

**NEW DELHI TUESDAY 14 JANUARY 2025**



DELHI AGE | 9

## Steve Jobs' wife Laurene, in India for Maha Kumbh, gets Hindu name Kamala

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## IN BRIEF

**Court to hear case against Tytler Jan. 28**

**New Delhi:** A Delhi court is likely to resume on January 28 hearing arguments in a 1984-anti Sikh riots case against Congress leader Jagdish Tytler. Special Judge Jitendra Singh adjourned the matter after a brief hearing on the arguments on Monday. Tytler appeared before the court in person. The case is linked to the killings of three Sikhs at Gurdwara Pul Bangash in 1984. The judge on November 12, 2024, concluded recording the statement of Lakhvinder Kaur, the widow of Badal Singh who was killed by a mob at the gurdwara during the riots. The court framed charges of murder and other offences against Tytler on September 13 last year. A witness claimed Tytler came out of a white car in front of the gurdwara on November 1, 1984, and instigated a mob against the community, leading to the killings.

A sessions court in 2023 granted anticipatory bail to Tytler in the case on a personal bond of ₹1 lakh and a surety of like amount. He was directed not to tamper with the evidence in the case or leave the country without the court's permission, among other conditions. — PTI

**Fire in Paschim Puri claims 1 life, 2 injured**

**New Delhi:** An elderly woman was killed and two persons were injured in a fire that broke out in a flat in the Paschim Puri area of west Delhi, officials said on Monday. The incident occurred in New Slum Flats in Paschim Puri in the Punjabi Bagh police station area on Sunday night. "The fire department received a call about the fire around 10:27 pm (on Sunday) and dispatched three fire tenders to the scene. The fire, confined to domestic articles in a second-floor flat of the ground-plus-three-storey building, was brought under control," Delhi fire services (DFS) chief Atul Garg said. Firefighters discovered the charred body of a woman inside the flat. The body was handed over to police, he said. Two persons were rescued. They sustained burn injuries and were rushed to Acharya Bhikshu Hospital, he added.

**Man held for stabbing 2 in northeast Delhi**

**New Delhi:** A man was arrested for allegedly stabbing two persons within 12 hours in northeast Delhi, police said on Monday. The accused, Haider Khan alias Suhail Haider (25), was wearing bloodstained clothes and shoes when he was arrested on January 11, a day after he stabbed the two men, according to police. "On the night of January 10, Khan and his accomplices, including his brother Umer and friend Asif, got into heated arguments with two individuals, Atif and Bakib, at separate locations in northeast Delhi.

**UGC-NET EXAM POSTPONED DUE TO FESTIVALS**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, JAN. 13

The UGC-National Eligibility Test (NET) scheduled for January 15 has been postponed on account of festivals, including Makar Sankranti and Pongal, the National Testing Agency announced on Monday. The exam for admission to PhD programmes, awarding Junior Research Fellowship and appointment as assistant professors is being conducted from January 3 to January 16 for 85 subjects in the Computer Based Test mode. "The NTA has received representations to postpone the exam on January 15 on account of festivals, including Pongal and Makar Sankranti. In the interest of the aspirants, the exam has been postponed and a new date will be announced later," the NTA, said. "The exam on January 16 will be conducted as per the earlier schedule," he added. On January 15, the exam was scheduled for 17 subjects, including mass communication and journalism, Sanskrit, Nepali, law, Japanese, women studies, Malayalam, Urdu, Konkani, criminology, folk literature, electronic science, environmental science and Indian knowledge system. The UGC-NET was also postponed last year after the education ministry received inputs that the integrity of the exam might be compromised.

**Rahul promises caste census, quota cap hike if Cong wins elections****'Kejriwal-Modi's propaganda alike'**

**BHASKAR HARI SHARMA**  
NEW DELHI, JAN. 13

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday launched a blistering attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, saying there is no difference between the two leaders and they do not want backwards, Dalits, tribals and minorities to get their due share.

Giving a massive push to Congress in poll bound Delhi, he claimed that Mr Kejriwal was following "Mr Modi's strategy of propaganda and false promises" despite rising pollution, corruption and inflation in the national capital. Notably the Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party are INDIA bloc allies.

**Relief for AAP's Avadh Ojha as EC clears vote transfer to Delhi**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, JAN. 13

Paving the way to file his nomination from Patparganj constituency, the Election Commission of India (ECI) on Monday approved the transfer of Aam Aadmi Party leader Avadh Ojha's name from the voter rolls in Greater Noida to Delhi.

The development came after a delegation of AAP, led by Arvind Kejriwal, met ECI officials to address the issue.

Earlier in the day, the former chief minister alleged irregularities in the electoral process, claiming that Mr Ojha had filed Form 8 to transfer his vote on January 7 — the official deadline. He accused the Delhi chief electoral officer of unlawfully advancing the deadline to January 6.

He claimed the move as an attempt to "deliberately debar" Mr Ojha from contesting the upcoming elections, saying it was against the law.

Mr Kejriwal also made serious accusations against Bharatiya Janata Party's candidate from the New Delhi constituency, Parvesh Verma, alleging distribution of cash, liquor, and other items such as bedsheets, shoes, and glasses to sway voters.

**'Visited 27 states': Eric Garcetti bids farewell to India**

**'Indians' US travel desire deeper than Pacific'**

**SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI**  
NEW DELHI, JAN. 13

The desire of Indians to travel to the United States is "deeper than the Pacific Ocean and wider than the globe," US ambassador to India Eric Garcetti said on Monday.

Addressing reporters in a farewell speech in the national capital, Mr Garcetti — a political appointee of the outgoing Biden administration who will shortly be demitting office ahead of the swearing-in ceremony of US President Donald Trump next week — said that India had become the top foreign source of students pursuing higher education in the US.

Talking about his last 21 months in office as the US ambassador, Mr Garcetti said he had visited a whopping 27 Indian states and several Union Territories.

Mr Garcetti, who was previously the mayor of Los Angeles city, also spoke about the devastating wildfires that had ravaged the region around the city.

He revealed that his own parents had been displaced from their family home there by the fires and expressed sorrow over the grave crisis and



Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi during the 'Jai Bapu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan' rally in New Delhi on Monday.

Mr Gandhi said, "Arvind Kejriwal had talked of removing corruption. Has he removed corruption? Just like Modi ji's propaganda through the media, making false promises one after another, he (Kejriwal) is following the same strategy. There is no difference at all."

**BJP big wigs to join nomination filing****Party makes concerted efforts to dislodge AAP from power next month**

**New Delhi, Jan. 13:** Union ministers and top national-level office bearers of the BJP will accompany candidates during their nomination filing for the Delhi Assembly polls as the party makes concerted efforts to dislodge AAP from power in the city next month. A Delhi BJP functionary associated with the nomination filing said some candidates are likely to submit their papers on Makar Sankranti while most of them will do so on January 15 and 16.

**BJP: AAP failed to provide houses to slum-dwellers**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, JAN. 13

BJP leader Parvesh Verma on Monday accused AAP of failing to fulfil its pledge of providing homes to slum dwellers and claimed these people have not got houses despite paying large sums of money to the Delhi government under its housing scheme for them.

The BJP candidate, who has been fielded against AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal in the upcoming Assembly polls, slammed the former Delhi chief minister for his repeated claims that the saffron party would demolish all slums in the city if it is voted to power. "AAP has made a mockery of the system. They have been lying repeated-



Parvesh Verma

ly, misguiding the people of Delhi, especially the poor living in jhuggis (slums)," the BJP leader said.

"If Kejriwal cannot keep his promise, I think he should not fight this election," he said, exuding confidence about the BJP's win in the upcoming elections. The remarks by the challenger to Mr Kejriwal in his New Delhi Assembly seat came after the AAP chief challenged Union home minister Amit Shah to withdraw all cases against people living in 'jhuggis' and resettle those displaced within 24 hours, vowing not to contest the elections if the BJP complied.

**Got sanctions from Saxena to prosecute Jain: CBI tells court**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, JAN. 13

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Monday informed a special court it has obtained requisite sanctions from Delhi L-G to prosecute Aam Aadmi Party leader and former Delhi minister Satyendra Jain in a disproportionate assets' case. The CBI informed special judge Jitendra Singh, who posted the matter on January 22, observing a supplementary chargesheet was filed against Mr Jain in the case on January 3.

"Today, a sanction dated December 31, 2024 for prosecution of Satyendra Jain under Section 19 of the POC (Prevention of Corruption) Act, has been filed by the IO (investigating officer). The same is taken on record... Be listed for consideration on January 22, 2025," the court said.

In November 2024, the CBI in a status report said the file seeking sanction to file the supplementary chargesheet was sent to the offices of the chief secretary and the lieutenant-governor.

The court had noted the CBI's sanction request and asked it to "personally monitor the matter" for the completion of the process in reasonable time.

**THE CONGRESS** leader hailed the work done under three successive Sheila Dikshit-led governments and asserted that neither Kejriwal nor the BJP can match the Congress' track record.

Congress government then the first thing we will do is increase reservation to 50 per cent...the reality is that both Mr Kejriwal and Mr Modi will give long speeches on this. But when it comes to *bhagidaari* then it's only Congress party that will actually give it."

The Congress leader hailed the work done under three successive Sheila Dikshit-led governments and asserted that neither Kejriwal nor the BJP can match the Congress' track record.

"Kejriwal had said that he would clean Delhi, remove corruption, and turn the national capital into Paris. What actually happened — one cannot move around due to pollution and inflation is rising," he claimed.

He added that the Congress would keep fighting the BJP's ideology and that was the message of his "Bharat Jodo Yatra".

"We are against the BJP-RSS ideology, we were against, are against them and will always remain so... we walked for 4,000 km and changed the politics of the country," he said.

Mr Gandhi urged the people to support the Congress and make it victorious, asserting that the party would ensure Delhi's development as in the past under Sheila Dikshit's government.

**NITIN GADKARI** and Dharmendra Pradhan, and Pushkar Singh Dhami are some of the big leaders who will attend the nomination processions of the BJP candidates

It has announced candidates for 59 Assembly seats in the national capital so far. The candidates for the remaining 11 seats are likely to be announced soon. The last date for filing nomination papers is

**Items worth ₹21cr seized within wk of MCC implementation**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, JAN. 13

Within a week of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) coming into effect in the run-up to the Assembly polls in the capital, the office of the Delhi chief electoral officer (CEO) informed on Monday that cash and other items like liquor, worth more than ₹21 crore, have been seized by various departments.

The MCC was implemented on January 7, immediately after the announcement of the poll schedule. Voting for Delhi's 70 Assembly constituencies is scheduled

**City shivers in coldwaves ■ AQI remains in 'poor' category****Dense fog disrupts flight, train operations**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, JAN. 13

The India meteorological department (IMD) on Monday reported a minimum temperature of 9.6°C, which is 2.2°C above the normal for this time of the year. The relative humidity is 99 per cent, with the maximum temperature expected to rise to 19°C later in the day.

The IMD has issued a yellow warning for dense fog across the national capital.

The thick fog in the early hours disrupted air and rail traffic.

Several flights were delayed at Delhi's Indira



A cyclist crosses railway tracks as a train approaches on a cold and foggy winter morning in Gurgaon on Monday.

Gandhi International (IGI) Airport due to low visibility, causing inconvenience to the travellers.

**Amity university grows spinach tissue in space**

**New Delhi, Jan. 13:** The spinach callus tissue, sent by Amity University-Mumbai to space, has shown signs of growth in the Poem-4 module that is orbiting the earth at an altitude of 350 kms, scientists associated with the experiment said.

Growing plants in space under micro gravity is an important milestone for space biological research and as an engaging activity for the astronauts during long duration manned missions. "The initial data received from the PSLV orbital experiment platform (Poem-4) platform has shown signs of growth in the spinach callus," said A.W. Santhosh Kumar,

vice-chancellor of Amity University, Mumbai.

He said the data received from Isro was promising and the health of the payload was good.

Mr Kumar, the lead scientist at University's Center for Astrobiology, had sent the Amity plant experimental module in Space (APEMS) on board the PSLV-60 that launched the two SpaDeX satellites on December 30.

He said the decision to grow callus tissue rather than traditional seeds was taken as it allowed researchers to more easily track changes in growth and health through color monitoring. — PTI

## CAG REPORTS IN ASSEMBLY

**Unfortunate Delhi govt dragged feet on tabling, says HC****'Raises doubts about your bona fides'**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, JAN. 13

The Delhi high court on Monday said the state government dragged its feet on the issue of tabling several CAG reports before the Assembly, raising "doubts on its bona fides."

Justice Sachin Datta, who was hearing a petition by the BJP MLAs, said the government should have promptly placed the CAG reports before the House for discussion.

"The way you dragged your feet raises doubts about your bona fides. You should have promptly forwarded the reports to the Speaker and had a discussion in the House. The timeline is stark. See the way you have been dragging your feet is something that is unfortunate, Justice Datta said."

Opposition leader Vijender Gupta and BJP MLAs Mohan Singh Bisht, Om Prakash Sharma, Ajay Kumar Mahawar, Abhay Verma, Anil Kumar Bajpai, and Jitendra Mahajan filed the petition last year and sought a direction to the Speaker to call a session of the Assembly for the purpose of tabling of the CAG reports.

**AAP: CAG reports with Assembly, no more role of govt**

**New Delhi, Jan. 13:** The pending CAG reports have been sent to Delhi Assembly Speaker and the government has no role beyond it, the ruling AAP said on Monday, hours after high court's rebuke to it over tabling of the reports in the House. The BJP said that the AAP government has lost the "moral ground" to remain in power. "The CAG reports have been sent to the Delhi Legislative Assembly Speaker for tabling in the next session of the Assembly. Beyond this, we have no role," the AAP said. — PTI

Justice Datta, during the hearing, said that calling an Assembly session was the prerogative of the Speaker and asked if the court could pass a direction to the Speaker to do it, especially when the elections were around the corner.

Senior counsel for the government raised an objection with respect to the "political" nature of the petition and alleged that the L-G office had made the reports public and shared it with newspapers.



Sanjay Singh

Rohingyas in the nation. They have cheated the country just for election benefits," Mr Singh alleged in a press conference.

Mr Singh asked how have the Bangladeshis and Rohingyas crossed the border and entered the national capital in the last 10 years and how many of them have been deported.

The AAP MP asked how have the immigrants crossed the border along West Bengal, Assam, and Tripura, passed through Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh and reached Delhi.

He also said the PM should be asked about the whereabouts of former Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasena. Calling Hasena the "leader of Bangladeshis, Rohingyas", the senior AAP leader asked, "Where have you kept her?"

Hasena flew to India after being ousted from power by anti-government protests in Bangladesh.

## NORTHERN RAILWAY

**Pre-Bid Meeting for Procurement of Snow Blower/Cutter**

**Tender No. 15245170** for procurement of 02 Nos. of Snow Blower/Cutter has been published by this office. The pre-bid meeting is scheduled for dated **05.02.2025** in PCMM Conference Room, Stores Branch, Baroda House from **11:00 hrs. onwards** & tenders are due to open on dated **26.03.2025**. Please make it convenient to attend the same.

**No. 15245170/Snow Blower/Cutter Dt. 13.01.2025 142/2025**  
**SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE**

Government of Punjab Tender Notice Reference no. 2025/2902 dated 09.01.2025	
The Department of SPO, PAU, Ludhiana invites online e-tender for the following purchases:	
Publication of e-Tendering Notice for Photo Copier Paper A-4 Size 75 GSM, F/S Size 75 GSM A-3 Size 75 GSM, Art Paper (128 or 130 GSM), Art Paper (170 GSM), Art Paper (300 GSM), Super Printing Paper Maplitho paper size (80 GSM), Ledger Paper (95 GSM) and White Printing Paper (60 GSM) and Purchase of Maplitho Paper of Department of Store Purchase Organization, PAU Ludhiana and Additional Director Communications Centre PAU, Ludhiana.	
Closing date and time : 29.01.2025 at 11:00 AM	
For details log on to : <a href="http://www.eproc.punjab.gov.in">www.eproc.punjab.gov.in</a> and <a href="http://www.pau.edu">www.pau.edu</a>	
Note:- Any corrigendum(s) to the Tender Notice shall be published on the above website only.	
RO No :- NA/12/27448/2023/40719	Admn cum Accounts Officer Store Purchase Ludhiana Punjab Agricultural University Ludhiana (e-mail: <a href="mailto:spoaao@pau.edu">spoaao@pau.edu</a> )



SHORT TAKES

Planning liquor ban in MP holy cities: CM

**Bhopal:** Madhya Pradesh chief minister Mohan Yadav on Monday said his government was seriously planning to ban sale of alcohol in state's "holy" cities, to protect their religious sanctity. Mr Yadav said that the initiative to declare prohibition in the religious cities was being taken in view of complaints received from different quarters that the sale of alcohol in these areas have a negative impact on the religious environment in these cities. The seers and sadhus have also recommended imposition of restrictions on the sale of alcohol in the religious cities, he said. "The state government is seriously considering shutting down all the alcohol outlets operating in the religious cities in Madhya Pradesh, and necessary changes would be made in the excise policy to enforce the decision", Mr Yadav said.

Raut: Shah insulted Balasaheb and Maha

**Mumbai:** Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Monday alleged that Union home minister Amit Shah insulted Maharashtra and late Balasaheb Thackeray by calling Uddhav Thackeray a "traitor". Mr Raut said that the Shiv Sena has not betrayed anyone, but it was the BJP that betrayed Mr Uddhav. Mr Raut was responding to Mr Shah's comment that the Maharashtra Assembly elections had buried the "politics of betrayal", allegedly started by Sharad Pawar in 1978 and continued by Uddhav Thackeray in 2019. "The Shiv Sena never betrayed the BJP. In fact Amit Shah and Narendra Modi have encouraged traitors. Calling Uddhav Thackeray a traitor is an insult of Balasaheb Thackeray. People clapped on this statement of Amit Shah, which was Maharashtra's insult," Mr Raut said.

8 killed in Maha tempo-truck collision

**Mumbai:** At least eight people were killed and several others injured in a collision between a tempo and a truck in Nashik on the Mumbai-Agra highway fly-over. Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnis has announced financial assistance of ₹five lakh to the families of the deceased. The accident took place when a tempo collided with a truck carrying iron rods on Sunday night. The victims, all residents of Nashik, were on their way back after visiting a religious event in Niphad. Police sources have indicated that the death toll may rise, as some of the injured are in critical condition. "There were 16 passengers in the tempo, who were returning from a religious event in Niphad. The tempo driver lost control over the vehicle and rear-ended the truck carrying iron rods," the police official said.

ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION RECONSTITUTED

**New Delhi, Jan. 13:** The government has reconstituted the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) to include T.V. Somanathan and Manoj Govil, who took over as the Cabinet secretary and expenditure secretary respectively. The AEC also includes Pankaj Kumar Mishra, who took over as member (finance) last year, according to a notification issued on October 21 last year and published in the Gazette on January 9. The reconstituted AEC has Ajit Kumar Mohanty, secretary, department of atomic energy, as its chairman. The commission has National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval, principal secretary to the Prime Minister Pramod Kumar Mishra, foreign secretary Vikram Misri, Somanathan and Govil as ex-officio members. Other members include former chairpersons of the AEC M.R. Srinivasan and Anil Kakodkar, former secretary department of science and technology P. Rama Rao, former principal adviser DAE Ravi B. Grover, and former space commission chairman K. Kasturirangan. Babha Atomic Research Centre director Vivek Bhasin is also an ex-officio member of the commission. The AEC is tasked with formulating policies for the department of atomic energy. — PTI



1 A devotee blows a conch shell after taking a holy dip at the Sangam on the first day of Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, on Monday.  
2 A "sadhu" arrives for the Maha Kumbh Mela 2025.  
3-5 Devotees gather to take a holy dip at Sangam. — PTI



PM to meet all Mahayuti MLAs; launch 3 naval ships in Maha

PRASAD PATIL  
MUMBAI, JAN. 13

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Maharashtra on Wednesday, where he will meet all MLAs of the Mahayuti alliance, comprising the BJP, Eknath Sinde-led Shiv Sena and Ajit Pawar-led NCP.

Mr Shinde has asked all his legislators to come prepared for the interaction with the PM.

The PM will also dedicate three frontline naval combatants — *INS Surat*, *INS Nilgiri* and *INS Vaghsheer* to the nation.

It will be Mr Modi's first Maharashtra visit after the victory of the Mahayuti alliance in the November 2024 state polls. The alliance won 235 out of 288 Assembly seats in the state.

The PM will arrive in Mumbai in the morning.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during Sankranti celebration at Union minister G. Kishan Reddy's residence in New Delhi. — PTI

At around 10.30 am, he will dedicate *INS Surat*, *INS Nilgiri* and *INS Vaghsheer* to the nation on their commissioning at the Naval Dockyard in Mumbai.

*INS Surat* is a stealth guided missile destroyer, while *INS Nilgiri* is a stealth guided missile frigate and *INS Vaghsheer*

is a diesel-electric attack submarine. All three have been built indigenously at the Mazagon Dock Limited (MDL) in Mumbai and completed all their pre-commissioning trials.

After the Navy function, the PM will meet all the legislators.

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, JAN. 13

India on Monday summoned Bangladesh deputy high commissioner Narul Islam in an apparent retaliation after Dhaka had on Sunday evening summoned the Indian high commissioner Pranay Verma over a dispute arising from the fencing activities on the border.

New Delhi conveyed that with regard to security measures at the border, including fencing, India observed all protocols and agreements between the two governments and between the Border Security Force (BSF) and Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB).

India also "conveyed its expectation that all earlier understandings will be implemented by Bangladesh, and that there will a cooperative

Modi: Maha Kumbh celebrates harmony

Embodies India's timeless spiritual heritage, says PM

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
with agency inputs  
NEW DELHI, JAN. 13

The world's largest religious and spiritual gathering of saints, seers and devotees — the Maha Kumbh — began on Monday at the Triveni Sangam in Uttar Pradesh's Prayagraj on the auspicious "Paush Purnima".

Held every 12 years, this year's Maha Kumbh is more auspicious because of the celestial alignment, which is happening after a gap of 144 years.

"A very special day for crores of people who cherish Bharatiya values and culture! Maha Kumbh 2025 commences in Prayagraj, bringing together countless people in a sacred confluence of faith, devotion and culture. The Maha Kumbh embodies India's timeless spiritual heritage, and celebrates faith and harmony," Prime Minister Narendra Modi posted on X.

Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath, who has been personally monitoring the arrangements of this mega event, welcomed devotees on the beginning of the Maha Kumbh.

Welcoming devotees, the CM also extended best wishes for the first holy bath on Monday. He said the Maha Kumbh, a symbol of Sanatan Dharma's pride, would bring prosperity and joy to all.

Kumbh trends on social media

**Mahakumbh Nagar (UP), Jan. 13:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath on Monday hailed the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj as "Maha Kumbh of unity" that resonated widely on social media with #Ekta Ka Mahakumbh trending during the opening day of the mela. Users started sharing posts with the hashtag "Ekta ka Maha Kumbh" in Hindi on social media platforms X and Instagram since morning on Paush Purnima Snan Parv to celebrate the event's spiritual and cul-

tural significance. By afternoon, the hashtag topped trending charts, showcasing widespread public participation and the collective spirit of unity symbolised by this historic gathering.

Users shared photos, and videos related to the event, sparking widespread engagement.

Several hashtags on Maha Kumbh were used in the posts, but #Ekta Ka Mahakumbh stood out as the most prominent one.

By 3.30 pm, nearly 70,000 users had used the hashtag, sharing their experiences. — PTI

Separated due to crowd, over 250 reunite with kin

**Mahakumbh Nagar, Jan. 13:** More than 250 individuals separated from their families in the dense crowd in the early hours of the first day of Maha Kumbh were reunited through efficient measures by the fair administration, officials said.

The inaugural day of the Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj was marked by the Paush Purnima bathing festival, during which millions of devotees converged at the sacred Sangam for a holy dip. — PTI

IMD launches special webpage for Maha Kumbh

**New Delhi, Jan. 13:** The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has developed a dedicated webpage to provide weather updates for the Maha Kumbh, the world's largest religious gathering.

The webpage for the Maha Kumbh gives information on temperature, wind chill, wind speed and direction, humidity and air quality. It also offers hourly, three-hourly and weekly forecasts for Prayagraj and neighbouring cities. — PTI

New Delhi reiterates its commitment for crime-free border A day after, India summons B'desh envoy

▶ **ACCORDING TO** news agency reports from Dhaka earlier on Sunday, Bangladesh had alleged that India was trying to construct fences at five locations along the Indo-Bangla border

South Block today, January 13, 2025".

According to news agency reports from Dhaka earlier on Sunday, Bangladesh had alleged that India was trying to construct fences at five locations along the Indo-Bangla border, violating a bilateral agreement. According to reports that cited Bangladesh home affairs adviser (equivalent to home minister) Lt. Gen. (retd) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury, the conflicts have surfaced in five areas, including (northwestern) Chapainawabganj, Naogaon, Lalmonirhat,

and the Tin Bigha Corridor. Mr Chowdhury reportedly claimed that "several issues have arisen along the Bangladesh-India border" due to imbalanced and unequal agreements signed by the previous government of Sheikh Hasina, which, he said, contributed to disputes over fencing at 160 sites between 2010 and 2023.

The Bangladeshi foreign ministry was earlier on Sunday quoted by media reports as stating, "Bangladesh foreign secretary ambassador M. Jashim Uddin on Sunday expressed the deep concern of the government of Bangladesh to the high commissioner of India Pranay Verma at his office at the ministry of foreign affairs over the recent activities of the Border Security Force (BSF) of India along the Bangladesh-India Border."

India and Saudi ink Haj pact, fix 1,75,025 quota

New Delhi, Jan. 13: India on Monday signed a Haj agreement with Saudi Arabia, finalising a quota of 1,75,025 pilgrims for itself.

Ministry of minority affairs minister Kiren Rijiju signed the agreement with Saudi Arabia's minister for Hajj and Umrah Tawfiq Bin Fawzan Al-Rabiah in Jeddah.

"Haj Agreement 2025 signed with Tawfiq Bin Fawzan Al-Rabiah, minister for Hajj and Umrah of Kindom of Saudi Arabia. Finalized a quota of 1,75,025 pilgrims from India for Haj 2025," Mr Rijiju said in a post on X. — PTI

Patna CJ elevated to SC, total strength to go up to 33

**New Delhi, Jan. 13:** Patna high court Chief Justice K. Vinod Chandran was on Monday elevated as a judge of the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court collegium recommended Justice Chandran's name on January 7, and his appointment was announced on Monday by law minister Arjun Ram Meghwal in a post on X.

Justice Chandran was appointed as a judge of the Kerala high court on November 8, 2011. He was elevated as the chief justice Patna HC on March 29, 2023.

Once he takes oath as a judge of the top court, the working strength of the



Justice K.V. Chandran

"He has served as a judge of the high court for more than 11 years and as a chief justice of a big high court for more than a year. During his long tenure as a judge and chief justice of the high court, Justice Chandran has acquired significant experience in diverse fields of law," the collegium resolution said while recommending his name.

It also said Justice Chandran stood at No. 13 in the combined all-India seniority list of high court judges.

"In terms of seniority of judges hailing from the High Court of Kerala, Justice Chandran stands at serial number 1. While recommending his name, the collegium has taken into consideration the fact that there is no representation on the bench of the SC from the Kerala HC. The collegium has, therefore, unanimously recommended that Justice K. Vinod Chandran be appointed as a judge of the Supreme Court of India," the resolution said. — PTI

Beed panch's brother protests in Sholay style

BHAGWAN PARAB  
MUMBAI, JAN. 13

In a dramatic turn of events, which was reminiscent of a scene from movie *Sholay*, Dhananjay Deshmukh, brother of the murdered Beed sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh, climbed a water tank in his Massajog village on Monday and threatened to end his life by jumping from it.

He was protesting against "unsatisfactory" police investigation into

his brother's murder and police's refusal to share investigation information with the victim's family.

On Monday morning, Mr Deshmukh dodged the police and climbed the water tank in Massajog and staged an agitation. He demanded that a case of murder should be registered against the main accused Walmik Karad, and that the link of extortion in the murder case should be investigated. Demanding action

▶ **DHANANJAY DESHMUKH**, demanded that a case of murder should be registered against the main accused Walmik Karad

against the accused, Mr Deshmukh said that he feared the evidence might be destroyed, and that he and his family might meet the same fate as his brother if the accused in the murder and a related extortion case are set free.

Santosh Deshmukh, sarpanch of Massajog village in Beed district, was abducted, tortured and murdered on December 9. Karad, an associate of Maharashtra minister and NCP leader Dhananjay Munde, has been arrested in the murder case.

Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange Patil and Beed district SP Navneet Kawant rushed to the spot and assured Mr Deshmukh that his demands would be accepted.

NORTHERN RAILWAY	
TENDER NOTICE	
Invitation of Tender through E-Tendering (E-Procurement Systems)	
1	N.I.T. No. <b>GSU_DLI_SNT_09 dated 13.01.2025</b>
2	Name of work with its location Provision of networking in Administrative building i.c.w Development of Infrastructural facilities for maintenance of electric locomotives in Diesel Loco Shed, Tughlakabad.
3	Approx. Cost of work Rs 7498302.01/-
4	Bid Security Deposit Rs 150000.00/-
5	Completion period of Work 06 months
6	Date and Time for submission of tender and opening of tender Upto 11:30 hrs on 04.02.2025 Opening of tender at 11:30 hrs. on 04.02.2025
7	Website particulars notice board location complete details of tender can be seen and address of the office from where the tender form can be purchased etc. Above tender available on IREPS site i.e. <a href="http://www.ireps.gov.in">www.ireps.gov.in</a>
No.- GSU_DLI_SNT_09 Dated:-13.01.2025	
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE	
136/25	



**Kolkata:** Five Bangladeshi nationals were arrested by the police on Monday from the southern outskirts of the city. All of them were staying in India illegally. They were caught from a rented flat at Sonarpur in South 24 Parganas where they had been living for more than a year, sources said. Three among them had expired visa while others had no official document at all, according to the police. The five came from Kustia and Barisal districts of Bangladesh and were aided by a local agent to get the rented house at Sonarpur. Local residents claimed that the Bangladeshi nationals rarely interacted with them. Acting on a tip-off, cops from the Sonarpur police station started shadowing the five. The police found that they faked their identities and were working at a cloth mill. The arrests came close on the heels of the nabbing of a militant from J&K by the special task force of the state police at Canning.

**Continued From Page 1**

nothing in life is permanent, so I embarked on a quest for salvation. This is my first Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj, and the spiritual vibes are extraordinary. I practise yoga in Brazil, I have come here for 'moksha'. This one is very special, once in 144 years. India is like the spiritual height of the world. Sanatan Dharma is my mission of life and it changed my life, it changed the way I see the world, my family, Jai Shri Ram," added a devotee from Brazil. Also in the teeming crowd was Julie from Spain.

"I am feeling grateful for this opportunity to dive into the sacred river here at the sacred point. I am fulfilled with bliss," she said. In his message on the day, PM Narendra Modi said in a post on X that Maha Kumbh brings together countless people in a sacred confluence of faith, devotion and culture. "The Maha Kumbh embodies India's timeless spiritual heritage and celebrates faith and harmony," he said.

A group of women from Uttar Pradesh's Siddharth Nagar was busy singing folk songs. And there was a team of YouTubers from South Korea capturing various shots of the Maha Kumbh as was a team from Japan. Contingents from states across India were seen too at various ghats of Prayagraj.

Appreciating the arrangements made for the devotees, Kailash Narayan Shukla from Hamirpur in Himachal Pradesh said, "Good arrangements were made for the pilgrims and we had no problems in taking the holy dip."

Given the massive numbers of people, there were those who got inevitably separated from their groups — a recall in another era of a favourite Hindi film trope of siblings getting separated in the Kumbh Mela. The times have changed, however. — *PTI*

**MANOJ ANAND**  
GUWAHATI, JAN. 13

Ignoring all the environmental concerns of wildlife experts, the wildlife panel of the Centre has approved a proposal to carry out oil and gas exploration in the eco-sensitive zone of the Hollongapar Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary in Assam's Jorhat district.

Informing that the standing committee of the national board for wildlife (NBWL), chaired by union environment minister Bhupender Yadav, approved the proposal by Vedanta Group's Cairn oil and gas during its meeting, sources said that approval of the wildlife panel was granted on December 21.

Earlier, Assam's principal chief conservator of forests (wildlife) and chief wildlife warden had recommended clearance for the project in August 2024, citing "national interest."

The Union environment ministry's forest advisors

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, JAN. 13

Indian Army Chief Gen. Upendra Dwivedi on Monday came out in the support of the women officers commanding units and said they were doing exceedingly well.

His statement comes in view of a controversy which erupted after Lt. Gen. Rajeev Puri (since retired) in a letter to Eastern Army Commander Lt. Gen. R.C. Tiwari raised a number of issues against women commanding officers.

"First the Gen. Puri letter which got leaked out, should not have got leaked out. Court of Inquiry has been ordered over it. It is his perception. He has all right to give his perception. We would have to see that when we made them the commanding officers what was the situation. This was based on the SC order and where the complete process was accelerated."

Meanwhile, Gen. Dwivedi also defended the removal of the famous Pakistan Army's 1971 surrender from Army Chief's annexe in South Block and replacing it with an painting showing which showed tanks, soldiers, drones and helicopters operating near Pangong Tso in Ladakh, along with Hindu religious iconography.

**Continued From Page 1**  
Demchok in eastern Ladakh got resolved. The patrolling to traditional areas in these two sub-sectors has commenced. Similarly, traditional grazing has also commenced in these two areas. We shall continue to discuss management of other areas also along the northern borders, and towards that end I have authorised all my co-commanders to handle these issues at the ground level with respect to patrolling and grazing so that these trivial issues can be resolved at the military level itself," said Gen. Dwivedi ahead of Army Day, which is celebrated on January 15. He said that the deployment of troops along the LAC was balanced and robust and was well poised to deal with any situation. He said that two rounds of verification have been held at Demchok and Depsang and both sides are quite satisfied about it. He said that earlier grazing was not allowed in the forward areas as the Army did not want the situation to deteriorate further.

He said that a series of meetings have been held to resolve the situation at the LAC even at the level of the Prime Minister and the Chinese President. On when the situation can be resolved at the LAC, he said: "As far as the timeline is concerned, I can only say India has adequate strategic patience". "As far as the status of the standoff (with China) is concerned... we have to see what all has changed since April 2020. Has the terrain been doctored over a peri-

ed of me? Yes, both sides have doctored the terrain. Have both sides carried out constructions? Yes. Both sides have carried out some stocking, deployment. Yes. Therefore, what it means is that there is a degree of stand-off," Gen. Dwivedi said.

"You have changed the situation after April 2020 so the trust between the two countries has to have a new definition. Therefore, there is a requirement for us to sit together and thereafter come to a broader understanding of how we want to calm down the situation and restore the trust. We are now looking forward to the next special representatives' meeting which should take place," he said.

Gen. Dwivedi said that there were no "buffer zones" in eastern Ladakh, rather, "temporary moratoriums" to avoid violence. "When you carry out negotiations, you look at what can be solved immediately and what will take some time to resolve. Where you see that the degree of violence can be high and the fuse is short, you create some distances. So, when we carried out these negotiations over a period of time, some places we declared as temporary moratorium. Because we felt that if we met at those places, the violence level may go high," he said.

The Army Chief said that corps commanders have been given powers to resolve trivial issues or minor frictions so that they don't later on become a big issue.

committee (FAC) also granted in-principle approval in its meeting on August 27, 2024.	Any extraction, if reserves are found, will be carried out from outside the eco-sensitive zone. It is
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insists that only exploratory drilling will be permitted, environmentalists fear this could pave the way for commercial oil extraction in the eco-sensitive zone.

Citing the minutes of the NBWL meeting on December 21, sources said, that an inspection team, comprising officials from the environment ministry, the Wildlife Institute of India, and the Assam forest department, found that exploratory drilling would have minimal impact. However, they stressed that no oil or gas extraction should be allowed within the zone, even if reserves are discovered.

Vedanta Group has assured the government that no commercial drilling will take place and that exploration will be limited to identifying hydrocarbon reserves.

The project site lies in a disputed area on the Assam-Nagaland border.

In fact the inspection team encountered resistance from local Naga communities, who emphasised that no drilling operations would be allowed without their consent.

The Hoolongapar Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary is home to seven primate species and plays a crucial role in regional biodiversity. The large eco-sensitive zone surrounding the sanctuary is vital for maintaining connectivity with nearby forests.

However, the sanctuary is already facing pressures from human activities, including a planned railway line electrification project. The hoolock gibbon is "endangered" according to the international Union for conservation of nature.

**RABINDRA NATH  
CHOUHURY**  
RAIPUR, JAN 13

Security forces have targeted top-level Maoist leaders operating in the Leftwing insurgency-hit Bastar in Chhattisgarh to achieve the goal of ending Naxalism by March, 2026, a senior police officer said on Monday.

“A hit-list of top-level Maoist leaders has been prepared to neutralise them either through surrender, arrest or elimination”, sources in

The counterinsurgency strategy focused on neutralisation of top-level cadres of Maoists instead of the lower-rung leaders and foot soldiers, the SIB sources disclosed.

“Neutralisation of top-level leaders of the Maoist cadres makes the Naxal movement leaderless in the Maoist strongholds leading to erosion of Maoist bases”, the police officer said.

# ‘Factually incorrect’: fact-checks Meta CEO

## ‘Disappointing to see misinformation’

**New Delhi, Jan. 13:** Union minister Ashwini Vaishnaw hit back at Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg on Monday for making a “factually incorrect” statement that the incumbent government in India lost the election in 2024 due to its handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr Zuckerberg, chairman and CEO of Meta Platforms, triggered a row by claiming in a podcast interview that the Indian government lost the election in 2024 due to its weak COVID-19 response.

Mr Vaishnaw opted for Meta’s Facebook platform to call out Mr Zuckerberg for spreading “misinformation”.

“It is disappointing to see misinformation from Mr Zuckerberg himself.



Ashwini Vaishnaw

Let’s uphold facts and credibility,” the Union information and broadcasting minister said, tagging Meta on X and other social media platforms.

“From free food for 800 million, 2.2 billion free vaccines, and aid to nations worldwide during COVID, to leading India as the fastest-growing major economy, PM Modi’s decisive 3rd-term victory is a

**Continued From Page 1**  
him to file his nomination for the Patparganj constituency.

After getting the poll panel's approval on Mr Ojha's application for transfer, Mr Kejriwal said, "The good news is that Awadh Ojha's vote will be shifted and the commission has issued the order to transfer his vote, and he will be able to file the nomination."

On Sunday, the party had announced that the chief minister along with Mr Sisodia will lead a rally in Kalkaji constituency before filing her nomination.

The Delhi Assembly election will be held on February 5, with the results declared on February 8.

Before starting her rally, Ms Atishi, along with party leaders, visited Gurdwara Shri Guru Gobind Sahib in Giri Nagar. Earlier in the day, she offered prayers at the Kalkaji Temple, dedicated to Ma Kali, seeking blessings for her campaign.

"Before filing my nomination today, I came to seek the blessings of Ma Kali at the Kalkaji Temple. I believe Ma Kalka's blessings will always remain with me, the Aam Aadmi Party, and the people of the Kalkaji constituency,"

**YUSUF JAMEEL**  
SONAMARG (KASHMIR),  
JAN. 13

Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, while hinting at restoring the statehood of Jammu and Kashmir at “right time” said on Monday that he will comply with the commitments made to the people of the region, but all right things will happen at the right time.

"Take it for sure. This is Modi who makes a promise and fulfils it too. There is a right time for doing any work. And right things are going to be done at the right time," he said while addressing a public meeting after inaugurating a strategically important road tunnel along the Srinagar-Leh Highway here.

Earlier J&K chief minister Omar Abdullah had while speaking on the occasion reminded the Prime Minister of his promise of restoring the statehood of J&K.

He said that since the PM had fulfilled his two other promises made a few months-holding assembly elections in J&K and bridging the distances between the hearts and Delhi and Srinagar — he was optimistic about the third promise too being kept by him which was returning the statehood to J&K.

"After winning the (Lok Sabha) elections, you came to Srinagar to celebrate the International Day of Yoga (on June 21, 2024). You spoke to the people on a few things, and they tend to trust you for your being consistent. You mentioned three impor-

Union MoS Jitendra Singh and J&K chief minister Omar Abdullah enroute to the venue of inauguration of the Z-Morh tunnel on Monday. — PTV

**Srinagar, Jan. 13:** Soldiers posted at Siachen glacier, the highest battlefield in the world, can now enjoy high-speed internet services, a telecom company said. In the run-up to Army Day on January 15, Reliance Jio, in collaboration with the Indian Army, has achieved a groundbreaking milestone by extending its 4G and 5G network to the Siachen glacier, the company said.

"With support from the Army Signallers, Reliance Jio becomes the first telecom operator to deliver seamless connectivity in this harsh region," a

tant things in your speech then," he said.

Elaborating, Mr. Abdullah said that the PM had said that he wanted to erase "*Dil ki doori; Dilli ki doori*" (the distance of hearts and from Delhi) and he was undoubtedly

## IIT-Kharagpur student found dead in hostel

**Kolkata, Jan. 13:** A student of IIT-Kharagpur was found dead inside his hostel room, an institute official said on Monday. Shaon Malik, a third-year student of Electrical Engineering, was found hanging inside the room by his parents who had come to meet him on Sunday.

His parents and institute personnel had to forcibly open the door of the hostel room after he did not respond to repeated calls, the official said. Malik had spoken to his parents over phone the previous night and "things seemed perfectly normal", according to the official. The institute will conduct an internal probe into the death and take steps to prevent such incidents in future, he said.

—PTI

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,  
JAN. 13

A young man from Kerala, identified as Binil Babu, who was serving in a Russian mercenary unit, has died in the Ukraine-Russia conflict. He hailed from Kuttanapuram in the Thrissur district. The news of his death was confirmed by the Non-Resident Keralites Affairs Department (Norka) and communicated to the Thrissur district administration. Another youth, Jain Kurien, who was injured in the conflict, is currently receiving treatment in a hospital in Moscow. Binil's relatives stated that they had received official communication

■ **Continued From Page 1**

connectivity to the tourist resort of Sonamarg and beyond it to Baltal, a base camp of the annual Amarnath Yatra.

Sonamarg Tunnel is also strategically important as it, along with another 11 km tunnel being constructed beneath 3,528m-high Zoji La along the Srinagar-Leh Highway (NH1D), provides year-round weather-proof connectivity to Ladakh, enhancing military logistics to the landlocked region. Together, these tunnels will not only reduce distances, but the connectivity will also boost defence logistics, drive economic growth and socio-cultural integration across J&K and Ladakh, the officials said.

The Sonamarg Tunnel was originally planned to be built by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) in 2012, but it was re-tendered later by NHIDCL to APCO Infratech, an Indian construction firm, which after winning the contract formed a special purpose vehicle, APCO-Shri Amarnathji Tunnel Pvt Ltd, to execute the project.

The Prime Minister said that there was an atmosphere of peace in J&K which is leaving a good impact on the lives of its people and the Union territory was writing a new saga of development today. He said: "Jammu and

Kashmir of the 21st century is scripting a new chapter of development and leaving behind the difficult days of the past.' Claiming Kashmir has regained its identity as the paradise on earth, he said the tourism sector in the region was thriving with footfalls witnessing a tenfold increase over the past decade. He said that as a peace dividend, Lal Chowk (Srinagar's city centre) remains vibrant even during night, and Gulmarg has become India's capital of winter games.

"The people now enjoy ice-cream at Lal Chowk even at night, and the area remains lively. The local artists, musicians and singers are transforming the (the nearby) Polo View Market into a new habitat centre. The people in Srinagar now comfortably watch movies with their families in cinema halls and shop with ease," he said. He, however, emphasised that such significant changes cannot be achieved by the government alone and said that the credit goes to the people of J&K too for strengthening democracy and securing their future.

The PM said the first international marathon was held in Srinagar a few months ago, which brought immense joy to those who witnessed it. He recalled the viral video of

chief minister Omar Abdullah participating in the marathon and said that he congratulated him for this and the two had had an enthusiastic discussion about it during a meeting in Delhi. He also mentioned the recent international cricket league held in the Valley after 40 years and the car racing scenes around the beautiful Dal Lake.

He said that Gulmarg was becoming the winter games capital of India, having hosted four Khelo India Winter Games, with the fifth edition starting next month. He said that over the past two years more than 2,500 athletes from across the country have participated in various sports tournaments in J&K and that as many as 90 Khelo India centres have been established in the UT, imparting training to 4,500 local youth.

Mr Modi began his speech with paying tribute to a local doctor, Shahnawaz Ahmed Dar, and six construction workers – both local and non-local – engaged by the construction company who were killed in a terror attack at Gagangir, where the tunnel starts, on October 20, 2024. He said that despite being targeted the workers remained steadfast on their resolve to complete this important project.

He wishes to all celebrating these festivals. He, however, also spoke about the challenges the people of Kashmir are facing while reeling under the harsh 40-day period of winter called Chila Kalan and commended them for their resilience.

He said the Sonamarg Tunnel has come as a significant gift for the people of J&K and Ladakh and less than a fortnight after the launch of the new Jammu rail division, which was a long-standing demand of the people. “This tunnel will significantly ease the lives of people in Sonamarg, Kargil and Leh. It will lessen the difficulties faced during avalanches, heavy snowfall and landslides, which often led to road closures. It will also improve access to major hospitals and ensure the availability of essential supplies, thereby reducing the challenges faced by the residents,” he said.



THE ASIAN AGE

14 JANUARY 2025

Maha Kumbh, for believers, keeps faith, traditions alive

The spiritual cleansing and rejuvenation rituals of believers in the timeless relevance of India's teachings began on Monday, a full moon day which will give way to Sankranti, one of the Shahi Snan days in the religious calendar. There is a mystique to the universal appeal of the Maha Kumbh that the Hindus and believers in India's ancient spiritual traditions gather at the confluence of the Ganga, the Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati in numbers far greater than the population of many countries.

The phenomenon of spirituality exists, and however tangible or intangible the concept is, it has its votaries in millions, and it is growing, especially in India. Much the same could be said of many other religions too, which brings us to the magnetic power of faith that people believe can move mountains.

This is strictly not for the cynics and the sceptics who may struggle to understand the spiritual significance as opposed to the temporal which, with every breath that a sentient human being takes, may be easier to experience and understand.

It is the promise of a dip in the holy waters to cleanse the sins and reach out for the release promised from a cycle of rebirths that drives 40 crore people to descend on the Sangam, making the statistics of the gathering itself so mind-boggling — a tent city with a spread of 40 sq km to house 23,000 kitchens, 1,50,000 restrooms, 11 hospitals, 100s of ambulances, 50,000 security personnel, manning 2,700 cameras AI-powered to spot stress points in crowds, from 4 central control rooms, watching over 11 akharas with thousands of sadhus and saints bathing at dawn even as underwater drones help observe it all with an eye on safety.

**Stupendous as the effort is of millions to get to Prayagraj for the once-in-12 years Maha Kumbh, the responsibility of its smooth progress becomes an onerous one for the state.**

Stupendous as the effort is of millions to get to Prayagraj for the once-in-12 years Maha Kumbh, the responsibility of its smooth progress becomes an onerous one for the state. It would be hypocritical to believe that religion is easily separated from the State, however pure that may sound in principle. And Uttar Pradesh has rolled out not only ladles of money, roughly ₹6,500 crore, but also a massive supervisory effort to keep the wheels of faith moving for the millions who believe in the traditions of the Sanatana dharma.

Ideally, it should be a secular administrative duty of the state to oversee such a massive human movement in its jurisdiction, regardless of what impels it. It is another matter that the dominant force in today's national politics would like to use the monumentality of the Maha Kumbh's cultural message to project and promote its belief in Hindu nationalism.

Considering that rulers have come and gone or paled into insignificance even as a spiritual gathering that dates back several centuries has gathered momentum over the years in Indian society, any attaching of more than a regular religious significance may mean very little.

Right now, it is the grandiosity of the festival, which will be on till February 26 and which is to be celebrated purely for the richness of its traditions and the keeping of faith in making the Maha Kumbh the acme of spirituality.

Meta wrong to end fact checks

After the victory of Donald Trump, who was considered to be the most jingoistic in the US Presidential elections, almost all major governments, including that of China, and major companies began recalibration of their policies. However, the most impactful realignment that could affect the lives of at least 3.3 billion people and more was introduced by billionaire Mark Zuckerberg Meta Inc., impairing people's ability to make right and informed decisions.

At the core of this restructuring lies Zuckerberg's decision to relax content moderation rules and phase out the third-party fact-checking platforms, which he claimed were stifling free speech and promoting bias.

The company, which owns Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and Threads, will use the community notes system, which is similar to the one used by Trump's ally Elon Musk-led social media platform X.

In 2016, Meta announced funding for third-party fact-checkers after concerns were raised by disinformation being peddled on social media platforms.

**As the promoter of Meta, Zuckerberg is well within his rights to protect the interests of his shareholders. However, maligning the reputation of fact checkers is unwarranted.**

During his podcast session with American media personality Joe Rogan, Zuckerberg observed that the incumbent government in India, as elsewhere in the world, has lost in the recent elections.

It is patently untrue as the government led by Narendra Modi had won the elections. This instance shows that if the Meta chief himself could peddle disinformation on social media with impunity, how accurate would the opinions of an average person be?

THE ASIAN AGE

KAUSHIK MITTER

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Subhani



The Pak-Afghan standoff & its repercussions for India



Syed Ata Hasnain

Strangely, on their eastern and western flanks respectively, both India and Pakistan are facing developing situations which were completely unexpected. India has the otherwise-friendly Bangladesh all of a sudden in a meltdown situation, resulting in a change of government, the streets taken up by sullen radical elements and no surety which direction this is going. Similarly, Pakistan has the Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, once its greatest ally, now in a virtual state of war with it, with heavy military exchanges all along the Durand Line and the death of several Pakistani soldiers. I intend to discuss both situations, but in separate articles. Here, there is focus on the developments on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, why they came to pass and which way are they heading.

We need to recall that the Afghan Taliban, in its organised avatar, owes its origins to the Pakistan-US-Saudi alignment during the post-1979 period when the Soviet Union launched its invasion of Afghanistan. The Taliban movement originated in Pashtun nationalism which was exploited by these players through enhancement of the passions of resistance against the Soviets. The millions of refugees who came out of Afghanistan in 1979-80 were housed in camps on the Pakistan-Afghan border and with external support were fed and ideologically motivated to fight the Soviets. From them arose the Taliban, who were in power by 1996 and thereafter have always controlled the destiny of Afghanistan. Pakistan has held sway over the Taliban through the challenging times and during the period of the occupation by the United States and its allies. The Taliban's resistance to

the US occupation for 20 years could not have been possible without the moral and material support, and the safe havens provided to the Taliban leadership and fighters, by Pakistan. The US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 was considered a moment of victory for the Af-Pak combine. By a natural corollary, the results of that should have all gone to the advantage of Pakistan in the post-conflict stage that is still under way. There are several reasons why they have not.

The Afghan Taliban's vision for their country's future is not aligned with Pakistan's interests. Historically, Pakistan has sought to exert influence over Afghanistan through the backing of Islamist groups. That has now come a cropper after the return of the Taliban. The latter is motivated by its own success over the Soviets and then over the US and Nato, that reinforces the age-old perception about the undefeatability of the Afghan people. This further adds to Taliban pride in not accepting what is perceived as the "imposed border" called the Durand Line as the Pakistan-Afghanistan land border. This line is viewed as a relic of colonialism and has never been formally recognised.

Another point of contention is Pakistan's expectation of a "payback" with the Taliban taking action against the Pakistani terrorist group Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Instead, the Afghan Taliban has provided it safe sanctuary and permission to operate from within Afghan territory. The Afghan Taliban's relationship with Pakistan has deteriorated due to this combination of factors, including disagreements over the Durand Line, ideological differences and a struggle for space and influence. It also aspires to assume the leadership of

**The Afghan Taliban challenge is from unexpected quarters and is damning even for Pakistani belief in the doctrine of strategic depth.**

the Islamic movement towards attainment of the legendary caliphate. Pakistan too is a serious contender for that in the global Islamic movement. This competition isn't good for peace between them.

The Afghan Taliban's ambition is driven by belief in its own ideological legitimacy and sense of history, both of which tend to reinforce its perceived mandate to lead the Islamic world. Its willingness to engage with India is based on some legitimate reasons. First is the necessity to win economic support regionally, before aspiring for a larger ambit for its role; the current scope of economic support from Pakistan is next to nil. Also, the perception about India remains positive in the minds of the Afghan population, many of whom make a beeline for India for medical treatment and the general "feel good" which comes from India's openness and better quality of life. The Taliban probably also assesses that its control over Afghanistan gives it the strategic ability to exert influence over the broader region of Central Asia, Middle East and South Asia. Being at the crossroads of civilisations perhaps evokes a "Middle Ages" perception of the ability to spread ideology to the length and breadth of these regions. Pakistan has historically viewed itself as the flag-bearer of the Islamic world, with its large army and its nuclear capability. The Afghan Taliban challenge is from unexpected quarters and is damning even for the abiding Pakistani belief in the doctrine of strategic depth.

To top it all for Pakistan, the Afghan Taliban has good relations with both China and Russia. Its relations with India are developing well despite the lack of diplomatic recognition. Though India has no truck with the TTP, the combined effect of an active

western border between Pakistan and Afghanistan and the deeper involvement of Pakistan's counter-terrorism forces against the TTP creates a temporary military advantage for India. Pakistan would need to be conscious of that while formulating its strategy in Jammu and Kashmir. An over-the-top Pakistan sponsored terrorist action in J&K with the intent of exhibiting relevance and commitment could turn into a trigger for a much stronger Indian response than may otherwise be expected.

Pakistan has often treated the turbulent western border region with a degree of contempt. It has never failed to use heavy weaponry and indulged in large-scale human rights violations through mass evacuation of villages and their full destruction through aerial bombing. The war against the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) has also been intensifying, but without any major gains. The BLA has been targeting the Chinese workers and staff working on BRI projects. Obviously, Pakistan's security forces are overstretched with issues of their own making. Pakistan's military action inside Afghanistan will fuel anti-Pakistan sentiments among the Afghan population and further alienate Pakistani Pashtuns, adding more fuel to the existing fires. It's not as if the Afghan fighters will inflict defeat or gain any advantage in a military standoff with Pakistan, but this kind of disharmony tends to perpetuate problems for Pakistan at a time when it must focus on economic issues and development. The developing India-Afghanistan relationship will probably flower faster given the situation on the Afghan border. Under these circumstances, should India calibrate a quid pro quo threat against Pakistan if something similar builds up on our eastern borders with Bangladesh? There is room for discussion on this subject.

*The writer, a retired lieutenant-general, is a former GOC of the Srinagar-based 15 ("Chinar") Corps*

LETTERS

LIQUOR LOSS?

Apropos the news report "Rs 2,026-cr liquor loss in CAG report: BJP; fake says AAP" (January 12), I am at a loss on how BJP president J.P. Nadda came to know about a fiscal loss of Rs 2,026 crores when the CAG report on the now-scrapped excise policy of the Delhi government is yet to be tabled in Parliament. This means there is a fair chance of either getting the report in question leaked or the claim of Mr Nadda is a false one made with the obvious intent to malign the AAP government ahead of the Delhi Assembly elections. If the Speaker wants absolute transparency in the matter to be maintained, he needs to investigate how such a vital report could be leaked.

**Arun Gupta**  
Kolkata

NO JUSTIFICATION

IF THE 2002 Gujarat genocide was the result of "controlled emotions", who knows what would have happened if it was an all-out burst? Thousands perished in a few days and hundreds went missing. Village after village witnessed mayhem and gang rapes, but still it was just because of "controlled emotions". Mr Narendra Modi, then Gujarat chief minister, was reprimanded by the then Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, and asked to follow "raj dharma". He should have resigned at once as it was a complete failure of law and order (unless it was meant to be that way). Upright officers are still languishing in jail but the active participants roam scot-free.

**Syed Abdul Monim**  
Navi Mumbai

SAVE OUR TIGERS

THE SAVE TIGER project aims at ensuring that the population of tigers is maintained. Some of the main habitats in India that fall under the Maharashtra conservation unit should be safeguarded as well and it is also time to save tigers from injuries and provide timely treatment. Let us unite in our efforts to save the royal species for the future by protecting their habitats and curbing illegal trade in tiger skins. Tiger poaching has increased by 63 per cent in the past few years.

**Jayanthi Maniam**  
Navi Mumbai

Aakar Patel



Rights granted in the Constitution are often denied in actual practice

As January 26 approaches, it is time to examine what the day means, apart from military parades and VIPs and foreign guests. Republic Day is a celebration of our being a nation where supreme power rests with the people. This is guaranteed through our Constitution.

What we celebrate on that day is our Constitution, and in particular the rights we enjoy as citizens and individuals. Our Fundamental Rights are those through which we are assured equality, freedom from discrimination, the right to free speech, free association and free assembly, the right to life and liberty and the right to occupation, the right to education, the freedom to propagate, practice and manage religion and the freedom to move the Supreme Court if our Fundamental Rights are wrongly encroached or violated by the State.

This set of rights appears to be potent. But do we actually possess them? The answer is no. We are not entirely free. Let us look at how easily the State has trespassed on the rights that we thought had a high degree of protection from encroachment: Article 19 is an umbrella Fundamental Right on freedom of speech, assembly, association, movement and profession. It reads: "All citizens shall have the right to: freedom of speech and expression; assemble peaceably and without arms; form associations or unions; move freely throughout the territory of India; reside and settle

in any part of the territory of India; practise any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business."

The reality is that none of these rights actually exist in the form they are supposed to be.

India's first constitutional amendment (legislated under Jawaharlal Nehru) restricts these rights by qualifying them. Meaning that the State was given the authority to curb them through the so-called "reasonable restrictions". Free speech, for instance, can be controlled by "reasonable restrictions ... in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence."

The State can make any legislation it sees fit along the lines above, which are so broad as to fit anything into them. Let's see the multiple ways the government has infringed upon the rights within Article 19.

The right of Indians to assemble peacefully has been blocked by both law and process. Citizens do not really have this right to peaceful assembly. They have the right to seek police permission to assemble peacefully. The police has the right to approve, deny or not reply (which is often the tactic used by the State in India, so that there is deniability). Assembly in the absence of written permission is treated as a violation of the law.

Readers will be familiar with Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code which gives the State the right to arrest people engaged in "unlawful assembly".

The right to form associations and unions is severely limited by the process of registration. The State can deny (or delay) registration of organisations it doesn't like. It can deregister those whose activities it does not like. It can ban those it has a problem with. Again, overbroad laws that empower the State to define individuals as "terrorists" without conviction or trial are used to hinder and restrict the right to association.

The right to move freely across India doesn't exist for those visiting many areas, particularly in the Northeast. The rights which cannot be enforced by the rule of law do not exist. Try telling the residents of Manipur that they have the right to move freely.

The right to reside and settle in any part of the territory of India doesn't apply to Gujarat's Muslims because of a law particular to that state, called the Disturbed Areas Act. It is a law that is old but has become broader with time, tightening the rules under which Muslims can rent and buy property.

The right to practise any profession doesn't apply to butchers who have been told by the State that they cannot slaughter livestock, explicitly

denying them their Fundamental Right. Article 19 gives freedom in its text only to entirely remove this freedom through its footnotes.

All governments by all parties that have governed India and its provinces since 1950 are okay with these restrictions. No party is different really in that sense. What is "reasonable" is for the State to decide and the State always takes up a position against the individual.

The general assumption is that the citizen and rights are a nuisance that get in the way of the proper administration of the State ("good governance"). Promises made in manifestoes, for instance that by the Jan Sangh, to remove preventive detention, which is the basis for such laws as the UAPA, are promptly reversed when the party in question comes to power.

On Republic Day, it is worth going back to the Constitution of India to read it, and in particular read Part 3, the section concerned with the Fundamental Rights. This is only about a dozen pages or so, but is the heart of the Constitution so far as the individual is concerned. Reverence for our Constitution and celebrating it with guns and tanks and fighter aircraft and VIPs may be a good thing. Reading it and understanding it is even better.

*The writer is the chair of Amnesty International India. Twitter: @aakar\_patel*



## SHORT TAKES

NIGERIAN STRIKE  
MISTAKENLY  
KILLS CIVILIANS

**Abuja, Jan. 13:** A Nigerian military airstrike targeting armed groups in the conflict-battered northwest mistakenly killed a number of civilians working in community security outfits, authorities and residents said.

This is the third misfire by the military in a little over a year during aerial bombardments of extremists and rebel groups. The Nigeria Air Force was targeting rebels in the hard-hit Zurmi and Maradun areas of Zamfara state, Sulaiman Bala Idris, the state governor's spokesman, said.

ULTRAS KILL  
40 FARMERS  
IN NIGERIA

**Dakar, Jan. 13:** At least 40 farmers were killed in an attack by Islamic militants in north-east Nigeria's Borno state, a government official said on Monday. The attack on Sunday was suspected to have been carried out by extremists from the Boko Haram group and its breakaway faction that is loyal to the Islamic State group in Borno's Dumba community, said Borno state Gov Babagana Umara Zulum.

He warned civilians to stay within designated "safe zones" that have been cleared by the Army of both extremists and munitions.

GERMAN-IRANIAN  
ACTIVIST SET  
FREE IN IRAN

**Berlin, Jan. 13:** Nahid Taghavi, an Iranian-German women's rights activist, has been released from prison and is back in Germany after more than four years incarceration in Iran, Amnesty International said on Monday.

The release of Taghavi followed concerns about the 70-year-old's health and calls from rights groups on the German government to pressure Tehran on the case.

Taghavi was detained in October 2020 during a visit to Tehran and later sentenced to 10 years and eight months in prison.

LANKAN PREZ  
HEADS TO CHINA  
ON 3-DAY VISIT

**Colombo, Jan. 13:** Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake will leave for China on Monday on a three-day visit at the invitation of President Xi Jinping, his second overseas visit – the first being to India – since assuming office in September last year.

During the visit, Dissanayake will hold bilateral talks with President Xi on a range of areas of mutual interest.

The President will also meet Chinese Premier Li Qiang and Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of China Zhao Leji.

BEZOS' SPACE  
COMPANY CALLS  
OFF LAUNCH

**Cape Canaveral, Jan. 13:** Blue Origin called off the debut launch of its massive new rocket early on Monday because of technical trouble.

The 320-foot (98-metre) New Glenn rocket was supposed to blast off before dawn with a prototype satellite from Florida's Cape Canaveral Space Force Station. But launch controllers had to deal with an unspecified rocket issue in the final minutes of the countdown and ran out of time.

Once the countdown clock was halted, they immediately began draining all the fuel from the rocket.

FLIGHTS CALLED  
OFF AS STRIKE  
HITS BELGIUM

**Brussels, Jan. 13:** Belgium was hit by a national strike on Monday, with air and rail traffic severely affected as workers protested against pension reform plans.

About 40 per cent of flights taking off or landing at Brussels airport were cancelled, as baggage handlers, security staff and other personnel downed tools, the company operating the terminal told AFP.

Flag carrier Brussels Airlines said it was forced to preemptively cancel half its flights within Europe to keep long-haul routes running.

US curbs export of AI  
chips due to security

Rules to limit access to existing chips used in video games

**Washington, Jan. 13:** The Biden administration is proposing a new framework for the exporting of the advanced computer chips used to develop artificial intelligence, an attempt to balance national security concerns about the technology with the economic interests of producers and other countries.

But the framework proposed on Monday also raised concerns of chip industry executives who say the rules would limit access to existing chips used for video games and restrict in 120 countries the chips used for data centres and AI products. Mexico, Portugal, Israel and Switzerland are among the nations that could have limited access.

Commerce secretary Gina Raimondo said on a call with reporters previewing the framework that it's critical to preserve America's leadership in AI and the development of AI-related computer chips. The fast-evolving AI technology enables computers to produce novels, make scientific research breakthroughs, automate driving and foster a range of other transformations that could reshape economies and warfare.

As AI becomes more powerful, the risks to our national security become even more intense, Raimondo said. The framework is designed to safeguard the most advanced Artificial Intelligence technology and ensure that it stays out of the hands of our foreign adversaries but also enabling the broad diffusion and sharing of the benefits with partner countries.

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan stressed that the framework would ensure that the most cutting-edge aspects of AI would be developed within the United



Metal debris stands at a home destroyed by the Palisades Fire in Malibu, California, on Sunday. — AP

States and with its closest allies, instead of possibly getting offshored such as the battery and renewable energy sectors.

A tech industry group, the Information Technology Industry Council, warned Raimondo in a letter last week that a hastily implemented new rule from the Democratic administration could fragment global supply chains and put US companies at a disadvantage.

"While we share the US government's commitment to national and economic security, the rule's potential risks to US global leadership in AI cannot be emphasised enough," said a statement from Naomi Wilson, the group's senior vice president for Asia and global trade policy. She called for a more extensive consultation with the tech industry.

One industry executive said the proposed restrictions would limit access to chips already used for video games, despite claims made otherwise by the government. — AP

LA wildfire death  
toll goes up to 24

**Los Angeles, Jan. 13:** After a weekend spent blocking the explosive growth of fires that destroyed thousands of homes and killed at least 24 people in the Los Angeles area, firefighters got a slight break with calmer weather but cast a wary eye on a forecast for yet more wind.

Should that happen, already burned homes and valleys could flare anew, sending embers to unburned territory miles downwind. New fires could add to the complication.

The death toll surged on Sunday with an update from the Los Angeles County medical examiner: At least 16 people were missing, a number authorities said was also likely to rise.

The relative calm on Sunday allowed some people to return to previously evacuated areas, however.

The National Weather Service issued red flag warnings for severe fire conditions till Wednesday, with sustained winds of 50 mph and gusts in the mountains reaching 70 mph. The most dangerous day will be Tuesday, warned fire behaviour analyst Dennis Burns at a community meeting. "It will kind of ebb and flow over the next couple days. Tomorrow night, it will really ramp up," Burns said.

New fires caused by blowing embers could happen as much as 2 miles (3.2 km) or more downwind of areas that have already burned, Burns said.

Despite their recent losses, stress, and uncertainty, the crowd in a Pasadena City College gym was mostly respectful, in contrast with harsh criticism elsewhere. — AP

Peskov: Kremlin will not  
comment on NK POWs

**Moscow, Seoul, Jan. 13:** The Kremlin declined to comment on Monday on Kyiv saying it had captured North Korean soldiers fighting with Moscow's Army in Russia's Kursk region, after President Volodymyr Zelenskyy suggested he was ready to exchange them for Ukrainian POWs.

Russia has not denied or confirmed reports that thousands of North Korean soldiers have been sent to its border Kursk region to help Moscow fight off a Ukrainian incursion.

"We cannot comment in any way, we do not know what is true there," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said, after Kyiv over the weekend published videos of two alleged North Korean soldiers being interrogated.

South Korea's spy agency said that the two captured North Korean soldiers haven't expressed a desire to seek asylum in South Korea. Seoul added that around 300 North Korean troops have been killed and some 2,700 wounded. Lawmaker Lee Seong-kweun told reporters that North Korean troops have been ordered to kill themselves rather than be taken prisoner. — Agencies



A Ukrainian tank burns after being hit by a Russian drone near Vozdvyzhenka, eastern Ukraine. — AP

Coal mine output halts  
as Russians very close

**Kyiv, Jan. 13:** Ukraine has stopped production at its coking coal mine in Pokrovsk, which feeds the country's steel industry, because of the proximity of advancing Russian forces, two industry sources told Reuters on Monday.

The facility in the embattled city of Pokrovsk is Ukraine's only mine that produces coking coal needed for the country's once giant steelmaking industry, which has withered since Russia's invasion.

Russia has been closing in on the key logistics hub of Pokrovsk, and DeepState, a Ukrainian military analytical blog based on open-source intelligence, said Russians were less than 2 km from one of the mine shafts. — Reuters

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## Far-right min. vows to oppose agreement

Truce deal final draft  
given to Israel, Hamas

**Doha, Cairo, Jerusalem, Jan. 13:** Mediators gave Israel and Hamas a final draft of a deal on Monday to end the war in Gaza, an official briefed on the negotiations said, after a midnight "breakthrough" in talks attended by envoys of both Joe Biden and Donald Trump.

But, Israel's far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich on Monday vowed to oppose any deal to end the Gaza war.

"The proposed agreement is a catastrophe for Israel's national security," Smotrich said on X. "We will not be part of a surrender deal that involves releasing dangerous terrorists, halting the war, squandering the hard-won achievements paid for in blood, and abandoning many hostages still in captivity. Now is the time to intensify our efforts, using all available force to fully secure and cleanse the Gaza Strip."

The official said the text for a ceasefire and release of hostages was presented to both sides at talks in Doha, which included the chiefs of Israel's Mossad and Shin Bet spy agencies along with Qatar's Prime Minister.

The official said Steve Witkoff, who will become US envoy when Trump returns to the US presidency next week, attended the talks. A US source said the outgoing Biden administration's envoy Brett McGurk was also there.

"The next 24 hours will be pivotal to reaching the deal," the official said, characterising the draft as the outcome of a breakthrough reached in the early hours of Monday.

Israel's Kan radio, citing an Israeli official, reported on Monday that Israeli and Hamas delegations in Qatar had both received a draft, and that the Israeli delegation had briefed Israel's leaders. Israel, Hamas and the foreign ministry of Qatar did not respond to requests for confirmation or comment.

STARMER URGED  
TO SACK MINISTER  
FOR B'DESH GRAFT

**London, Jan. 13:** Britain's Keir Starmer faced fresh pressure on Monday to sack his anti-corruption minister Tulip Siddiq, as Bangladesh's graft watchdog filed new cases against her and her aunt — ousted leader Sheikh Hasina.

Siddiq, 42, has been dogged by claims about her links to Hasina, who fled Bangladesh last August after a student-led uprising against her decades-long, increasingly authoritarian tenure as prime minister. Hasina, 77, has defied extradition requests to face Bangladeshi charges, including mass murder.

On Monday, Bangladesh's Anti-Corruption Commission announced she and family members, including Siddiq, were subject to another graft probe, this time over an alleged land grab of lucrative plots in a suburb of the capital Dhaka. Family members, including Siddiq, had already emerged as named targets of the commission's probe into accusations of embezzlement of \$5 billion connected to a Russian-funded nuclear power plant. — AFP



Smoke plumes rise from explosions above destroyed buildings in the northern Gaza Strip on Monday. — AFP

NAWAF SALAM  
TO BE NEW PM  
OF LEBANON

**Beirut, Jan. 13:** The prominent Lebanese diplomat and judge Nawaf Salam has won majority support from legislators, paving the way for him to become Lebanon's new Prime Minister.

Salam is currently serving as the head of the International Court of Justice and his nomination was made by Western-backed groups as well as independents in the Lebanese parliament.

Moreover, Salam enjoys the backing of Saudi Arabia and western countries. — AP

IRAN AIRLINES  
TO LAUNCH  
EUROPE FLIGHTS

**Tehran, Jan. 13:** Iran announced on Monday the launch of direct flights on private airlines to Europe, more than three months after flag carrier Iran Air suspended its European routes due to EU sanctions.

"Flights to Europe will resume on January 31. It will start with the Paris-Tehran route operated by Iran Airtour," a private airline, said Hossein Pourfarzaneh, head of Iran's Civil Aviation Organisation, as quoted by the official IRNA news agency. — AFP

another or comment.

Officials on both sides, while stopping short of confirming that a final draft had been reached, described progress at the talks. "The negotiation over some core issues made progress and we are working to conclude what remains soon," a Hamas official told Reuters on Monday, asking not to be identified due to the sensitivity of the matter.

A senior Israeli official said a deal could be sealed within a few days if Hamas replies to a proposal. A Palestinian official said

information was "very promising", adding: "Gaps were being narrowed and there is a big push toward an agreement if all goes well to the end."

The United States, Qatar and Egypt have worked for more than a year on talks to end the war in Gaza, so far fruitlessly.

In Cairo, an Egyptian security official told Reuters the draft sent to the two warring sides did not comprise the final agreement but "aims to resolve outstanding issues that had hindered previous negotiations". — Agencies

Imran graft case  
verdict postponed  
for third time

**Islamabad, Jan. 13:** A Pakistan court on Monday postponed for the third time the announcement of the verdict in the £190 million Al-Qadir Trust corruption case against former prime minister Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi.

Judge Nasir Javed Rana of the anti-corruption court in Islamabad completed the hearing in the case on December 18 but reserved the judgment until December 23.

Later he fixed January 6 as the new date for announcing the verdict. Judge Rana was on leave on January 6, so it was postponed until January 13. Today, he once again postponed it until January 17, citing the absence of the accused in the court.

The postponement comes amidst the ongoing negotiation between the government and Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party to address the political instability in the country due to the imprisonment of the former premier and several other leaders of the party.

So far two rounds of talks have been held and



Imran Khan

another is expected this week. It was not clear if the judgment would impact the next round of talks.

The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) in December 2023 filed the case against Khan (72), Bibi (50) and six others, accusing them of causing a loss to the tune of £190 million (PR\$50 billion) to the national kitty.

However, Khan and Bibi have been prosecuted as all others, including a property tycoon, were out of the country.

Both Khan and Bibi are accused in the case, which revolves around allegations that PR\$50 billion, returned to Pakistan by the UK's National Crime Agency as part of a settlement with a property tycoon was misused. — PTI

Pakistan coal mine  
collapse kills two

**Islamabad, Jan. 13:** Two miners have been killed when a coal mine collapsed in Pakistan's restive Balochistan province, the second mining disaster in the area within a week.

The tragedy hit on Sunday in the Khost area of Harnai district, the Dawn newspaper reported.

The incident happened two days after 11 miners were killed in a coal mine collapsed in the Sanjdi

area near Quetta. Authorities are trying to retrieve the remaining body from the Sanjdi mine. In the latest incident, cracks developed in a coal mine located in the Khost coal field of Harnai district and a portion of the mine caved in when eight workers were still inside.

Six of the miners were rescued immediately after the collapse of the mine. — PTI





quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	77,378.91	-0.31
Nifty 50	23,431.50	-0.40
S&P 500*	5,827.04	-1.54
Dollar (₹)	85.96	0.10
Pound Sterling (₹)	105.76	0.29
Euro (₹)	88.55	0.07
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	78,400.23	-0.03
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	79.79	0.04
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.769	0.005
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.763	0.082

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

Standard Glass makes market debut at ₹140

Shares of Hyderabad-based Standard Glass Lining Technology Ltd listed with a premium of nearly 26 per cent against the issue price of ₹140 on Monday. The stock made its market debut at ₹176, rallying 25.71 per cent from the issue price on the BSE. Later, it surged 29.78 per cent to ₹181.70. At the NSE, it listed at ₹172, up 22.85 per cent. The company's market valuation stood at ₹3,541.97 crore.



HCLTech Q3 net profit rises 5.5% to ₹4,591 crore

HCLTech on Monday reported 5.54 per cent growth in consolidated net profit to ₹4,591 crore for December quarter of FY25. It had reported a profit of ₹4,350 crore in the year-ago period. Revenue from operations for the quarter under review came in at ₹29,890 crore, 5.07 per cent higher than ₹28,446 crore in Q3 FY24. Sequentially, profit and revenue rose 8.4 per cent and 3.56 per cent, respectively.

JSW Cement gets Sebi's nod for ₹4,000-crore IPO

JSW Cement, a JSW Group company, on Monday it has received final observation from the capital markets regulator, Securities and Exchange Board of India, to raise ₹4,000 crore through an initial public offering. The public issue with a face value of ₹10 each, is a mix of fresh issue of equity shares up to ₹2,000 crore and an offer for sale of up to ₹2,000 crore by the investor selling shareholders.

NBCC gets order worth ₹3,500 cr in Lucknow

NBCC (India) Ltd has bagged a ₹3,500-crore work order in Lucknow for development of mixed use project. NBCC has entered into a memorandum of understanding with Sarkari Awas Nirman Avam Vitt Nigam Ltd, under which the latter will award the works related to execution of mixed land use development of Poorvi Vihar, Lucknow admeasuring 588-acre to NBCC as project management consultant.

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Investors lose ₹12.6L-cr, rupee hits historic low

Indian currency logs its biggest single-day slide in nearly 2 years

FALAKNAAZ SYED AND RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JAN. 13

The Indian rupee slumped to a fresh low and logged its biggest single-day fall in nearly two years on Monday on a strong US dollar, continuous selling by foreign portfolio investors. The rupee fell to 86.5825 before ending the session at 86.5750, down 0.7 per cent on the day. The last time it fell this much was in February 2023.

Meanwhile, Indian market benchmarks Sensex and Nifty-50 fell for the fourth consecutive session on account of persistent foreign investors selling in January.

The Sensex fell 1048.90 points or 1.36 per cent to 76,330.01 while Nifty-50 fell 345.55 points or 1.47 per cent to 23,085.95, a seven month low.

Market investors suffered wealth erosion of over ₹12.61 lakh crore as BSE's market capitalisation fell below \$5 trillion to over ₹417.05 lakh crore.

The local currency has declined over 2 per cent since December on worries over India's slowing growth and expectations that the central bank may cut rates as soon as February.

The country's forex reserves dropped by \$5.693 billion to \$634.585 billion in the week ended January 3.

The rupee's drop was notably larger than the declines experienced by other Asian currencies, such as the Thai baht, the

MARKET TRAVAILS

LOCAL CURRENCY declines over 2% since Dec. 2024 on worries over India's slowing growth.

MARKET TAKES a hit as crude oil futures price hit 4-month high of \$81.67 per barrel after US imposes sanctions on crude supplies from Russia.

FPIS TURN net sellers of equities worth ₹4,892.84 cr while domestic institutions turn net buyers of equities worth ₹8,066.07 cr

SENSEX falls 1,048.90 points or 1.36% to 76,330.01 while Nifty-50 slides 345.55 points or 1.47% to 23,085.95, a 7-month low.

US JOBS report and subsequent spike in US yields and dollar have a double whammy impact on emerging markets with sharp foreign outflows.

Recent GDP down-grades and slowing earnings amidst higher valuations are weighing heavily on market sentiment. Expect volatility in the near term, with the 2025 budget, Q3 results, RBI policy, and Trump's policies are key factors to define the trend in the short-term. — VINOD NAIR, head-research, Geojit Financial Services.

Philippine peso, and the Malaysian ringgit, which fell between 0.3 per cent and 0.6 per cent.

Meanwhile, the Chinese yuan remained relatively steady, even appreciating slightly. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading up 0.29 per cent to its over two-year-high level of 109.80. The 10-year US bond yields rose by 0.48 per cent to touch its October 2023 level at 4.79 per cent.

Traders said that the Reserve Bank of India allowed the rupee to fall amid declining emerging market currencies and its dwindling forex reserves.

Market sentiments took a hit as crude oil futures

price hit four month high after US imposes fresh sanctions on crude supplies from Russia with Brent crude futures hitting a high of \$81.67 per barrel.

Broader market saw massive profit taking as the BSE mid-cap index fell 4.17 per cent and BSE small-cap index too fell 4.14 per cent.

Foreign portfolio investors were net sellers of equities worth ₹4,892.84 crore while domestic institutions were net buyers by ₹8,066.07 crore.

“What we are seeing is extreme pessimism going into the earnings and Budget. Investors are still not comfortable with the valuations, despite the recent fall. Friday's US

jobs report and subsequent spike in US yields and dollar had a double whammy impact on emerging markets with sharp foreign outflows and prospect of only one rate cut from the US Fed,” said Satish Chandra Aluri, Lemonn Markets Desk, an investment platform.

“Recent GDP down-grades and slowing earnings amidst higher valuations are weighing heavily on market sentiment. Expect volatility in the near term. The 2025 Budget, Q3 results, RBI policy, and Trump's policies are key factors to define the trend in the short-term,” said Vinod Nair, head-research, Geojit Financial Services.

Retail inflation for Dec. hits 4-mth low of 5.22%

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, JAN. 13

India's headline retail inflation rate, measured by the consumer price index (CPI), for December stood at 5.22 per cent, dipping marginally from 5.48 per cent in November, while the November's CPI also fell from a 14-month high of 6.21 per cent in October, the government data showed on Monday.

However, the government attributed that India's core inflation fell to a four-month low of 5.22 per cent in December as food prices provided some reprieve in the system, while in December, the figure, however, marks the fourth consecutive month of over 5 percent inflation



which is in the RBI tolerance band to the limit of 2-6 per cent.

As the RBI is tracking the core inflation trend in India, the monetary policy committee is expected to take a call on rates in February after the Budget. Experts have been predicting possibly a rate cut in February to bring down the cost of capital and spur the economy.

According to CPI data released by the National Statistics Office (NSO),

the inflation in the food basket reduced to 8.39 per cent in December.

“It was 9.04 per cent in November and 9.53 per cent in December 2023. The CPI and food inflation in December 2024 is the lowest in last 4 months,” the NSO said.

However, the NSO data showed that the vegetable prices rose 26.56 per cent year-on-year in December as compared to a 29.33 per cent increase registered in November.

Earlier, the RBI had raised the inflation projection for FY25 to 4.8 per cent from 4.5 per cent. The central bank also had said the lingering food price pressures likely to keep headline inflation elevated in December quarter.

India sees no disruptions to Russian oil supply

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, JAN. 13

As the US Treasury's imposed sanctions on Russian oil producers last week, India does not expect any disruption to Russian oil supply in the next two months as the US-sanctioned tankers are allowed to discharge crude until March, an oil ministry source said.

On possible supply disruption after two months,

the source said, “We are optimistic about the supply and India will allow Russian oil cargoes booked before Jan. 10 to discharge at ports. The market is waiting for Russia to respond to sanctions and Russia will find ways to reach us,” the source said at the sidelines of an energy conference ‘India energy week 2025 to redefine global energy Dialogue’ here in the national capital.



The comments come at a time when many of the tankers have been used to ship oil to India and China as Western sanctions and a price cap imposed by the group of seven countries

E-comm ups credit card spend in Tier 3, 4 towns

Credit card spends from Tier 3 and 4 towns are far outshining those from metro cities, says Ravindra Rai, managing director and chief executive officer at Bobcard, the credit card subsidiary of Bank of Baroda, in an interview with **Falaknaaz Syed**.



Our Gross NPA levels are under control, better than the industry at 3.19 per cent and we probably will close FY 25 with sub-3 per cent,

— RAVINDRA RAI, MD & CEO, Bobcard

Will credit on UPI be counter-productive for credit cards?

Credit on UPI will have limited cannibalising effects on credit cards since both products are positioned for different segments. Credit on UPI could be looked as a backdoor entry for entities who do not hold regulatory license to issue credit cards. These products help card issuers by expanding the pool of credit tested customers for better limits and features.

Trends emerging in the credit cards and payments space?

There are a lot of insights which keep coming in cards, and take us by positive surprise. One revelation in the past few months is that the spends per card from women cardholders is as high as

men cardholders. Other interesting trend is that the spends coming from Tier 3 and 4 towns of the country are outshining the spends from the metro cities. The aspirations of the youth in Indian towns have been fuelled by e-com and cards enabling those purchases. For instance, more iPhones were purchased on our card in Jaipur, Lucknow and Baroda than in Mumbai and Delhi. More than one

third of electronics and white goods are now purchased on purchase EMIs on credit cards, which indicate how cards have eliminated the Buy Now Pay Later (BNPL) category for forever.

How are the new card issuances and spends panning out?

We are around a stone's throw away from 3 million card issuance and are on course to clock another 2 million cards by this financial year. Spends are also healthy at around nearly ₹3,200 crore a month, expecting to grow at around 1.8 to 2 times of the industry growth rate. If you adjust inflation, we are looking at a y-o-y growth of 25-30 per cent.

What are your delinquency levels?

Our Gross NPA levels are under control, better than the industry at 3.19 per cent and we probably will close FY 25 with sub-3 per cent.

When do you plan to list?

We plan to list next financial year and are working on it internally. However, externally we still haven't started anything.

8 cities see land deals of 2,000 acre in 2024

SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, JAN. 13

The top eight cities saw land deals of 2,000 acres closing in 2024, while the private equity investments in the real estate sector moved up to \$2.82 billion in the first nine months of FY2024-25.

The total land deal volume surged by 54 per cent in 2024 to 2,000 acres against 1,300 acres in 2023. During 2024, nearly 135 land deals were closed compared to 90 in 2023.

Delhi-NCR recorded around 40 land deals, Bengaluru 30 transactions, followed by Mumbai and Chennai, which contributed approximately 25 and 15, respectively, according to CBRE.

Deals in residential assets contributed more than 60 per cent or 1190 acres and recorded a 70 per cent increase compared to 2023. Data centres contributed 10 per cent transaction volume share with 200 acres.

Meanwhile, private equity deals in realty dropped from 30 in 9M FY24 to 24 in 9M FY25, though the total investment value rose six per cent to \$2.82 billion.

“The average deal size



saw a notable increase of 32.5 per cent, climbing from \$88.5 million in 9M FY 2023-24 to \$117.3 million in 9M FY2024-25,” said Shobhit Agarwal, managing director and chief executive officer of Anarock Capital.

Led by the Reliance – Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA)/KKR transaction, the top 10 deals accounted for a massive 93 per cent of the total transactions.

The Reliance-ADIA/KKR transaction was valued at \$1,542 million.

The industrial and logistics sector captured 62 per cent of total investments, significantly surpassing both the office and residential sectors, which attracted 14 per cent and 15 per cent, respectively.

FC BANKING BUREAU MUMBAI, JAN. 13

The National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) on Monday debunked recent media reports on online fraud called the Jump Deposit Scam.

NPCI said that the media report had certain inaccuracies and technical discrepancies that has led to unnecessary panic and confusion among users about the UPI platform. “We would also like to clarify that no instances of fraud, as described in the articles on ‘Jumped Deposit’ Scam, have been observed on the UPI platform,” said NPCI in a statement.

According to media reports, scammers are targeting UPI users by making small deposits into their accounts and then using psychological tactics to deceive them into authorising larger payment requests.

“Simply opening a UPI or bank application does not automatically approve a transaction. Users must explicitly authorise a payment request by entering their UPI PIN. Without this step, no transaction can be processed,” NPCI said.

“No external party can directly request or withdraw funds from a user's account. Only the user can initiate transactions or withdrawals,” it added.



NET DIRECT TAX MOP-UP RISES 16% TO ₹16.9 LAKH CR

New Delhi, Jan. 13: The net direct tax collection grew 15.88 per cent to about ₹16.90 lakh crore so far this fiscal, according to government data released on Monday.

As per the data by the central board of direct taxes (CBDT), mop-up from net non-corporate taxes, which include mainly personal income tax, stood at over ₹8.74 lakh crore.

The net corporate tax collection between April 1, 2024, and January 12, 2025, was around ₹7.68 lakh crore.

Net collections from securities transaction tax stood at ₹44,538 crore so far this fiscal. — PTTI





SHORT TAKES

India drub Scots in U19 WC warm-up

**Kuala Lumpur:** Defending champions India thrashed Scotland by 119 runs in a warm-up match of the ICC Women's Under-19 T20 World Cup here on Monday. Invited to bat, India made 164 for 7 in their allotted 20 overs with Kamalini G top-scoring with 32 off 23 balls. Four Indian batters — Trisha G (26), Sanika Chalke (17), captain Niki Prasad (25) and Kamalini — were retired out to give chance to their colleagues to be in the middle in the practice match. For Scotland, Ammy Baldie was the most successful bowler with 2/13 from 3 overs. Later, the defending champions bowled Scotland out for a paltry 45 in 18.5 overs for a commanding win. Shabnam Shakil, Vaishnavi Sharma and Sonam Yadav took two wickets apiece. The main tournament starts on Saturday, while India begin their campaign against the West Indies on Sunday. — *PTI*

Shreyas named Punjab captain

**New Delhi:** Indian batsman Shreyas Iyer has been named captain of Indian Premier League team Punjab Kings for the upcoming edition of the lucrative T20 tournament. Iyer, a title-winning captain with Kolkata Knight Riders last season, was picked by Punjab for 267.5 million rupees (\$3.17 million) as the second-most expensive buy in the IPL auction in December. The 30-year-old Iyer said he was excited to re-unite with Australian great and new Punjab coach Ricky Ponting, after the two previously worked together with Delhi Capitals. Iyer said he was "honoured" to be named as skipper. "I am looking forward to working again with coach Ponting," Iyer said in a statement late Sunday. "The team looks strong, with a great mix of potential and proven performers," he added. "I hope to repay the faith shown by the management to deliver our maiden title." Ponting said Shreyas had "a great mind for the game", adding that his "proven capabilities as captain will enable the team to deliver". The 18th edition of the tournament will begin on March 21 with Kolkata hosting the opener. — *PTI*

Jamwal stuns Shiva in semis

**Bareilly:** Himachal Pradesh's Abhinash Jamwal continued his sensational run as he defeated reigning welterweight champion Shiva Thapa in a thrilling semifinal clash at the men's National Boxing Championship here. Jamwal has been one of the standout performers of the tournament, building momentum with victories over formidable opponents, including 2022 Youth World Champion Vanshaj Kumar earlier in the competition. Services Sports Control Board (SSCB) extended their dominance with eight of their 10 boxers reaching the finals. Highlighting SSCB's individual achievements, former World Youth Champion Sachin Siwach delivered a decisive win over Haryana's Gorish Pujani in the lightweight (55-60kg) category. Lakshya Chahar, another performer in the spotlight, beat Mizoram's Malsawmtluanga in the light heavyweight (75-80kg) division to book his spot in the medal round. — *PTI*

PGTI adds 4 new events in calender

**New Delhi:** The Professional Golf Tour of India on Monday added four new events to its calendar, taking the total number of tournaments it will host in the first half of the year to 11 with a combined prize purse of ₹15.66 crore. The season will tee off on February 11 with the Tata Steel PGTI Players Championship in Kolkata and will be followed by non-stop golfing action across as many venues. The season will end in April with the Kapil Dev-Grant Thornton Invitational. The four new events unveiled by PGTI are Chattisgarh Open Golf Championship (₹1 crore, Raipur), PGTI Invitational (₹1.5 crore, Greater Noida), Indorama Open Golf Championship (₹2 crore, Ahmedabad) and Calance Open (₹1 crore, Delhi-NCR). The PGTI has so far staged events in 16 states, two UTs and the National Capital Territory of Delhi. With the golfing body making its foray in Chhattisgarh, it has now expanded its geographical footprint in the country to 17 states.

NOWALK IN PARK

Djokovic survives first round scare at Oz Open

**Melbourne, Jan. 13:** Novak Djokovic survived a scare in his quest for tennis history before joining Carlos Alcaraz and defending champion Jannik Sinner in the second round of the Australian Open on Monday. But home favourite Nick Kyrgios will not join them as the combustible Australian failed to clear the first hurdle, swearing and in pain.

In the women's draw, Iga Swiatek and Coco Gauff powered through with minimum fuss as they seek to dethrone two-time defending champion Aryna Sabalenka.

On a blockbuster second day in Melbourne, Djokovic lost the first set to 107th-ranked American Nishesh Basavareddy in the prime-time evening match on Rod Laver Arena.

But the Serbian great, hoping to roll back the years and win an 11th Australian Open and record 25th Grand Slam singles title, recovered to pull through 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-2.

Djokovic was animated at the end and struggled to raise a smile.

Italian world number one Sinner was playing under a cloud after twice testing positive for traces of a steroid in March.

He denies wrongdoing and was cleared by tennis authorities, but the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) appealed and is seeking to ban him for up to two years.

Sinner was warmly welcomed on Rod Laver Arena before defeating Chile's Nicolas Jarry 7-6 (7/2), 7-6 (7/5), 6-1.

"I was curious to see how it was. You never know what's happening," he said about the reception.

"I was happy about the crowd," said Sinner, who has not tasted defeat since losing to Alcaraz in the Beijing final in October.

Alcaraz, a four-time Grand Slam champion but never a winner in Melbourne, had a couple of hairy moments before seeing off the challenge of Kazakhstan's Alexander



Coco Gauff of the US returns to countrymate Sofia Kenin during their first round match at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne on Monday. — AP

Shevchenko, 6-1, 7-5, 6-1.

"This is a tournament I really want to win one day, hopefully this year," said the 21-year-old Spaniard.

There was disappointment however for home fans as the colourful but temperamental Kyrgios, only recently back from 18 months out with injury, lost 7-6 (7/3), 6-3, 7-6 (7/2) to

Britain's Jacob Fearnley.

Kyrgios spoke to physios multiple times in the second set after wincing in pain while serving and fired expletives at his coaching box.

GAUFF SENDS WARNING

The women's draw provided few upsets on day two.

Red-hot world number three Gauff laid down a marker as she swept aside former Melbourne champion and fellow American Sofia Kenin.

Gauff is unbeaten this year after leading the US to United Cup glory and eased past the 2020 Australian Open winner 6-3, 6-3 in 80 minutes.

THE RESULTS

**Men's singles 1st round:** Jannik Sinner (ITA x1) bt Nicolas Jarry (CHI) 7-6 (7/2), 7-6 (7/5), 6-1; Tristan Schoolkate (AUS) bt Taro Daniel (JPN) 6-7 (6/8), 7-6 (7/4), 6-1, 6-4; Alex Michelsen (USA) bt Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE x11) 7-5, 6-3, 2-6, 6-4; James McCabe (AUS) bt Martin Landaluce (ESP) 6-4, 6-3, 6-4; Fabian Marozsan (HUN) bt Thiago Wild (BRA) 6-3, 6-7 (5/7), 7-5, 5-7, 7-5; Frances Tiafoe (USA x17) bt Arthur Rinderknech (FRA) 7-6, 6-3, 4-6, 6-7, 6-3; Novak Djokovic (SRB x7) bt Nishesh Basavareddy (USA) 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-2; Jaime Faria (POR) bt Pavel Kotov (RUS) 6-1, 6-1, 7-5; Benjamin Bonzi (FRA) bt David Goffin (BEL) 6-1, 6-2, 7-6 (9/7); Francesco Passaro (ITA) bt Grigor Dimitrov (BUL x10) 7-5, 2-1 ret; Jack Draper (GBR x15) bt Mariano Navone (ARG) 4-6, 6-3, 3-6, 6-3, 6-2; Thanasi Kokkinakis (AUS) bt Roman Safiullin (RUS) 3-6, 6-3, 6-3, 7-6 (7/5); Aleksandar Vukic (AUS) bt Damir Dzumhur (BIH) 6-7 (3/7), 6-0, 3-6, 6-3, 6-4; Sebastian Korda (USA x22) bt Lukas Klein (SVK) 6-3, 0-6, 6-3, 7-6 (8/6); Carlos Alcaraz (ESP x3) bt Alexander Shevchenko (KAZ) 6-1, 7-5, 6-1.

**Women's singles 1st round:** Magdalena Frech (POL x25) bt Polina Kudermetova (RUS) 6-4, 6-4; Moyuka Uchijima (JPN) bt Magda Linette (POL) 4-6, 6-2, 7-6 (10/8); Diana Shnaider (RUS x12) bt Elisabetta Cocciaretto (ITA) 7-6 (7/4), 6-4; Alla Tomljanovic (AUS) bt Ashlyn Krueger (USA) 6-4, 4-6, 6-4; Harriet Dart (GBR) bt Jana Fett (CRO) 7-5, 2-6, 7-6 (10/7); Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova (RUS x27) bt Yuan Yue (CHN) 6-4, 4-6, 6-3; Anastasia Potapova (RUS) bt Tamara Zidansek (SLO) 6-2, 7-5; Laura Siegemund (GER) bt Hailey Baptiste (USA) 4-6, 7-5, 6-4; Coco Gauff (USA x3) bt Sofia Kenin (USA) 6-3, 6-3; Jodie Burrage (GBR) bt Leolia Jeanjean (FRA) 6-2, 6-4; Belinda Bencic (SUI) bt Jelena Ostapenko (LAT x16) 6-3, 7-6 (8/6); Talia Gibson (AUS) bt Zeynep Sirmaz (TUR) 3-6, 7-6 (7/5), 6-1; Jessica Pegula (USA x7) bt Maya Joint (AUS) 6-3, 6-0; Iga Swiatek (POL x2) bt Katerina Siniakov (CZE) 6-3, 6-4.

"I knew it was going to be difficult, but you know, I'm happy with how I played," said Gauff, the 2023 US Open champion.

Women's world number two Swiatek defeated Czech doubles specialist Katerina Siniakova 6-3, 6-4 to get her tournament up and running.

— *AFF*

NAPOLI SEE OFF VERONA TO MOVE FOUR CLEAR OF CHAMPS INTER

**Milan (Italy), Jan. 13:** Napoli extended their lead at the top of Serie 'A' to four points on Sunday after beating lowly Verona 2-0 as champions Inter Milan moved second with a 1-0 success at Venezia.

An early own goal from Verona goalkeeper Lorenzo Montipo and Andre-Frank Zambo Anguissa's second half rocket ensured that Napoli took advantage of Atalanta being held to a goalless draw at Udinese on Saturday and strengthened their bid for a second league title in three seasons.

Napoli's lead isn't as imposing as it looks, however, as Inter have two games in hand, the first of which is against Bologna at the San Siro on Wednesday. Atalanta, who are a further point back in third, also have an extra fixture to play due to their participation in the Italian Super Cup.

— *AFF*



Barcelona players celebrate after winning the Spanish Super Cup final against Real Madrid at King Abdullah Stadium in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on Sunday night. — AP

10-man Utd send Arsenal packing

**London, Jan. 13:** Ten-man Manchester United beat Arsenal 5-3 on penalties after a dramatic 1-1 draw in the FA Cup third round, while Tottenham needed extra time before seeing off non-league Tamworth 3-0 on Sunday.

Defeated 2-0 by Arsenal in the Premier League in December, FA Cup holders United exacted revenge on their return to the Emirates Stadium to extend their revival after last weekend's impressive draw at Liverpool.

It was another painful result for Arsenal after Tuesday's 2-0 home defeat against Newcastle in the

THE RESULTS			
<b>Arsenal</b> (Gabriel 63)	1	<b>Ipswich Town</b> (Phillips 18, Clarke 24, Taylor 37)	3
<b>Manchester United</b> (Fernandes 52) aet, Manchester United won 5-3 on penalties	1	<b>Bristol Rovers</b>	0
<b>Tamworth</b> (Tshikuna 101-og, Kulusevski 107, Johnson 118) aet	0	<b>Newcastle United</b> (Miley 16, Gordon 49-pen, Osula 61)	3
<b>Tottenham Hotspur</b> (Tshikuna 101-og, Kulusevski 107, Johnson 118) aet	3	<b>Bromley</b> (Congreve 8)	1
<b>Crystal Palace</b> (Eze 4)	1	<b>Southampton</b> (Sulemana 20, Dibling 35, 65)	3
<b>Stockport</b>	0	<b>Swansea</b>	0

League Cup semifinal first leg and last weekend's damaging league draw at Brighton. "In a thousand games like this you lose one," said Gunners boss

Mikel Arteta, who hasn't won a trophy since 2020.

SPURS SURVIVE

Tottenham, currently 12th in the Premier League, are



India players Satwiksairaj Rankireddy (from left) P. V. Sindhu, Chirag Shetty and Lakshya Sen at the launch event of the Indian Open badminton tournament in New Delhi on Monday.

Eyes on Sindhu at India Open

**DEEPIKA DAS**  
NEW DELHI, JAN. 13

The glow and constant smile on her face showed that newly wed badminton star P. V. Sindhu is in a happy space and all geared up for the new season.

After missing the season-opener Malaysia Open Super 1000 in Kuala Lumpur due to her wedding, fit-again Sindhu will lead the home charge at the India Open Super 750 tournament slated to begin at the Indira Gandhi Stadium here on Tuesday.

The two-time Olympic medallist ended last year with the Syed Modi International title and is determined to start the new season on a positive note. Sindhu will begin her campaign against rising star Shuo Yun Sung of Chinese Taipei.

Malvika Bansod and Aakarshi Kashyap are the other names in the women's singles section to watch out for. Malvika will take on third seed Chinese Yue Han and Aakarshi will face eighth-seeded Thai Pornpawee Chochuwong.

Spearheading the Indian challenge in the men's singles is Lakshya Sen, who finished fourth at the 2024 Paris Olympics, and experienced H. S. Prannoy. Both had forgettable starts to the season in Kuala Lumpur but aim to do better in front of the home crowd.

Lakshya, who clinched the men's singles top honour in 2022 India Open, will look for an encore. He clinched the Syed Modi

title in 2024 and finished third at the King's Cup a few days ago and will look to extend the run here as well.

Prannoy is returning after a five-month hiatus following a pre-quarterfinal exit at the Paris Olympics and a stumble in the second round in Malaysia last week.

Former world No. 1 Kidambi Srikanth and Kiran George were added to the men's singles draw following the late withdrawal of top seed Shi Yuqi of China and eighth seed Antony Ginting of Indonesia.

With marquee players like Olympic champions Viktor Axelsen (men) and An Se Young (women) leading the competition, it would be no stroll in the park for the Indians in fray.

SATWIK-CHIRAG LOOK TO SEAL TITLE

All eyes will be on last year men's doubles finalists Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, who will be definitely looking to go one better this time.

The former world No. 1 pair landed in the capital on Monday morning after bowing out from the Malaysia Super 1000 tournament in the semifinals. They had claimed the Indian Open doubles title in 2022 and came very close in 2024 but ended runners-up.

India's hopes in the women's doubles will rest on fifth seeds Treesa Jolly & Gayatri Gopichand, who will face Japan's Arisa Igarashi & Ayako Sakuramoto in the first round.

CHAMPIONS | TROPHY

CUMMINS IN AUSSIE TEAM DESPITE INJURY CONCERN

**Sydney, Jan. 13:** Pat Cummins was on Monday named captain of Australia for next month's Champions Trophy while fellow pacer Josh Hazlewood too was included in the squad despite lingering injury concerns surrounding both players. Cummins was managing an ankle injury throughout the recent Border-Gavaskar Trophy against India, which played a part in him missing the upcoming tour to Sri Lanka along with the pacer wanting to stay back at home to welcome his second baby.

"I don't really have any more information than what I shared when we announced the Test squad (for Sri Lanka series) a few days ago," said Chair of Selectors George Bailey.

"I believe he's had the scan. I have no idea what the scan said. But we want to give him a little bit of space at the back end of the Border-Gavaskar; obviously baby pending," he added.

Hazlewood, side lined from the Melbourne and Sydney Tests due to a calf niggle, was similarly not picked for the Sri Lanka series but has been named in the preliminary 15-player Champions Trophy squad.

— *PTI*  
**Australia squad:** Pat Cummins (c), Alex Carey, Nathan Ellis, Aaron Hardie, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Marnus Labuschagne, Mitchell Marsh, Glenn Maxwell, Matthew Short, Steve Smith, Mitchell Starc, Marcus Stoinis, Adam Zampa.

SA INCLUDE NORTJE, NGIDI IN CHAMPS TROPHY SQUAD

**Johannesburg, Jan. 13:** South Africa on Monday included Lungi Ngidi and Anrich Nortje in the Temba Bavuma-led squad for next month's Champions Trophy after the pacers recovered sufficiently from their respective injuries.

Nortje sustained an injury on his big toe last month which ruled him out of the series against Pakistan while a groin strain in November forced Ngidi to miss the series against Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

South Africa, the semifinalists of the 2023 ODI World Cup, are placed in group B of the Champions Trophy.

— *PTI*

**South Africa squad:** Temba Bavuma (captain), Tony de Zorzi, Marco Jansen, Heinrich Klaasen, Keshav Maharaj, Aiden Markram, David Miller, Wiaan Mulder, Lungi Ngidi, Anrich Nortje, Kagiso Rabada, Ryan Rickelton, Tabraiz Shamsi, Tristan Stubbs, Rassie van der Dussen.

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