurd versions from Russia. We witnessed clear attempts to cover up the matter.

— Ilham Aliyev, Azerbaijan's President

"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 Azerbaijani leader, who has

close ties to Russia and 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 Sunday.

— Reuters



Our plane was shot down by accident. Unfortunately, in the first three days we heard only absurd versions from Russia. We witnessed clear attempts to cover up the matter.

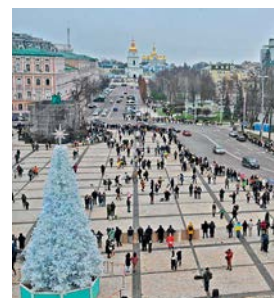
— Ilham Aliyev, Azerbaijan's President

Russia to abandon missile moratorium, says Lavrov

Moscow, Dec. 29: Russia 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 Sergei 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 disintegration



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.

— AFP

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

nuclear war.

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 intermediate-range 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.



nical test before it becomes 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 Syaprubensi when it crashed on August 7.

— Agencies



China unveiled an updated model of its high-speed bullet train, on Sunday.

— AP

At 450 kmph, China unveils fastest train

Beijing, Dec. 29: China on Sunday unveiled an updated model of its high-speed 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 for 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 high-speed rail (HSR) currently in service, which operates at speeds of 350 kmph, a report by state-run Xinhua said. China Railway will arrange a series of line tests.

— PTI

UNDER | THREAT

Ninth telecom co. in list of entities compromised by hackers

China 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 intelligence interest," an AT&T spokesperson said. "While only a few cases of compromised information were identified, 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

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 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."

— Reuters

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	78,699.07	0.29
Nifty 50	23,813.40	0.27
S&P 500*	5,970.84	-1.11
Dollar (₹)	85.02	0.08
Pound Sterling (₹)	106.22	1.38
Euro (₹)	88.24	0.38
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	76,536*8	-0.01
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 middle-income 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 economic momentum."



MARKETS TO TRACK MACRO DATA, FIIs, GLOBAL TRENDS

New Delhi, Dec. 29: Macroeconomic data announcements, trading activity of foreign investors and global trends will guide equity market movement this week, which would also mark the beginning of the new calendar year and month, analysts said.

Movement of rupee, which registered the steepest fall in almost two years to hit its lifetime intra-day low on Friday, will also be tracked by investors.

"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 earnings season approaches, corporate quarterly updates will begin trickling 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

FOCUS ON growth

● 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, AI, 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

economic momentum. Persistent food inflationary pressures 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, targeted 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

THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD FOCUS ON ENHANCING PEOPLE'S INCOME, SAYS CII



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 MGNREGS 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 ₹8,000. This will entail an additional expenditure of Rs 20,000 crore," it said.

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

New Delhi, Dec. 29: India is poised to achieve new heights in foodgrain production in 2025, driven by favourable monsoon, though significant challenges persist in pulses 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 ending 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 rainfall," Agriculture Secretary Devesh 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

DIGITAL INFRA INVESTMENTS HIT HISTORIC HIGH

New Delhi, Dec. 29: Continuous investment in digital 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 said.

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 intermediation 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 the sector's growth included continuous investment in digital infrastructure, such as data centres and high-speed internet connectivity; initiatives like Digital India that have fostered a conducive environment for IT and digitally delivered services and partnerships. — PTI

Rupee withstood storms in '24, relief likely in '25

Mumbai, Dec. 29: The Indian rupee tumbled 3 per cent in 2024 as concerns over slower economic growth and the greenback's global strength weighed, 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



FREE FALL REASONS FOR WEAKENED RUPEE IN 2024

- Wars in Ukraine and Middle East.
- Trade disruptions in the Red Sea.
- Elections in several major economies.
- Dependence on crude oil imports.
- Widened trade deficit
- 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.

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 (non-deliverable 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 September.

CAD ends up flat in Q2 after revision

New Delhi, Dec. 29: 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 Asian nation's import bill up during the quarter, which typically sees a jump in spending as Indians prepare for the Diwali festival season. The country's trade 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 are concerns that officials may have over estimated 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

RBI flags high staff attrition in pvt banks

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 India 2023-24.

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.

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

(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. — PTI

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

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

Private operators have invested around ₹70,000 crore in telecom infrastructure and radiowave assets this year to expand

the coverage of next-generation 5G services which is one of the main highlights of 2024 for the sector. To recover investments and protect margins, private telcos resorted to tariff hikes in mid-year but that move backfired.

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



a 10-26 per cent price hike. Around 68 customers switched to state-run player BSNL which refrained from price hike. The loss-making PSU still offers

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

recover investment and invest more in 5G to offer new-age services to drive future growth.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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 wicket-taker 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 award.

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 significant 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 451.3.

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-year-old defeated Lanier 21-17, 21-11, securing a handsome prize purse of around ₹36 lakh. Lakshya 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, Lakshya 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 skipper 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 was 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 overstepped when he had Nathan Lyon caught in the slips by KL Rahul. Insult to the injury was the last-ball boundary hit by Lyon.

With immaculate 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 top-order 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 no demons but Indian batters need to clear the cobwebs in their minds.

Marnus Labuschagne played his grittiest knock of the series with a 70 but Yashasvi Jaiswal's three dropped catches could cost India dear despite another day of heavy-lifting 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.

— PTI



India's Jasprit Bumrah (centre) celebrates the wicket of Australia batter Travis Head on the fourth day of their fourth Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground in Melbourne on Sunday.

— AP

Wanted to prove critics, naysayers wrong: Nitish

Melbourne, Dec. 29: Nitish Reddy wanted to confuse 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	
Australia 1st Innings 474	
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 0, 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 b Cummins 0, Mohammed Siraj not out 4. Extras (lb-2, nb-4, w-5) 11. Total (all out in 119.5 overs) 369.	
Fall of wickets: 1-8, 2-51, 3-153, 4-154, 5-159, 6-191, 7-221, 8-348, 9-350.	
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 lbw Siraj 70, Steve Smith c Pant b Siraj 15, 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 overs) 228.	
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.	

give my 100 per cent for Indian team," the 21-year-old said and his plain speaking was as aggressive as his purposeful batting.

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

my my past two to three years. How hard I've been working on my batting and bowling."

A lot of people don't know that Reddy had hired side-arm throw-down experts before the start of 2024 IPL and practised against them with speed of deliveries cranking up to 145 clicks from around 18 yards. — PTI

BUMRAH IS FIRST BOWLER WITH SUB-20 AVERAGE

Melbourne, Dec. 29: Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah on Sunday became the second fastest Indian along with Ravindra Jadeja to complete 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 against Australia here.

Bumrah dismissed Travis Head (1) for his 200th victim in the post-lunch session, joining Jadeja in the list of bowlers who are fastest to 200 wickets in Tests.

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.

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

INCONSISTENT BOUNCE 'TRICKY' FOR AUSTRALIA

Melbourne, Dec. 29: India might be in for a very difficult chase on a track which is offering inconsistent bounce 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 bounce is significantly lower," he added. — PTI



Koneru Humpy after winning the FIDE World Rapid Chess Championship 2024 in women category in New York on Sunday.

— PTI

Humpy grabs 2nd World Rapid title

New York, Dec. 29: 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 Chess Olympiad in Budapest.

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-

● 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 struggling 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 finished second as the tie-break 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 a 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 said.

The seasoned player said she was motivated to do well after her first round defeat, which saw her eventually slipping to 2.5 points after four rounds. — PTI



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. — AP

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 three.

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 season. — AFP