

SHORT TAKES

2 die after inhaling toxic coal fumes

New Delhi: Two men died and another was hospitalised after inhaling toxic gas from a coal brazier that they left burning in their office in Delhi's Mundka area, the police said on Sunday. The three were using a coal angithi for warmth inside a room that they had bolted from the inside and slept off, leading to the accumulation of deadly carbon monoxide fumes, a police officer said. The incident came to light when Pawan, a co-worker from Haryana, alerted the police. The police said Rajesh, a resident of Ladpur village in Delhi and Rajender Singh, from Aaraj Jadaupur in Uttar Pradesh, both 44-years-old, along with their co-worker Mukesh Pandey (26), from Ravidass Nagar in Uttar Pradesh, were found unconscious. Rajesh and Rajender were declared dead at the spot while while Mukesh is undergoing treatment, officials said. Investigations suggest that suffocation caused by toxic fumes from the coal heater led to the deaths.

23-year-old dies in bike accident

New Delhi: A 23-year-old man died after his motorcyle was allegedly struck by an unidentified vehicle on the Ashram flyover in south-east Delhi, the police said on Sunday. Another man suffered severe injuries in the accident, they said. "The accident involved a motor-cycle collision that left one rider dead and another seriously injured. The accident was reported through a PCR call at the Sunlight Colony police station," an officer said. A police team inspected the spot and found skid marks on the divider, and bloodstain on an electricity pole and the road, he said. A crime team was also called to the spot to collect evidence. The victim was identified as Faizan, a food delivery executive. Muneer, a 26-year-old labourer, was rushed to the trauma centre at AIIMS by bystanders. He remains in hospital with serious injuries, the officer said.

Member of Hashim Baba gang arrested

New Delhi: The Delhi police has arrested a 23-year-old member of Hashim Baba gang, an official said on Sunday. A pistol and five bullets were seized from the accused, Chetan Sharma, an active member of the Hasim Baba gang, he said. Based on a tip-off, Sharma was arrested on Saturday from Khichdipur area, he added. Sharma is a history-sheeter and wanted in theft, attempted murder, and extortion. In 2023, he attempted to extort a local bootlegger and fired at him when he refused, the police said.

MAN FOUND DEAD IN BURNT STATE IN CAR

New Delhi: A 24-year-old man was found dead in a charred state in his car near the Ghaziipur area of east Delhi, the police said on Sunday. According to the police, the incident must have happened while Anil was returning home in Noida's Nawada village after distributing invitations for his wedding, scheduled to take place on February 14. On Saturday, the police received three PCR calls at 11.03 pm, 11.07 pm, and 11.13 pm reporting a fire incident near the Ghaziipur area. When they reached the spot, officers found a Maruti Wagon R engulfed in flames. Inside it, was Anil's charred body. "When our team reached the spot, they found the car in flames, and a person inside was identified as Anil," a senior police officer said. The crime and forensic science laboratory teams were immediately called to the scene to collect evidence. Anil's body was sent to Lal Bahadur Shastri Hospital. Later, two more calls were made by An-il's elder brother to the pol-ice, alleging that his death was part of a conspiracy. The family also indicated that a dispute with the family of a woman he was in love with might have something to do with his death. According to the police, Anil was in an aff-air with a distant relative, but her father opposed the relationship.

Proposes housing scheme for MCD, NDMC staff, urges PM to give land

Kejriwal woos sanitation workers

SANJAY KAW
NEW DELHI, JAN. 19

In an attempt to woo sanitation workers ahead of the upcoming Assembly elections in Delhi, AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday proposed a new housing scheme for such employees employed by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC).

He has requested the Central government to provide land for the project for the construction of houses for these employees by the Delhi government.

Under the proposed scheme, sanitation workers would be able to purchase homes at subsidised rates and repay the cost with easy instalments deducted from their salaries.

The scheme, which would initially benefit sanitation workers, is expected to be extended to other government employees in the future.

While drawing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's attention towards the plight of sanitation workers employed in the MCD and the NDMC regarding their housing issues post-retirement, Mr Kejriwal in a letter urged him to provide land to the AAP government for the construc-



AAP leader Manish Sisodia during a campaign for the Delhi Assembly elections in New Delhi on Sunday. — PTI

tion of homes for these employees.

As per the Constitutional framework, land in the national capital comes under the control of the Centre.

Describing these workers as the backbone of the city's cleanliness system, Mr Kejriwal said, "I want to draw your attention to a very important issue concerning the sanitation workers employed in the NDMC and MCD areas. These workers are the backbone of our city's cleanliness system. During their service, they reside in government-provided accommodation. However, after retirement, they are required to vacate these houses. They are unable to purchase their own

homes or afford the high rents in Delhi, leaving them and their families in a precarious situation."

The letter said, "Since land-related matters in Delhi fall under the purview of the Central government, I request that the Central government provide land to sanitation workers at concessional rates. The Delhi government can construct houses on this land for them, and the workers can repay the cost of these houses to the government in easy instalments."

The AAP convener expressed hope that the Prime Minister and the Central government would agree to this scheme as it is meant for the welfare of the poor.

No walkover for AAP, BJP in polls: Delhi Cong chief

Congress won't let AAP-BJP have a walkover in February polls, emphasised Delhi Congress president Devender Yadav reiterating his party's stand on no post-poll alliance with the AAP.

Mr Yadav, who twice served as a legislator and twice as municipal councillor from Badli Assembly, is once again in the fray.

He claimed that the AAP is making accusations against his party because they are disgruntled as Congress is using its full arsenal and further claimed that BJP is 'not the natural choice of people in Delhi.'

Mr Yadav, in an interview with **BHASKAR HARI SHARMA**, launched a scathing attack on AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal accusing him of using the INDIA bloc for political gains.

Excerpts

How do you see the February 5 Delhi Assembly polls after being out of power for a decade?

During our 15-year rule under Sheila Dikshit, we tried to develop Delhi as a world-class city but in 2013 people trusted an impostor who ruined the city by making false promises. There is a huge anti-incumbency against AAP and BJP is not the "natural choice" by the people of Delhi. This time we strengthened our rank and file of the organisation with the Nyay Yatra after which the party is riding on the reinvigorated party cadre. We have been able to work to re-establish our connection with the common people.



Devender Yadav

How are your freebies different from AAP and BJP's?

We are not giving freebies; we are giving guarantees, which are rightfully theirs. It all depends upon who will be trusted by the people. For us, the guarantee of Congress means we will stick by our promises. Before announcing a guarantee, we carry out a lot of checks to ensure we will be able to deliver it. Whatever schemes we have already guaranteed, or the promises that we are going to make in the coming days, are things that Delhi needs.

In Delhi, your INDIA bloc allies AAP and your rival BJP are involved in a blame game and both are terming you as a B team of the other.

AAP is misguiding the people and so is BJP. There is a triangular fight. We are fulfilling our duty as an Opposition party. Wherever they want to divide votes, AAP comes into the fray — whether it is Goa, Gujarat, or Haryana. I believe that AAP is on the brink of ending. They are getting disgruntled and retaliating against us because they know we are

putting our best front forward and they realise that this is going to damage their prospects. Even retaining their vote share would be a big thing.

In case of a hung Assembly, will Congress and AAP have a post-poll alliance?

We are not going to make any compromise this time either with AAP or with BJP. As of now, we are fighting the elections with full force and our leaders, like Rahul Gandhi, have already hit the ground. Mallikarjun Kharge, Priyanka Gandhi, CMs, and other top leaders will be campaigning in Delhi. We won't let any party have a walkover this time.

Opposition India bloc allies are extending support to AAP, how are you seeing it?

The INDIA bloc is on the national level and has nothing to do with state politics. There is no official statement being given by any of these parties. The bloc is intact. Mr Rahul Gandhi on Saturday went to Bihar where he was warmly received by RJD leaders. But I would like to say that our allies have no idea about the situation in Delhi. Still, if anyone wants to support anyone on an individual level, it is their choice. However, I would like to invite all our partners to visit Delhi and look at the AAP's misgovernance.

What is your take on your opponents in the Badli seat?

They are good candidates from their party and even better for me.

Cops again didn't let us screen docu: AAP

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 19

The AAP alleged on Sunday the Delhi police has scuttled their yet another attempt to screen a documentary based on the arrest of party leaders including Arvind Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia. There was no immediate reaction from the police on the AAP's claim on Sunday. However, they had said on Saturday that the party did not seek permission for screening the documentary — Unbreakable — and in any case, it could not be allowed due to the enforcement of the model code of conduct in the city.

AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh told the media that the police denied permission for his press conference where the documentary was to be screened.

"I want to ask the Election Commission under which rule the permission was denied. There was not going to be any public meeting, election campaigning or appeal for vote was to be made. I came alone for the press conference and screening the doc-



Sanjay Singh

umentary," Mr Singh said outside an auditorium of the Andhra Association in Central Delhi. Mr Singh said he was verbally conveyed that the permission for the press conference and screening was denied.

A screening of the documentary, based on the arrest of the AAP leaders over the last two years in corruption cases, at the Pyarelal Bhavan near ITO was prevented by the police on the ground that no permission was taken for the event which is mandatory as the MCC is in placefor polls.

AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday alleged that the BJP was scared of the documentary because it exposes the "secrets" and "conspiracies" behind the arrest of his party leaders.

Prominent AAP leaders including Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia, Sanjay Singh and Satyendar Jain were arrested by Central agencies in corruption cases during 2023-24.

Cong's Udit Raj dubs Kejriwal as anti-Dalit

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 19

Congress leader Udit Raj on Sunday dubbed AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal as "anti-Dalit", saying that while his party announced a scheme to provide a monthly honorarium to temple priests and gurdwara granthis, it left out priests of Valmiki and Ravidas temples. On Monday, 'bhikshus' and priests of Valmiki and Ravidas temples will protest against the AAP to demand that they be covered under the party's proposed scheme, the former MP said.

On December 30, Mr Kejriwal announced that the AAP would give ₹18,000 a month to temple priests and gurdwaras granthis under the 'Pujari Samman Yojana'.

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 19

The BJP's New Delhi Assembly candidate Parvesh Verma on Sunday accused the AAP of creating a "fake" narrative of an attack on their leader Arvind Kejriwal, and asserted the AAP chief will lose the seat to him by 20,000 votes.

AAP leaders have alleged stone-pelting at Mr Kejriwal's car by "Verma's goons" during election campaigning in the New Delhi constituency on Saturday. At a press conference here on Sunday, Mr Verma gave it in writing that he will be able to defeat Mr Kejriwal by 20,000 votes. The BJP leader claimed Mr Kejriwal is baffled and restless as he has not fulfilled any of the 10 promises he made to the people of Delhi before the 2020 Assembly polls, and now

121 farmers end fast after Dallewal takes medical aid

AGE CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH, JAN. 19

A group of 121 farmers, who sat on a fast-unto-death at the Khanauri protest site in solidarity with farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, ended their indefinite strike on Sunday after he took medical aid. Mr Dallewal (70), who has refused any aid since he sat on a fast-unto-death on November 26, agreed on Saturday to take medical aid following the Centre's invitation for talks on February 14 to discuss farmers' demands.

With his health deteriorating and the government not agreeing to their demands, a group of 111 farmers joined Mr Dallewal's fast-unto-death on January 15, and sat on the Haryana side of the border near Khanauri. On January 17, 10 more farmers, who were from Haryana, joined them.

The 121 farmers ended their fast by sipping juice in the presence of deputy inspector general of police Mandeep Singh Sidhu and Patiala senior superintendent of police Nanak Singh.

A high-level Central delegation, led by Union agriculture ministry joint secretary Priya Ranjan,

SKM hails govt's decision to hold talks with farmers

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 19

The Samyukt Kisan Morcha on Sunday hailed the Union government's proposal of talks with farmers as a great victory and welcomed fasting farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal's decision to receive medical support.

In a statement, the SKM said that it considers the Union government's decision to hold discussions with farmers organisations a great victory.

met farmer leader Mr Dallewal and representatives of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha on Saturday, and invited them for a resumption of talks on February 14 at Chandigarh.

Following the announcement of the proposed meeting, Mr Dallewal agreed to take medical aid. Later, he took medical assistance with an intravenous drip.



Parvesh Verma

the women and youth are asking him questions.

"A vehicle in which Kejriwal himself was sitting hit three local youths, but the AAP is creating a fake narrative of an attack on him," Mr Verma charged.

He said he has submitted a complaint with the Election Commission and given videos.

On the AAP's charges that those who allegedly attacked Mr Kejriwal were his "goons", Mr Verma said the entire one lakh voters of the New

Delhi constituency were his family. "Kejriwal is saying that the people of the constituency are goons. The three local youth hit by Mr Kejriwal's vehicle at his instance were also local voters who wanted to ask him about jobs," he said.

Mr Verma also claimed that Mr Kejriwal's convoy during campaigns includes 50 vehicles in which 350 Punjab police personnel carrying AK-47s and other firearms accompany him. He has not been able to step out of his New Delhi constituency and was conducting a door-to-door campaign. Not a single photo or video of his public meeting in the constituency is available due to poor response by the locals, he claimed.

Delhi will vote on February 5 and the results will be announced on February 8.

4 of family die as fire erupts in Gzb house

Ghaziabad, Jan. 19: Four people, including three members of a family, were charred to death in sleep after a fire broke out in a house here due to a short circuit early Sunday, officials said. The fire broke out in a multi-storey building in the Kanchan Park area under the Loni police station jurisdiction.

According to the fire department, information about the incident was received at the Loni fire station at 7.06 am and three fire engines were

pressed into service.

After reaching the spot, it was found that the fire had broken out on the second and third floors of the house and people were trapped inside. The house was in a congested lane and hence the fire engines were parked outside and water spraying was started after extending hose pipes through adjacent houses, it said.

The narrow staircase and the smoke in the house made it difficult to go up and the walls of the

► **THE NARROW** staircase and the smoke in the house made it difficult to go up and the walls of the house were broken down, the fire department said.

house were broken down, it added.

Four people were found on the terrace of the building. Two of them — Ayesha and her four-year-old son Ayan — were injured and the other two, Shahnawaz and Shamshad — were evacu-

ated safely, the officials said.

After dousing the blaze, firefighters found four bodies inside the house, chief fire officer Rahul said.

The victims were identified as Shahnawaz's wife Gulbahar and their two minor sons, and the son of one of their relatives who lived in the same house, the officials said.

Sewing machines and clothes were kept on the first and second floors of the house, they said.

— PTI

Dark web drug cartel busted, ₹2.1cr weed seized; 2 nabbed

High-demand weed ordered from USA, paid via crypto

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 19

The Delhi crime branch dismantled an international dark web drug cartel, seizing 6 kilograms of hydroponic weed worth over ₹2 crores, the police said on Sunday. The seizure was made under Operation Kawach, carried out ahead of the Delhi Assembly elections, targeting illicit liquor, drugs, and illegal arms.

"Using blockchain-based privacy-centric communication apps and the sophisticated dead delivery method, the syndicate operated through the dark web, with payments made via cryptocurrencies," a senior police officer said.

He said the bust led to the arrest of Abdul Malik

► **A PROBE** into the matter began when the police intercepted several drug parcels at the foreign post office, containing over 5kg of hydroponic weed imported from the USA

alias Parvez, 46, and Mayank Nayyar, 35, both from Delhi and key figures in the racket.

An investigation into the matter began when the police intercepted several drug parcels at the foreign post office, containing over 5kg of hydroponic weed imported from the USA, the officer said.

Even though the parcels were addressed to fake recipients, an analysis of Internet communication and data mining helped police trace Abdul Malik,

who was supposed to collect the narcotics.

"A raid on his premises led to the recovery of an additional 871 grams of weed and a mobile phone used for drug transactions. Upon interrogation, Malik revealed he worked under Nayyar, the kingpin of the syndicate," he said.

The officer added, "Nayyar, a BBA graduate from Gurgaon, turned to drug trafficking after his family's cancer medicine export business suffered losses during the Covid-19 pandemic."

Leveraging his knowledge of the dark web, Nayyar ordered high-demand hydroponic weed from the USA, paid for via cryptocurrency, and orchestrated deliveries through Malik.

SHORT TAKES

Manu Bhaker's kin killed in accident

Bhiwani, Haryana: Paris Olympic medalist shooter Manu Bhaker's grandmother and maternal uncle died in a road accident here on Sunday, police said. The accident occurred on Mahendragarh bypass road in Charkhi Dadri area when a car hit their scooty, officials said. The two died on the spot and the car driver fled from the spot after the accident, assistant sub-inspector (ASI) Suresh Kumar said. He said that the victims have been identified as Manu Bhaker's grandmother Savitri Devi (70) and maternal uncle Yudhveer (50), who worked as a driver in Haryana roadways. Mr Kumar said the bodies have been sent for post-mortem, and efforts are underway to nab the car driver. — *PTI*

Goa PCC neta booked over stalking woman

Panaji: Goa Pradesh Congress Committee general secretary Olencio Simoes has been booked for allegedly stalking and threatening a woman, a police official said on Sunday. The woman has accused Mr Simoes of trying to befriend her despite her clear indications of disinterest, the official said. The complainant has alleged that the Congress leader blocked her way with his vehicle while she was driving her car in Margao city on January 7 and threatened her with dire consequences. Mr Simoes is also the general secretary of the National Fishworkers Forum, a body dealing with the rights of the traditional fishermen in the country. The police has registered an FIR against the Congress leader under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita sections 126 (wrongful restraint), 78 (stalking) and 351 (criminal intimidation). — *PTI*

Dalit girl abducted and raped in UP dist

Moradabad: A 16-year-old Dalit girl was allegedly abducted and raped in a car by a man here, police said on Sunday. The accused, nabbed through an identity card placed on the car's dashboard, also recorded the act on his phone, the police said. The man, Rashid, abducted the girl in his car from outside her house and raped her. The incident took place around 10 am when the girl was out to throw garbage. Rashid also allegedly hurled casteist abuses at her while he committed the crime, police said. After raping the girl, he threw her on a road outside her village near a cremation ground, they said. At the time of the incident, the girl's father, a labourer, was away from home, while her mother was working in a field. The girl saw the name of the assailant on an identity card in his car. He was identified as a native of a village under Thakurdwara police station. — *PTI*

IIT-M DIRECTOR LAUDS GOMUTRA, VIDEO GOES VIRAL

Chennai, Jan. 19: A video clip of the IIT-Madras director V. Kamakoti purportedly praising the "medicinal value" of "gomutra", while speaking on protecting indigenous breeds of cows and the significance of switching to organic farming, has gone viral in the social media. Addressing an event at a Go Samrakshana Sala here on the day of Maatu Pongal (January 15, 2025) here, he narrated an anecdote from the life of a sanyasi and said the ascetic, when he had high fever, consumed gomutra and he was cured. The director said, therefore, gomiyaam (cow urine/gomutra) has, "anti-bacterial, anti-fungal, and digestive properties," and it is useful as a medicine for conditions such as the Irritable Bowel Syndrome and battled for consideration of cow urine's "medicinal value." He made this remark after underlining the importance of organic farming and the crucial role played by indigenous breeds of cattle in agriculture and the overall economy. Rationalist outfit Dravidar Kazhagam slammed the Gomutra remark saying it went against the truth. — *PTI*

Where's K'taka caste data: JD-U after Rahul's charge

'Rahul kept mum when Nitish raised caste matter'

AMRESH SRIVASTAVA with agency inputs NEW DELHI/PATNA, JAN. 19

The ruling JD(U) on Sunday accused Congress leader Rahul Gandhi of hypocrisy on the issue of caste census, saying Mr Gandhi maintained silence when Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar had raised the matter in INDIA bloc meetings. The JD(U) also questioned why Congress government in Karnataka has not released the state's caste data. The JD(U)working president and MP Sanjay Jha's attack on Congress leader came a day after Mr Gandhi slammed the caste survey carried out by Kumar-led government as a fake exercise at an event in Patna, while pitching for a nationwide caste census. Slamming the Congress, Mr Jha said its government in Karnataka has been sitting over the caste-wise population data in the state for several years. Why does Mr Gandhi not

Rahul launches white T-shirt drive for justice and equality

New Delhi, Jan. 19: Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi on Sunday announced the launch of a "white T-shirt Movement", championing the rights of the masses, even as he accused the Narendra Modi government of turning its back on the poor. Mr Gandhi announced the launch in a post on X and urged people to be a part of it. "If you believe in economic justice, oppose rising wealth inequalities, fight for social equality, reject all

get it released, he asked. "There cannot be a bigger hypocrisy than this. I was a witness to Mr Gandhi maintaining silence while Mr Kumar strongly and logically spoke in favour of caste census at INDIA bloc meetings in several places," Mr Jha added. Kumar-led JD(U) was

forms of discrimination and strive for peace and stability in our country, wear your white T-shirts and join the movement," said a video voiceover posted by Mr Gandhi on X. "Today the Modi government has turned its back on the poor and the working class, and has left them to their own devices. The government's entire focus is on enriching a select few capitalists. Because of this, inequality is constantly increasing," he added. — *PTI*

part of INDIA bloc before he snapped ties with the Opposition alliance and joined hands with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Bihar's caste survey was carried out and its findings released when the Congress was a partner in the government led by Mr Kumar.

■ 18 tents gutted, no casualties ■ 'Blaze controlled within 1 hr'

Cylinder blast sparks major fire in Kumbh; PM dials Yogi

Mahakumbh Nagar (UP), Jan. 19: A big fire broke out at the Maha Kumbh Mela here on Sunday due to a cylinder blast, engulfing 18 tents in Sector 19, officials said. No casualty was reported in the incident.

Thick clouds of smoke enveloped the mela area as panic gripped the nearby akhadas. The officials said 15 fire tenders managed to bring the blaze, which started at around 4 pm, under control within an hour.

Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath, who was in Prayagraj to review the preparations ahead of Mauni Amawasya, also reached the spot and directed authorities to take steps to avoid any such incident in future, they said. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Mr Adityanath over phone to enquire about the incident. "The chief minister told PM Modi that the blaze was quickly brought under control by teams of SDRF,



In this drone shot, smoke billows out after a fire broke out in a camp during Maha Kumbh at Sangam in Prayagraj on Sunday.

— *PTI*

NDRF and fire department," a senior official said.

Prayagraj zone additional DGP Bhanu Bhaskar told PTI that the blaze has been extinguished and the situation is under control. "...People have been evacuated and the fire has been brought under control. No casualty was reported in the incident. The situation is normal here and losses are being quantified," he said.

Mr Bhaskar said the thatched roofs of the tents caught fire while the rest of the structures are still there. The police said that initially straw in a tent caught fire due to which an LPG cylinder exploded. Prayagraj DM Ravindra Kumar Mander said they received information at 4:30 pm about a fire in a tent housing the Gita Press in Sector 19 of fair area. — *PTI*

Modi cites new tiger reserves in 'Mann ki Baat'

AGE CORRESPONDENT BHOPAL, JAN. 19

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday made mention of the two new tiger reserves in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh in his first "Mann ki Baat" of the year. Mr Modi said that two new tiger reserves came up in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. While Ratapani wildlife sanctuary on the outskirts of Bhopal has been declared a tiger reserve recently, Guru Ghasidas-Tamor Pingal wildlife sanctuary in Chhattisgarh has been declared a tiger reserve. The state government notified Ratapani as a tiger reserve in December last year after chief minister Mohan Yadav pulled up the officials for the delay in declaring it a tiger reserve. Guru Ghasidas-Tamor Pingal wildlife sanctuary was accorded as a tiger reserve in 2021 by NTCA.

PM: Ram temple anniv marks revival of cultural consciousness

New Delhi, Jan. 19: Asserting that the global popularity of the Maha Kumbh is a matter of pride for every Indian, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the extensive participation of youths in the large religious gathering is visible this time.

In his "Mann ki Baat" broadcast, Mr Modi described the consecration of Lord Ram's idol in Ayodhya as the "re-establishment of the cultural consciousness of India". Noting that the first anniversary of the consecration ceremony, which fell on January 11, was celebrated on the day of "Paush Shukla Dwadashi" as per the Hindu calendar, the PM said, "This Dwadashi of Pran Pratishtha is the Dwadashi of the re-establishment of the cultural consciousness of India." Therefore, this day of "Paush Shukla Dwadashi" has also become the day of "Pratishtha Dwadashi" in a way, he added. "While walking on the path of development, we have to preserve our heritage and move forward while taking inspiration from that," Mr Modi said. Speaking of the ongoing Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj, he said the festival celebrates unity in diversity and displays no discrimination or casteism in its tradition going on for thousands of years. "When the young generation connects with its civilisation with pride, its roots become stronger and its golden future is also ensured," he said. This time, the digital footprints of the Kumbh are visible on a large scale, he added.

"This global popularity of Kumbh is a matter of pride for every Indian," Mr Modi said. He described the Maha Kumbh as an unforgettable sea of humanity, incredible visuals and an extraordinary confluence of equality and harmony. "In Kumbh, the rich and the poor come together as one. All of them take a dip in the Sangam, dine together in bhandaras and receive prasad. This is why the Kumbh is the Maha Kumbh of unity," he said. "The event also tells us how our traditions bind the whole of India together, as the ways of adhering to the beliefs are the same from north to south," the PM added. The Kumbh is organised at Prayagraj, Ujjain, Nasik and Haridwar and in the southern part of the country. Pushkaram is organised on the banks of Godavari, Krishna, Narmada and Kaveri rivers. Both these festivals are connected with holy rivers, he added. — *PTI*

Budget must end 'raid raj, tax terrorism', says Cong

Claims policies of Modi govt broke investors' confidence

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JAN. 19

The Congress on Sunday claimed that Modi government's retrograde policies have broken the confidence of investors in India and converted the ease of doing business to an unease one. Ahead of the Union Budget, the Opposition party said that to fix this, the upcoming Budget must eliminate raid raj and tax terrorism. It also called on the government to take action to protect Indian manufacturing jobs and take decisive action to shore up wages and purchasing power. Congress general secretary in-charge, communications, Jairam Ramesh said Modi government has long proclaimed its desire to improve the "ease of doing business" in India, but yet in the

▶ **DESPITE CLAIMS** to the contrary, Chinese imports into India continue unabated with a record trade deficit of \$85 billion in 2023-24, says Congress leader Jairam Ramesh

past decade "we have only seen an easing of private investment, which has fallen to record lows, and the easing out of businesspersons who have departed India in large numbers for foreign shores". "A byzantine, punitive, and arbitrary tax regime covering both GST and income tax — which amounts to sheer tax terrorism — is now the greatest threat to India's prosperity and has contributed to an 'unease of doing business'," he said in a statement. An estimated 21,300 dollar-millionaires left India between 2022 and 2025, he

claimed. "All this is happening for three reasons. Firstly, a complicated GST. According to former chief economic adviser Arvind Subramanian, the GST, which was proclaimed by the PM to be a good and simple tax, has up to 100 different tax rates, including cesses," he said. The multiplicity of rates and confusion has facilitated alarming GST evasion of 2.01 lakh crores, almost double the 1.01 lakh crores reported in FY23, he said. Mr Ramesh claimed that 18,000 fraudulent entities have been uncovered with many more likely undetected. "Secondly, despite claims to the contrary, Chinese imports into India continue unabated with a record trade deficit of \$85 billion in 2023-24. This has damaged Indian manufacturing, especially in labour-intensive sectors," he said.

Bunker with arms, ammunition found by forces in Bastar

■ 'This was the 8th tunnel dug by Maoists in Leftwing-hit district'

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY RAIPUR, JAN. 19

A Maoist bunker used by the ultras to duck aerial surveillance, dump arms and ammunition and a weapon making unit has been found by the security forces in Pujari Kanker area in Bijapur district in south Bastar of Chhattisgarh, the police said on Sunday. The bunker was spotted by the district reserve guard (DRG) personnel during the January 16 encounter with the Maoists in the forested area, a senior district police officer said. The tunnel-shaped bunker, camouflaged with leaves, had electricity supply from a generator and can easily hide around a dozen people during surveillance through drones in the area and was also used as an arms dump. Recovery of lathe machines and other raw materials used for making weapons in the bunker indicated that it was used as a weapon making factory by the Maoists, the police officer said, unwilling to be quoted. The tunnel was built on the bank of Tumrel and Talperu rivers, which clearly establishes that the bunker can be used as a hideout by the Maoists

CRPF blood test camps in C'garh

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JAN. 19

The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) bases in the remote Maoist-affected areas of Chhattisgarh have launched a massive blood testing campaign for the locals and tribals — to diagnose diseases and deficiencies prevalent amongst them. The initiative was proposed during an anti-Naxal operation and the development review meeting held a few months back by Union home minister Amit Shah, following his declaration in state capital Raipur that India would see the end of Left-wing extremism (LWE) by March 2026.

for a long time, the police officer said. This was the eighth such Maoist tunnel found in the Leftwing insurgency-hit Bastar in recent times. Earlier, a bunker built by the Maoists on the bank of Indravati river in Bijapur district was spotted by security personnel. Around six months ago, security forces had found half-a-dozen tunnels in the jungles in Sukma district.

Kerala minor girl rape: 57 of 59 accused arrested

Pathanamthitta (Kerala), Jan. 19: As many as 57 of the total of 59 people accused in the sensational case of alleged sexual abuse of a Dalit girl in the district, have been arrested so far, police said on Sunday. Since the first case in this regard was registered at Ilavumthitta Police Station on January 10, all the listed accused, except the two who are currently abroad, have been arrested through a comprehensive probe, district police chief V.G. Vinod Kumar said. A 25-year-old youth was the last person that has been taken into custody in the incident, the officer said. — *PTI*

■ NCP minister says being targeted in Beed panch murder case

Won't be cornered, I'm Arjun: Munde

BHAGWAN PARAB MUMBAI, JAN. 19

Continuing his resolute stand, NCP minister Dhananjay Munde, under severe attack over the sarpanch murder in Beed, said his opponents cannot corner him like Abhimanyu, because he is Arjun and knows how to break "chakravayuha." Speaking at the NCP conclave in Shirdi in Ahilyanagar, Mr Munde accused the Opposition and ruling Mahayuti leaders of deliberately targeting him in the sarpanch murder-extortion case. "No matter what, it will be of no use to corner me like Abhimanyu. Because

Ambanis attend dinner by Trump



US President-elect Donald Trump with Reliance Industries chairman Mukesh Ambani and Reliance Foundation chairperson Nita Ambani at a pre-swearing-in dinner organised in Washington DC.

— *PTI*

Guardian minister allocation triggers protest in Mahayuti

AGE CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI, JAN. 19

A day after an announcement of guardian ministers in Maharashtra, resentment in the BJP-led Mahayuti has grown. Supporters of Shiv Sena Cabinet minister Bharatsh Gogawale torched tyres on Mumbai-Goa highway for not getting

Raigad district guardian minister's post. Ajit Pawar-led NCP minister Aditi Tatkare got the post, which has not gone down well with the Shiv Sena. Mr Gogawale openly expressed displeasure, stating that the announcement of guardian minister of the Raigad district shocked him. I am not Abhimanyu, I am Arjun. Some leaders from the party (NCP) too are providing false information to Ajit dada, who is standing by me in these difficult times," Mr Munde asserted.

Despite fervent demands from the Opposition, NCP chief Ajit Pawar has refused to sack Mr Munde from the Cabinet over the Beed sarpanch murder case. Walmik Karad, an associate of Mr Munde, has been arrested in the murder case. Indicating that he was being targeted at the behest of Sharad Pawar, Mr Munde said he had advised Ajit Pawar not take the "early morning oath", but Ajit Pawar took the oath with Devendra Fadnavis for which he is being punished. "Ahead of the oath-taking in November 2019, I had asked Ajit dada to not join as deputy CM," he said.

C'garh Cabinet okays proposal to buy paddy at ₹3,100/quintal

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY RAIPUR, JAN. 19

The Chhattisgarh Cabinet on Sunday approved the proposal to procure paddy from the farmers at ₹3,100 per quintal. The Centre will procure paddy at an MSP of ₹2,300 quintal and the state government would give an additional amount of ₹800 per quintal to the farmers for purchase of the paddy. The ruling BJP had pledged to procure paddy at ₹3,100 per quintal from the farmers before the November 2023 Assembly elections. Around 27 lakh farmers in the state will be benefited by the move. The state Cabinet, which met here under the chairmanship of chief minister Vishnu Deo Sai, also decided to hand over the preparation of ready-to-eat food to the women self-help groups. In the first phase, the work of preparing ready-to-eat food will be given to the women self-help groups in five districts. The Cabinet has also decided to provide electricity tariff concession to the mini steel plants in the state to combat slowdown in the sector. "The Cabinet took an important decision and decided to give a maximum discount of one rupee per unit in power tariff to the steel industry under special relief package," a state government spokesman said.

SHORT TAKES

Sambhal violence: 10 more arrested

Sambhal, UP: Police on Sunday arrested 10 more people in connection with the November 24 violence near the Shahi Jama Masjid in this Uttar Pradesh district, officials said. With this, 70 people have so far been arrested in connection with the incident, ASP Srish Chandra said. Those arrested were Tahzeeb, Azhar Ali, Asad, Danish, Suhail, Alam, Mohammad Danish, Shane Alam, Bakir and Mulla Afroz, the officer said, adding that they were nabbed after police scanned CCTV footage and photographs that had gone viral on the social media. The ASP said Afroz, son of Afzar, is a active member of the Sarik Sata gang that is involved in vehicle and arms trafficking. He was reportedly present at the scene during the commotion and had allegedly fired at the police party during the chaos. Bullets struck several individuals, including Bilal and Ayan, who succumbed to their injuries. — *PTI*

MP man killed by 2 over loud music

Bhopal: A 67-year-old man in a Madhya Pradesh village was killed by his two neighbours over protest by the former's granddaughter to the loud music played by them, police said on Sunday. The two accused, Ratiram Ahirwar and Mukesh Ahirwar, armed with stick and sharp weapons barged into the deceased's house in Gorakala under Chanderi police station in Ashok Nagar district on Friday to protest against the seizure of music system by the police following the complaint by the hexagenarian's granddaughter, a Class 12 student, police said. They first had a heated exchange with her parents who later fled the spot fearing for their life and then attacked the elderly man with stick and sharp weapons, leading to his death, according to Chanderi police station in-charge Manish Jadaun.

Tata's hi-tech power supply unit in Odisha

Bhubaneswar: TPCODL, a joint venture of Tata Power and Odisha, unveiled a state-of-the-art power distribution technology centre in Bhubaneswar on Saturday, marking a transformative leap in distribution network management and operational excellence. The centre was inaugurated by deputy chief minister K. V. Singh Deo in the presence of dignitaries such as state chief secretary Manoj Ahuja, Tata power CEO & MD Dr Praveer Sinha, Tata power president T&D Sanjay Banga, and the CEOs of Tata power-led Odisha discoms—TPCODL, TPSODL, TPWODL, and TPNODL. This cutting-edge technology hub integrates advanced operational technology (OT) and Information Technology (IT) systems, along with a 24x7 Power system control centre to ensure real-time network monitoring and uninterrupted power supply.

Assam's top cop is named CRPF DG

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN 19

Assam police chief Gyanendra Pratap Singh has been appointed as the director-general of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), according to a personnel ministry order. He is a 1991 batch Indian Police Service (IPS) officer of the Assam-Meghalaya cadre. "The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has approved the proposal of the ministry of home affairs for appointment of G.P. Singh, IPS (AM:1991) as director general, CRPF in Level-16 of the pay matrix from the date of assumption of charge of the post, for a tenure up to the date of his superannuation on November 11, 2027 or until further orders, whichever is earlier," an official order dated January 18 stated.

Senior IPS officer Vitul Kumar has been holding officiating charge of the force after the retirement of Anish Dayal Singh on



Gyanendra Pratap Singh

December 31.

Known as a tough cop, Mr Singh has served as the inspector general of North Assam and was also a part of several operations against the outfit United Liberation Front of Assam and other militant groups.

During his earlier central deputations, he has worked with special protection group for prime minister's security and also at NIA.

In November 2019 he was sent back to Assam as ADGP (Law and Order) to quell the violent protests that had erupted across the state against the Citizenship Amendment Act.

Israel thanks India for its support amid Gaza turmoil

AGE CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, JAN. 19

As the much-awaited ceasefire in Gaza began after Hamas said it will release the three female hostages, the Israeli ambassador to India Reuven Azar said the ceasefire is the first phase of a gradual deal that has the potential of bringing back its hostages and also making sure Hamas will not be ever able to massacre Israelis like it did on October 7, 2023.

He thanked the Indian government and the people of the country for their overwhelming support as Israel battled one of its worst humanitarian and geopolitical crises.

"Peace won't prevail if Hamas is allowed to rearm and regroup. The Middle East has changed. The Iranian radical regime still constitutes the biggest threat to our region, but it has lost Lebanon, Syria, and Gaza."

"With enough international pressure, we can make sure it stops its quest for nuclear weapons. I would like to thank the Indian government for supporting our right to self-defence, and we especially appreciate the overwhelming support of the Indian people," Mr Azar said on Sunday.

SIT set up to probe deaths due to mysterious illness, says L-G MHA team in Rajouri, toll rises to 17

Jammu, Jan. 19: A high-level inter-ministerial team Sunday reached Jammu and Kashmir's Rajouri district where a mysterious illness is wreaking havoc, killing another person on Sunday and taking the death toll to 17. Union home minister Amit Shah had on Saturday ordered the constitution of an inter-ministerial team to ascertain the causes of deaths that took place within weeks in three families linked to each other in the remote Badhaal village.

Yasmeen Kousar, the last of the six children of Mohd Aslam undergoing treat-

'Murder could be linked to coal business' IPS, IAS, 2 netas behind killing of BJD leader in '23: BJP MLA

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, JAN. 19

In a startling revelation, BJP MLA from Sambalpur, Jayanarayan Mishra, has alleged the involvement of two senior government officials — an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer and an Indian Police Service (IPS) officer — in the assassination of senior Biju Janata Dal (BJD) leader and former health minister Naba Kishore Das at Brajarajnagar on January 29, 2023.

Mr Mishra also implicated two prominent politicians in the conspiracy, adding a new layer of intrigue to the high-profile case.

As per Mr Mishra, the IPS officer made a suspicious trip to Jharsuguda just days before Das's murder, allegedly to orchestrate the plot.

"The IPS officer against whom allegations have been levelled will try to mislead the probe. This officer



Naba Kishore Das

orchestrated the entire assassination by visiting Jharsuguda shortly before Naba Kishore Das was shot dead," Mr Mishra claimed. He also suggested that Das's murder could be linked to political dealings or disputes within the coal business.

"An investigation is meaningless if it fails to establish the motive and identify those behind the crime," he said, reiterating his party's dissatisfaction with the current Crime Branch probe.

"We have already rejected the Crime Branch investigation into the former minister's death," he added.

Earlier in the day, Dipali

Das, the daughter of the late Naba Kishore Das, stated that the family is contemplating writing to the Odisha government to demand a probe by the CBI.

"Two years have passed since the incident, and several questions remain unanswered. We believe the truth will emerge if the CBI conducts a detailed investigation into all aspects of the case," she said.

Mr Mishra's allegations were echoed by BJP MP Pradeep Purohit, who questioned the silence of Das's family in demanding an impartial investigation earlier. "Assistant police sub-inspector Gopal Das, the only accused arrested in Naba Kishore Das's murder, is merely a pawn. There is a conspiratorial group behind this assassination," Mr Purohit said.

He also alleged that the mastermind is someone who harbored ambitions of becoming the CM after Naveen Patnaik. "This is now proving to be true," Purohit claimed.

THE PATIENTS complained of fever, pain, nausea and loss of consciousness before dying within days of their admission to hospitals

special investigation team to probe the events from other angles. "We will brief you once the reality comes to the fore," Sinha said. Officials said the 16-member team arrived at Rajouri district headquarters this evening and is likely to visit the mountain village, 55km from the town, on Monday.

The Central team will work in collaboration with

the local administration to provide immediate relief to the victims.

Experts from some of the most reputable institutions in the country have been roped in to understand the causes of the deaths. The patients complained of fever, pain, nausea and loss of consciousness before dying within days of their admission to hospitals. Earlier, a J&K government spokesperson said investigations and samples empirically indicated that the incidents were not due to a communicable disease of bacterial or viral origin and that there is no public health angle. — *PTI*

3 dead as boat capsizes in Ganga in Bihar

Katihar, Jan. 19: Three people were killed and four others went missing after a boat capsized in the Ganga in Bihar's Katihar district on Sunday, officials said.

The boat, with 17 people on board, capsized near Golaghat in the Amadabad area, they said. Ten have been rescued so far, officials said, adding that most of them managed to swim to the bank.

"The rescue operation is still underway for the four missing persons. An investigation has been ordered to find the cause of the incident," DM Manesh Kumar Meena said. — *PTI*

CDS: Blueprint for theatre commands our key priority

New Delhi, Jan. 19: Presenting a blueprint to the government on integrated theatre commands and creating them will now be a key priority, Chief of Defence Staff Gen Anil Chauhan said on Sunday, days after defence minister Rajnath Singh declared 2025 as the 'year of defence reforms'.

Gen. Chauhan also said that making a joint planning and operation room to help enable the three services to conduct integrated operations will be another focus area for the military under organisational and structural reforms.

In a podcast, the CDS

PoK is 'crown jewel of India', says Rajnath

'J&K incomplete without PoK'

Jaunpur (UP), Jan. 19: Defence minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday described Pakistan-occupied Kashmir as the "crown jewel of India" and asserted that Jammu and Kashmir was incomplete without it.

The senior BJP leader also accused Pakistan of continuing its conspiracy to foster terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir. Mr Singh was speaking to reporters in the Nizamuddinpur village of Jaunpur district, where he attended a ceremonial event at the home of senior BJP leader Jagat Narayan Dubey.

"It (Pakistan-occupied Kashmir) is the crown jewel of India and J&K is incomplete without it," he said. "For Pakistan, the Kashmir occupied by it is nothing more than a foreign territory being used to promote terrorism and anti-India propaganda. Terror camps and launch pads there (Pakistan-occupied Kashmir) should be dismantled or it will face an appropriate response," Mr Singh added.



Rajnath Singh

The defence minister also hit out at Pakistani leader Anwar-ul-Haq over his alleged anti-India rhetoric. "Pakistan is trying to provoke people against India on religious grounds while oppressing citizens there," he said. He further claimed that India had emerged as the world's largest digital economy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership.

India, which now has the highest number of 5G users, is on track to becoming a developed nation by 2047, Singh asserted. "Today, when India speaks, the world listens attentively. Our scientists are manufacturing defence equipment on Indian soil and exporting those to other nations," the minister said. — *PTI*

Suspected hooch leaves 7 dead in Bihar, probe on

Bettiah (Bihar), Jan. 19: Seven people died allegedly after drinking spurious liquor in dry Bihar's West Champaran district, prompting the administration to order an inquiry, a police officer said on Sunday.

The police came to know about the deaths on Sunday, though the first fatality occurred four days

ago and the bodies of all seven were already cremated, the officer said.

District SP Shaurya Suman said all the deaths were reported from the Lauriya police station area. Locals blamed the deaths on consumption of spurious liquor, but the SP asserted that the reason behind at last two fatalities was not hooch. — *PTI*

Saif's attacker arrested

■ Continued From Page 1

valid Indian documents. There are some seizures which indicate that he is a Bangladeshi national."

Maharashtra deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar said the man who allegedly stabbed Saif Ali Khan didn't realise that he intruded into the Bollywood star's house.

"The accused in the Saif Ali Khan stabbing case was arrested from Thane and he has confessed to his crime. He had come to Kolkata from Bangladesh only eight months ago. An agency hired him without doing any verification. The police have arrested those concerned from the agency as well," he said while addressing a two-day conclave of his party in Shirdi.

Saif Ali Khan was repeatedly stabbed with a knife by an intruder inside his 12th-floor apartment at "Satguru Sharan" building in upscale Bandra in the early hours of January 16.

The police said the accused had entered the Bollywood star's home with the intention of theft. "Our probe has found that he took the stairs till the seventh-eighth floor, then entered the duct area, climbed to the 12th floor using a pipe, and broke into the actor's flat through a bathroom window. He then came out from the bathroom, where he was seen by the actor's staff," the official said.

The accused started argu-

ing with a nanny in the house and sought Rs 1 crore and, hearing the ruckus, Khan arrived there and nabbed him from the front. The accused was startled and stabbed Khan in the back. Khan later locked the flat, believing the accused was pinned inside. However, the accused managed to flee from the same area from where he had entered. We have recovered a hammer, screwdriver, nylon rope and other materials from his bag, the official said.

According to police, the accused, following the crime, travelled by train from Bandra to Dadar and then walked to his residence in Worli Koliwada, where he stayed with other persons. Upon seeing his image on television, he panicked and fled to Thane, from where he was eventually arrested. He was hiding off the mangrove area adjoining a labour camp near Hiranandani Estate in Kasarvadavali in Thane city.

The police is also looking into a possible "international conspiracy" angle into the case. They told the court they needed to find out if there was an international conspiracy linked to the case, which the court accepted and observed that it "cannot be said to be impossible".

The police also made it clear that the role Akash Kanojia, who was apprehended from Durg railway station on Saturday, could not be established and he was released after a brief inquiry.

Bid to eliminate Kejriwal: AAP; fake claim, says BJP

■ Continued From Page 1
Verma. "This individual who has multiple criminal cases against him was involved in the attack. He is frequently seen with Mr Verma. They want to eliminate Mr Kejriwal," she added.

Mr Singh said: "The BJP is unable to defeat us in the Assembly polls, so they are resorting to such tactics to remove Mr Kejriwal from their way."

Reacting to the AAP's allegations, Mr Verma accused the party of trying to create a "fake narrative" of the attack and claimed that he will defeat Mr Kejriwal by 20,000 votes. He alleged that Mr Kejriwal "attempted to run over Valmiki and Dalit youth with his car" and asserted that the injured youth were once Mr Kejriwal's supporters and worked tirelessly for his party.

"When they dared to question Mr Kejriwal's 10 years of governance, they were labelled as goons and targeted," he added.

The BJP leader claimed Mr Kejriwal is restless as he has not fulfilled any of the 10 promises he made to the people of Delhi before the 2020 Assembly polls, and now the women and youth are asking him

questions.

"A vehicle in which Mr Kejriwal himself was sitting hit three local youths, but the AAP is creating a fake narrative of an attack on him," Mr Verma charged. He said he has submitted a complaint with the Election Commission and given videos. On the AAP's charges that those who allegedly attacked Mr Kejriwal were his "goons," Mr Verma said the entire one lakh voters of the New Delhi constituency are his family.

"Mr Kejriwal is saying that the people of the constituency are goons. The three local youth hit by Mr Kejriwal's vehicle at his instance were also local voters who wanted to ask him about jobs," he said.

Mr Verma also claimed that Mr Kejriwal's convoy during campaigns includes 50 vehicles in which 350 Punjab police personnel carrying AK-47 and other firearms accompany him. He has not been able to step out of his New Delhi constituency and was conducting door-to-door campaigns. Not a single photo or video of his public meeting in the constituency is available due to poor response by the locals, he claimed.

PM asks all to vote for stronger India

■ Continued From Page 1
values and Syama Prasad Mukherjee raised the issue of equality of opportunities.

Hailing the Maha Kumbh as a festival celebrating unity in diversity, Mr Modi said, "People from all over India and the world congregate on the sands of the Sangam. There is no discrimination, no casteism, anywhere in this tradition, which has been going on for thousands of years... People from the south of India, from the east and west of India, arrive here... The Kumbh event also tells us how our traditions bind the whole of India together. The ways of adhering to the beliefs are the same from north to south."

Mr Modi also pointed out that this month the first anniversary of the Ram Lalla pran pratishtha parv was celebrated on the day of Paus Shukla Dwadashi.

"This year, Paus Shukla Dwadashi fell on January 11. On this day, lakhs of Ram devotees had a darshan of Ram Lalla in Ayodhya and received his blessings."

"This dwadashi of pran

pratishtha is the dwadashi of the re-establishment of the cultural consciousness of India," he said, noting that while walking on the path of development, "we have to preserve our heritage and move forward taking inspiration from that".

The Prime Minister also spoke about India's many historic achievements in the field of space in the beginning of 2025 itself, including India's first private satellite constellation Firefly and Isro's successful space docking of two satellites.

He also lauded the Indian scientists for making efforts to grow plants in space and ensure that they survive.

Mr Modi also highlighted how IIT Madras's ExTeM centre is working on new technologies for manufacturing in space and how the centre is conducting research on technologies like 3D-printed buildings, metal foams and optical fibres in space.

During the broadcast, Mr Modi also hailed the valour of Subhas Chandra Bose ahead of his birth anniversary on January 23.

Hostages arrive in Israel

■ Continued From Page 1
ceasefire deal. Relatives of the women jumped, clapped and wept.

"An entire nation embraces you," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said.

Romi Gonen, 24, and Doron Steinbrecher, 31, also were released. Gonen was abducted from the Nova music festival, while the others were kidnapped from Kibbutz Kfar Aza. Damari is an Israeli-British dual citizen and Steinbrecher has Israeli and Romanian citizenship.

The ceasefire ushers in an initial six weeks of calm and raises hopes for the release of nearly 100 remaining hostages and an end to the devastating 15-month war. A last-minute delay by Hamas put off the truce's start by nearly three hours, but the spokesman for Hamas' military wing later said it is committed to the ceasefire.

Even before the ceasefire took effect, celebrations broke out across Gaza and some Palestinians began heading home.

Some families set off for home on foot, their belongings loaded on donkey carts.

In the southern city of Rafah, residents returned to find massive destruction. Some found human remains in the rubble, including skulls.

"It's like you see a Hollywood horror movie,"

resident Mohamed Abu Taha said as he inspected the ruins of his family's home.

Already, Israeli forces were pulling back from areas. Residents of Beit Lahiya and Jabaliya in northern Gaza told the AP they didn't see Israeli troops there.

Next up was the release of 90 Palestinian prisoners later Sunday. In the Israeli-occupied West Bank, families and friends gathered excitedly as cars honked and people waved the Palestinian flag.

The truce, which started at 11.15 am local time, is the first step toward ultimately ending the conflict and returning hostages abducted in Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023 attack.

In the interim between the planned ceasefire time and when it took hold, Israeli fire killed at least 26 people, according to Gaza's health ministry. It did not say whether they were civilians or fighters. The military has warned people to stay away from Israeli forces as they retreat to a buffer zone inside Gaza.

Israel's hard-line national security minister, meanwhile, said his Jewish Power faction was quitting the government in protest over the ceasefire. Itamar Ben-Gvir's departure weakens Netanyahu's coalition but will not affect the truce. — *AP*

THE ASIAN AGE

20 JANUARY 2025

Trump 2.0 starts today: His agenda is alarming

The era of the wild, wild West may have been over long ago, but another begins Monday in Washington when Donald Trump starts his second term that will bookend one by an aging president who meant well but failed in a battle of perception over age and declining mental acuity. The day he fumbled the debate lent the decisive twist that led to a historic split term for his predecessor whose ascent is causing waves globally that threaten to prove unstoppable like the Los Angeles wildfires.

Joe Biden took over in the most difficult of times as the Covid pandemic was spreading globally and was to cripple the global economy that was shut down bowing to advice that seemed logical enough when the pathogen was rampant. The US suffered more than many other countries and as Biden's Democrats opened the coffers and vaccinated the nation, no one objected except the Republicans and vaccine sceptics.

The divisiveness caused by Mr Trump's claims of a stolen 2020 election, however, split the nation irretrievably into two different halves that may never meet on a common plane again even if they did briefly work together to make the Israel-Gaza ceasefire deal possible. It is the erosion of politics that may tell on the power of democratic institutions. As divisions persist, even Mr Biden's good moves may never be truly acknowledged.

History might struggle to be kind to Mr Biden not because of his image of a faltering senior but due to the many missteps he took, including in clinging to the fight for the President's chair when he could so easily have admitted a decline and paved the way for a more democratic way of choosing the party candidate to oppose Mr Trump. And yet he was the one who pulled USA out of its long war in Afghanistan, but in such a messy way as to make the withdrawal seem like a total failure.

Inflation, not enough money in the hands of those who needed it more and unflinching support for Israel in the Gaza war and the rising immigration problem were the factors that brought Mr Biden down in the eyes of America. Not even the fact that the worst attack on democracy in an insurrection aimed by Republicans at Capitol Hill helped Mr Biden's political image for securing the country against such a challenge. Mr Biden's unwanted legacy may be the resurrection of Mr Trump.

In his farewell speech, Mr Biden warned America of an oligarchy of billionaires taking the reins on behalf of his successor who he has termed a fascist. If the fear is real of a band of 13 super rich tech czars taking over, the Democrats should also think over how they may have also been guilty of allowing some super rich suited to their disposition wielding undue influence. They paid the price for the wokeism they supported, their grandstanding on human rights and their embracing of immigrants.

As Mr Trump steps in, the anxieties of the world will be more about the trade wars he may engender with planned retaliatory tariffs and his shredding of US foreign policy that acknowledged the freedoms of fellow democracies. A transactional real estate mogul who turned politician for a lark may reset all ties that the free world may have held dear. Maybe, his ideas of ending wars may prove the exception in an otherwise seemingly destructive agenda, thick with imperialist territorial ambitions, and put him in line for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Abetting suicide: Caution by SC

The Supreme Court's direction to investigating agencies not to subject people to "the abuse of the process of a totally untenable prosecution" and to the trial courts to "exercise great caution and circumspection" and "not adopt a 'play it safe' policy by mechanically framing charges" in the case of alleged abetment to suicide has come as an important course correction in the faulty implementation of the law.

The apex court has realistically looked at the circumstances when Section 306 of the IPC which dealt with abetment to suicide was usually invoked and rightly cautioned the police that the law "should not be deployed against individuals only to assuage the immediate feelings of the distraught family of the deceased". Instead, they should ensure that the acts of the accused "satisfy the requirement of instigation" as mandated by the apex court and the law, and that they "created such circumstances that the deceased was left with no other (sic) option except to commit suicide."

The law is now very clear: Yes, a suicide may have landed the family of the deceased in distress but that should not act as a reason to frame charges against people whom the family or circumstances would suggest to be culpable. There has to be proof that meets the essential requirements of the law.

It is not the first time that the Supreme Court has seriously looked at the wrongful use of the law; it has as recently as in December come out with an explanation of criteria that must be satisfied for the police to book the suspects. There must be evidence of direct or indirect acts of instigation or incitement to suicide by the suspects in close proximity to the time of commission of suicide by the deceased, the court had said.

In fact, the import of the Supreme Court's intervention is not limited to one law; it must be strictly adhered to by the agencies and lower courts in the application of every law, lest the process itself becomes punishment for the undertrial.

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India's 'other' neighbour: Let's learn from Jakarta



Sanjaya Baru

Sanjayovacha

When most Indians think of the country's neighbourhood they think of the defunct British India and its territories around. This is what the United States named and classified as South Asia. When the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) was formed, it first included countries that shared land borders with India. That would include Sri Lanka too, in a way. While the distant archipelago of the Maldives was a founding member of Saarc, a very close maritime neighbour, Indonesia, did not seem to enter the mind space of the founders of Saarc.

When Saarc morphed into BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), as part of India's "Look East Policy", and subsequently as a means to exclude Pakistan from the idea of neighbourhood, it brought in two more land neighbours, Myanmar and Thailand. Both civil society and the Indian State rarely think of Indonesia, merely 80 nautical miles away from the southeastern tip of India, as a neighbour.

The arrival this week of the President of Indonesia, Prabowo Subianto, as chief guest at the Republic Day parade in 1950 was President Sukarno of Indonesia. He then spoke of how "in the veins of every one of my people flows the blood of Indian ancestors and the culture we possess is steeped through and through with Indian influences".

There is an enduring cultural connect as well as the more recent history of

Asian solidarity. Both have laid the foundation for the relationship. The cultural connect runs deep. In the modern era Europeans referred to both countries in a similar way for, after all, Indonesia means "Indian islands" in Greek.

The Indonesian scholar O. Abdul Rachman wrote eloquently about the religious links between the two when he recalled how "from their birth places in India the great religions of Hinduism and Buddhism found their way to Indonesia, where they mingled with the indigenous belief systems to become an enduring and integral component of Indonesian culture. Islam also arrived in Indonesia by way of the Indian sub-continent and the Indian Ocean".

In the heart of modern Jakarta, Indonesia's Muslim-majority nation has paid a handsome tribute to his Hindu inheritance by building one of the most majestic depictions of Lord Krishna and Arjuna on a chariot, the Krishna Wijaya statue, with 11 bronze horses in virtual flight. Unlike the bigoted barbarians of Afghanistan who destroyed the majestic and imposing statue of the Buddha at Bamiyan, the devout Muslims of Indonesia have carefully preserved one of the greatest Buddhist monuments, the Borobudur Temple in central Java, built in the 8th century CE.

Indonesia presents to the world the most secular and modern face of Islam. An identity under constant challenge by communal forces.

Sukarno and Jawaharlal Nehru were the great leaders of Asia and joint organisers of the Bandung conference of Asian and African nations hosted in Indonesia in 1955. The two, along with Egypt's Gen. Abdel Nasser, founded the Non-Aligned Movement.

While history and culture

As Southeast Asia's biggest nation, Indonesia has emerged as an independent voice in the region. Indonesia presents to the world the most secular and modern face of Islam.

had ordained that the two would come together, geopolitics and New Delhi's "ocean blindness", as many admirals of the Indian Navy have often described, has often warped our perspective.

Last week Prime Minister Narendra Modi echoed the views of his predecessor, Manmohan Singh, to speak eloquently about India's emergence as a maritime power. India has had a long maritime history that many historians are now re-discovering and yet India's official definition of neighbourhood, including when the external affairs ministry talks about "Neighbourhood First", is mysteriously restricted to South Asia.

It is not just geographical proximity that makes Indonesia a special neighbour.

As Southeast Asia's biggest nation, Indonesia has emerged as an independent voice in the region, working both with the West and with China. While its outreach to India is pegged on both ancient roots and recent history, the fact is that in the emerging contestation of power between the United States and China, Indonesia and India will find working together of great value.

Given the growing engagement between the Indian and Indonesian navies and armed forces, that entered a new phase after the tsunami of December 2004, it is not surprising that a large contingent of Indonesian soldiers will march down Kartavya Path on Republic Day. President Subianto will be the third Indonesian head of state to be reviewing the parade in the past few years.

The Indonesian polity has worked hard to remain

a liberal democracy, battling both Left extremism and majoritarian communalism. Indonesian elites have had to work at protecting their democratic institutions in a region where the roots of democracy do not run very deep. Indonesian society has had to deal with religious extremism and majoritarianism, and so far, the nation's traditional pluralism and respect for diversity have held sway.

Apart from its religious tolerance, Indonesia holds many lessons for India. It has been able to industrialise rapidly, increasing the share of manufacturing in national income to almost 20 per cent, and the share of manufactured goods in its exports to close to 80 per cent. At the same time, Indonesia has improved its human development indicators, especially fertility rate, female literacy and child mortality rates and suchlike, with its rank in the United Nations Human Development Index at 114, compared to India's 134, out of 193 countries.

When the US, Japan, India and Australia launched the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or "Quad", there was some concern within Southeast Asia if the region was being left to its own devices in the emerging US-China rivalry. It is interesting to see that all four Quad members have reinvested diplomatic energy in the region even as the Quad itself has been adrift. It is just as well that India has been pursuing defence relations with several Southeast Asian nations, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, the Philippines and Singapore.

Southeast Asia has sought to maintain stable relations with both China and the United States while at the same time working with both and trying to benefit from the West's "China+1" trade and investment strategy. This balancing act has enabled the region to stabilise itself and regain momentum. India must remain engaged with the region.

The writer is an author, a former newspaper editor and adviser to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh

LETTERS

NAIL ALL GUILTY

The CBI court in Kolkata's Sealdah has declared Sanjay Rai as the sole convict in the R.G. Kar rape and murder case, which occurred on the night of August 9, 2024. The CBI cannot rest on this verdict since there is more to it than what has appeared as there was so much resistance to investigating this case by the state government. The family of the victim and the convict's sister, too, have said that authorities shouldn't allow the other culprits to escape the punishment for this heinous crime. The convict's family will not appeal the verdict but are praying that the other culprits are nabbed by the CBI so that only Roy does not have to bear the consequences of this monstrous crime.

A.P. Thiruvadi
Chennai

RUN FOR REFORM!

THE MUMBAI marathon must be the only race where celebrities running for a few kilometers receive more attention than the final winners. Mumbai does not comprise of Cuffie Parade, Walkeshwar or Worli alone. More people live in the suburbs like Malad and Ghatkopar than the whole of South Mumbai. So why not have have it in the suburbs so that the others know of the terrible condition of dug-up roads as there exist places like Poin-sur and Saki Naka in the city. The glamour content of SoBo is absent in the suburbs and so the route of the marathon has always been in and around the well-maintained roads. The marathon and half-marathon is a hybrid between sport and entertainment and is exploited to the full by attention seekers.

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

SHUTTLE'S JIBE

THE WORLD NO. 23 in badminton, Mia Blichfeldt from Denmark, has criticised air pollution in Delhi and also questioned poor infrastructure, birds shitting on the courts and dirt everywhere while she participated in the India Open Super 750 Tournament in Delhi. It is embarrassing for Indians in general and the Badminton Federation of India in particular. While BFI cannot be expected to do something about Delhi's air quality, the least it can do is to ensure a safe and hygienic environment for players.

Bal Govind
Noida, UP

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to Abhijit Roy (Jan. 19). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Kishwar Desai
London Diary



Travel on London's Tube with no pants; movie halls in UK open door to pets

It is foggy and cold in London, but then with typical British humour — someone decided that this is the ideal time for a "No Trousers Day". Thus, last week, the event which was publicised on Facebook, persuaded some hot-blooded commuters to drop their trousers and emerge only in their underpants and knickers — decorously covered only by goosebumps.

Yes, seriously — this is now an annual event. You get the most colourful sights with bare legs flashing as both men and women have a lark, particularly on the tube. I imagine that this could only happen in London — and that in most other countries the concept itself could cause a riot — especially if you are using public transport.

In India, certainly the cops would have arrested the whole lot of revellers — even before they stepped out in their fashionable undies and prosecuted Facebook. And perhaps they would have even arrested the manufacturers of the underwear for instigating the event through their provocative designs! But here it is just considered innocent "fun"...

So — when the temperatures are dropping — these pranksters drop their pants — each year. In these days of "Me Too" movements — the fact that office goers can sit next to each other, in public — in their underwear — boggles the mind. But the great thing is that there were no

salacious moments and the event passed off peacefully.

On the other hand, what continues to generate anger is an older case of sexual harassment and abuse by the so-called "grooming gangs" mainly from Manchester, Rochdale and Telford. However, the men who groomed young British schoolgirls and cruelly exploited them were mostly of Pakistani origin. And many of them were taxi drivers.

Unfortunately, the media continues to call them "Asian gangs." This has raised red flags in the Indian community who believe that there should be further distinction and the gangs should be referred to as "Pakistani," not Asian, as that is misleading.

In a bid to embarrass the Prime Minister, Keir Starmer, Elon Musk has also added fuel to the fire, saying on X that the PM did not deal properly with the issue while he was head of the Crown Prosecution Service between 2008 and 2013. He has gone to the extent of saying that the Prime Minister was "deeply complicit in the mass rapes in exchange for votes". This of course has been denied by the PM who says that Musk is stirring up a controversy where there is none, as there was a thorough investigation into the case.

But the issue has many in Parliament up in arms as well — and the leader of the Opposition, Kemi Badenoch, has demanded a further inquiry.

She has raised eyebrows by stating that these men come from "sub-communities" and are not even in touch with the countries of their origin.

The government has now finally announced another investigation. Musk's intervention only reinstates the accusation often thrown at Labour that they are soft on a particular community. On a broader note — it is also dangerous that X continues to drive the narrative.

There is a feeling of political chill all around as we are all waiting for the inauguration of Donald Trump's next term, today. What he will unleash in the unsuspecting world, especially on Europe, is the subject of constant discussion. The leader of the Liberals here suggested that when Trump visits UK we should tell him that he will not get an invitation to dine with His Majesty. That threat should make him behave! It is also widely feared that he may not bring the PM up on the top of the queue for his first meet and greet — due to Labour's known support for Kamala Harris. Do these "beauty pageants" really matter is what I am wondering when there are so many other issues to deal with!

For example, let us give love where we are most likely to receive it back. Especially to our pets. Recognising that, cinema theatres in London now allow owners to take their pets with them to watch movies. Apparently, these pets are so well-trained that they do not make any noise, but quietly enjoy the film and the popcorn. These shows are called Dog Day Afternoons. The pets like these outings so much that they even acknowledge the presence of their fellow creatures without a bark.

For those passionate about theatre — there is sad news: The demise of Joan Plowright who was married to Laurence Olivier and acted in both plays and films. She was 95 — but one always feels sad seeing the end of an era. She had the singular distinction of acting with Laurence Olivier in the Inesoco play "Rhinoceros" directed by Orson Welles. She was given the title of Dame for her acting career but then as the wife of Lord Laurence Olivier she was Lady Olivier as well, a rare double. In her honour London theatres are going to be dimming their lights for two minutes on the next Tuesday.

Kishwar Desai is an award winning author and columnist. She is also the Chair of the Partition Museums in Amritsar and Delhi.

SHORT TAKES

MAURITIUS: CHAGOS DEAL WILL SECURE U.S. MILITARY BASE

Port Louis, Mauritius, Jan. 19: A prospective deal on returning the Chagos islands to Mauritius will ensure the United States maintains its strategic military base on the Indian Ocean archipelago, Mauritius' Prime Minister said Sunday.

"There is a disinformation campaign in the United States claiming that we are close to China, that we are going to let them open bases, which is completely untrue," Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam told the *Le Mauricien* newspaper.

60 KILLED IN COLOMBIA GUERRILLA RIOTS

Colombia, Jan. 19: The death toll from attacks by ELN rebels in Colombia has risen to 60 in the country's restive Catatumbo region near the border with Venezuela, officials said Sunday.

Rival groups have for years been fighting in the region over control of the cocaine trade. Fighting in recent days pitted rebels from the left-wing National Liberation Army (ELN) — the biggest of the armed groups still active in Colombia — against dissidents of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

NIGERIA TANKER TRUCK BLAST TOLL RISES TO 86

Lagos, Jan. 19: The death toll from the explosion of a petrol tanker truck in Nigeria that killed people rushing to gather fuel has risen to 86, emergency services said Sunday.

The truck carrying 60,000 litres (nearly 16,000 gallons) of gasoline exploded after flipping over on a road in the centre of the country on Saturday, authorities said. "The final death toll from the tanker explosion is 86," said Ibrahim Audu Hussein, spokesman for the national emergency management agency in Niger state.

PAK FORCES KILL 5 TERRORISTS IN BALOCHISTAN

Karachi, Jan. 19: Pakistani security forces on Sunday killed five suspected terrorists attempting to cross into the Balochistan province of Pakistan from Afghanistan, ISPR said.

According to the military's media wing, the terrorists belonging to the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) group were killed while trying to infiltrate the Zhob district of the restive province early Sunday. Pakistan has regularly asked the Afghanistan Taliban government to take action against the TTP militant group which Pakistan government blames for terror attacks in Pakistan.

WILL FOLLOW GOVT TIMELINE FOR POLLS: BANGLA EC

Dhaka, Jan. 19: Bangladesh Election Commission said on Sunday that it will hold general elections on the timeline set by the interim government, asserting its commitment to free and fair polls.

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) A.M.M. Nasir Uddin made the remarks during an event where the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) handed over technical equipment needed to update the voter lists, *Dhaka Tribune* newspaper reported.

S. KOREA COURT EXTENDS YOON'S DETENTION

Seoul, Jan. 19: A South Korean court extended the detention of impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol on Sunday over concerns he could destroy evidence linked to his martial law declaration, enraging his supporters who attacked the court building.

Hundreds of pro-Yoon protesters smashed windows and broke down doors to enter the court after the decision was announced, chanting the name of the president, who plunged the South into its worst political chaos in decades with his bid to suspend civilian rule.

Yoon's December 3 martial law declaration lasted just six hours, with lawmakers voting it down despite him ordering soldiers to storm parliament to stop them.

Trump ready to revel in his return as President

Arrives in Washington; to hold rally inside Capital One Arena

Sterling, Virginia, Jan. 19: President-elect Donald Trump arrived in the Washington area on Saturday evening for a celebration of his return to power ahead of an inauguration ceremony that has been upended by record cold temperatures.

Trump flew aboard an Air Force plane sent by outgoing President Joe Biden to the Republican's base in Palm Beach, Florida, where Trump prepared his transition after winning the November 5 election over Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris. His wife, Melania, daughter Ivanka and her husband, Jared Kushner, accompanied him on Saturday's flight.

After arriving at Dulles airport in suburban Virginia, Trump traveled to his golf club in Sterling, Virginia, on the outskirts of Washington.

Elvis Presley impersonator Leo Days serenaded the incoming president and first lady ahead of a reception for about 500 guests and fireworks display. An aide posted a video on social media showing the singer crooning as the Trumps watched.

The 78-year-old Trump is due to hold a rally with supporters inside the Capital One Arena in downtown Washington on Sunday, the eve of his inauguration, as well as a post-inauguration event Monday afternoon.

Frigid weather forecast for Monday prompted Trump to move the inauguration ceremonies from the iconic west front of the US Capitol building indoors to the Capitol Rotunda, and the parade down Pennsylvania Avenue to the Capital One Arena.

In the Capitol Rotunda, Trump will be sworn in at 12 pm ET (17'00 GMT) then deliver an inaugural address, a speech that typically sets the tone for the President's four-year term. He told *NBC News* the theme would be "unity and strength, and also the word 'fairness'."

It will be the first time since Ronald Reagan's second inauguration in January 1985 that the big event has been moved indoors.

Most of the more than 220,000 ticketed guests who had been due to watch from the US Capitol grounds will be unable to view the swearing-in inside the building. — *Reuters*

CEOs, global leaders at inauguration

Washington, Jan. 19: Donald Trump's inauguration as the country's 47th President was expected to be an extravagant break from tradition before it got moved indoors due to cold weather.

There will still be well-known performers, influential billionaires as guests and foreign heads of state. Unlike his first inauguration, Trump will be welcomed back to office by business titans and global leaders, groups that often shunned him in his first term.

Here are some things to



US President-elect Donald Trump with his wife Melania Trump during a reception at Trump National Golf Club in Sterling, Virginia, on Saturday. — AP

TRUMP PROMISES

IMMIGRATION

TRUMP promises a hardline stance against an estimated 11 million undocumented migrants in the United States.



TRADE WARS?

TRUMP has vowed to slap a 25 per cent tariff on goods imported from Mexico and Canada — top US trading partners — as punishment for what he says is their failure to stem the flow of drugs and undocumented migrants into the United States.



CLIMATE

CLIMATE skeptic Trump has promised to "drill, baby, drill" for oil and gas.



TRANSGENDER RIGHTS AND RACE



"WITH THE STROKE of my pen on day one, we're going to stop the transgender lunacy," Trump said in December, vowing to "end child sexual mutilation, get transgender out of the military and out of our elementary schools and middle schools and high schools." He also said the US government would recognise only two genders, male and female.

Several rally in Washington against Trump's policies

Washington, Jan. 19: Thousands of demonstrators marched through the streets of Washington on Saturday in protest at the policies of Donald Trump and his Republican Party, two days before the billionaire reclaims the Oval Office.

The "People's March" has been organised by a collective of civil rights and social justice groups, including the team behind the Women's March, which drew hundreds of thousands of people to the US capital in the wake of Trump's first inauguration in 2017.

Participants are highlighting a range of issues which they say are under attack from Trump and his party's leaders, including abortion access, climate change, the need for better protections against



An artist gives final touches to a painting of US President-elect Donald Trump on Friday. — AP

gun violence, and immigrant rights.

Colorful signs and plenty of pink pussy hats — a throwback to the 2017 event — dotted the crowd in downtown Washington, which gathered at three parks before converging for a march to the Lincoln Memorial for a rally.

"These laws endanger

BIDEN TO VISIT CHARLESTON ON LAST DAY AS PREZ

Washington, Jan. 19: Joe Biden will travel to South Carolina on Sunday, his last full day as US President, where he will mark a national holiday honoring civil rights icon Martin Luther King Jr.

Biden will visit Royal Missionary Baptist Church in Charleston, where he will attend services and speak about "the continued fight to make Dr. King's dream a reality," a White House official said. He will also attend an event at the city's International African American Museum.

Monday is a national holiday in the United States honoring King, the Nobel Peace Prize winner who advocated for the use of non-violent resistance in the fight for equal rights for Black Americans. He was assassinated in 1968. Monday is also the day Donald Trump will be sworn in to succeed Biden as president.

The White House said Biden's "last official trip as president... will continue his long relationship with the state of South Carolina." — AP

Workers warned of challenges ahead in aid ops

UN: 1st post-ceasefire aid trucks enter Gaza

Rafah, Egypt, Jan. 19: Trucks carrying humanitarian aid entered the Gaza Strip on Sunday after a long-awaited truce between Israel and Hamas came into effect, the United Nations said.

"First trucks of supplies started entering" minutes after the ceasefire took effect on Sunday morning, UN aid official Jonathan Whittall, interim chief of the UN's OCHA aid agency for the Palestinian territories, said on X.

"A massive effort has been underway over the past days from humanitarian partners to load and prepare to distribute a surge of aid across all of Gaza." An Egyptian source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said "260 trucks of aid and 16 of fuel" moved into the Israeli-controlled Kerem Shalom crossing between Israel and Gaza and the Nitzana crossing between Egypt and Israel before entering Gaza.

On Saturday, Egyptian foreign minister Badr Abdelatty, whose country mediated the deal along with Qatar and the United States, said it provides for "the entry of 600 trucks per day to the Strip, including 50 trucks of fuel".

On Sunday, *AFP* journalists saw hundreds of trucks carrying aid at the Rafah border crossing and around El-Arish, 50 kilometres (31 miles) west.

The vehicles were waiting to proceed to the Israeli crossings with Egypt at Kerem Shalom and Nitzana for screening before being allowed in to Gaza.

Some trucks returned empty after offloading their cargo, and around a dozen ambulances were also seen driving out of the main Rafah gate.



People gather around a vehicle of the ICRC in Saraya Square in western Gaza City on Sunday. — AFP

Israeli far-right min. Ben Gvir's party quits

Jerusalem, Jan. 19: Israel's far-right national security minister Itamar Ben Gvir's party announced on Sunday it was leaving the country's ruling coalition in protest at what it called "scandalous" ceasefire agreement in Gaza.

In a statement, Jewish Power called the ceasefire deal a "capitulation to

Hamas" and denounced what it called the "release of hundreds of murderers" and the "renouncing of the (Israeli military's) achievements in the war" in Gaza.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu retains a slim majority in the Israeli parliament despite their resignation. — *AFP*

The Rafah crossing — previously a vital entry point for aid — has been closed since May, when Israeli forces seized it on the Palestinian side.

Palestinian Red Crescent spokesperson Nebal Farsakh said Sunday that "The Israeli authorities control the process of receiving aid", adding that "the mechanisms for receiving these trucks and the crossing points through which they will enter remain unclear".

Humanitarian workers have warned of the monumental challenges that could impede aid opera-

tions, including the destruction of infrastructure that previously processed shipments.

Sunday's truce comes after more than 15 months of war sparked by Hamas' attack on October 7, 2023, the deadliest in Israeli history. It follows a deal brokered by the three international mediators after months of negotiations, and comes on the eve of Donald Trump's inauguration as US president.

According to the UN, nearly all of Gaza's 2.4 million people have been displaced at least once. — *AFP*

Biden pardons late civil rights activist

Washington, Jan. 19: US President Joe Biden has pardoned five people including the late civil rights activist Marcus Garvey, the White House said Sunday, just hours before he cedes the Oval Office to Donald Trump.

Biden also pardoned gun violence prevention advocate Darryl Chambers, immigrant advocate Ravi Ragbir, Virginia lawmaker Don Scott, and criminal justice advocate Kemba Smith Pradia, all convicted of non-violent offenses, the White House said.

Garvey, who died in 1940, was a Jamaican-born writer and orator seen by some as a Rastafarian prophet who advocated for the African diaspora to return to the continent and reclaim it from European colonizers.

He was convicted of mail fraud in the United States and sentenced to five years imprisonment — but that sentence was commuted by President Calvin Coolidge, and he was later deported back to Jamaica.

Rights icon Martin



Marcus Garvey



Ravi Ragbir

Luther King Jr. called Garvey "the first man of color in the history of the United States to lead and develop a mass movement," the White House said in a statement.

Garvey "created the Black Star Line, the first Black-owned shipping line and method of international travel, and founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association, which celebrated African history and culture," the statement said. — *AFP*

UKRAINE SAYS IT DOWNED 43 RUSSIAN DRONES

Kyiv, Jan. 19: Ukrainian air defences shot down 43 out of 61 drones launched by Russia in an overnight attack on Sunday that targeted nine regions across Ukraine, the air force said.

It said that 15 other drones were "lost" in reference to Kyiv using electronic warfare to redirect them.

No major damage or casualties were immediately reported by officials.

RUSSIA TAKES CONTROL OF VOZHDVYZHENKA IN EASTERN UKRAINE

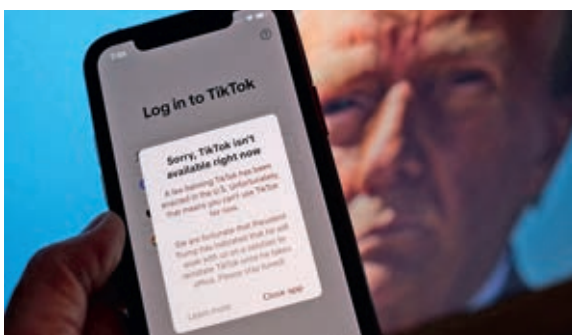
Russian troops have captured the village of Vozhdvyzhenka in the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine, Interfax news agency reported on Sunday, citing the Russian defence ministry.

Russian forces had also unleashed a combined drone and missile strike on the Ukrainian capital Kyiv early on Saturday, killing three people, while two other attacks in the country's south killed three more. — *Reuters*

APP | BAN

TikTok stopped working for 170 million American users on Jan. 18

TikTok restores service, thanks Trump



TikTok disconnected access to its users in the US after no action was taken shortly before a national ban was to take effect, in the name of national security. — *AFP*

they will face no penalties (for) providing TikTok to over 170 million Americans and allowing over 7 million small businesses to thrive." TikTok stopped working

for its 170 million American users late on Saturday before a law shutting it down on national security grounds took effect on Sunday. US officials had warned that

under Chinese parent company ByteDance, there was a risk of Americans' data being misused.

Trump said he would "extend the period of time before the law's prohibitions take effect, so that we can make a deal to protect our national security."

"I would like the United States to have a 50 per cent ownership position in a joint venture," he wrote on Truth Social.

Trump said the executive order would specify there would be no liability for any company that helped keep TikTok from going dark before his order.

Trump had earlier said he would most likely give TikTok a 90-day reprieve

from the ban after he takes office, a promise TikTok cited in a notice posted to users on the app.

"A law banning TikTok has been enacted in the US. Unfortunately, that means you can't use TikTok for now. We are fortunate that President Trump has indicated that he will work with us on a solution to reinstate TikTok once he takes office. Please stay tuned," a message notified users of TikTok, which disappeared from Apple and Google app stores late on Saturday. Even if temporary, the unprecedented shutdown of TikTok is set to have a wide-ranging impact on US-China relations, US politics, social media marketplace. — *Reuters*

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	76,619.33	-0.55
Nifty 50	23,203.20	-0.47
S&P 500*	5,996.66	1.00
Dollar (₹)	86.61	0.05
Pound Sterling (₹)	105.63	0.06
Euro (₹)	89.18	0.16
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	79,019w4	-0.01
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	80.73	-0.07
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.774	0.02
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.623	0.017

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Foreign investors pull out ₹44,396 cr so far this month

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) have pulled out ₹44,396 crore from Indian equities this month, driven by strength of the dollar, rising bond yields in the US, and expectations of a weak earnings season. This came following an investment of ₹15,446 crore in December, data with the depositories showed. The shift in sentiment comes amid global and domestic headwinds. FPIs have been sellers on all days this month except January 2.



ArcelorMittal JV to commission 2 production lines

ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel India on Sunday said it is set to commission two production lines at its Gujarat-based facility this year to produce advanced automotive steel products. The company, a joint venture between ArcelorMittal and Nippon Steel, said that once operational, the production of the two units will substitute imports of high-end steel required by the entire automotive sector.

Sellwin signs pact to develop new tech platform

Sellwin Traders has signed a pact with UAE-based Secorbit FZCO for developing a blockchain-based tokenisation platform for equities, bonds, and real-world assets at a cost of \$3 million (₹26 crore). It will be developed for Secorbit to enable the tokenisation of equities, bonds, and real-world assets, with a focus on scalability, security, and seamless integration with existing financial and blockchain ecosystems.

Vinir files papers with Sebi to float initial public offer

Vinir Engineering has filed preliminary papers with capital markets regulator Sebi seeking its approval to float an initial public offering (IPO). The IPO is entirely an offer-for-sale of up to 5.33 crore equity shares by promoter Nitesh Gupta, according to the draft red herring prospectus. At present, promoters hold 100 per cent stake in the company. Since it is an OFS, Vinir will not receive any proceeds from the IPO.

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EV entry barriers vanishing

More products cater for diverse needs, real benefits of owning an EV will be uniform

New Delhi, Jan. 19: The entry of more players in the EV segment will help in breaking barriers and accelerate adoption of electric mobility in the Indian market, according to leading automobile manufacturers.

More product introductions will help in catering to diverse customer needs with competition leading to expansion of the market, they noted.

The announcements by Maruti Suzuki India with its eVITARA and Hyundai Motor India's Creta Electric will help change the negative narrative regarding EVs in India and a unified voice from the Indian automotive industry players will help in better transformation and acceleration towards electric adoption, top executives of different automakers said.

"The general narrative on EV (earlier) was a bit more on the negative side, with a lot of question marks. Today, with all original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) now having a credible EV portfolio, I think the narrative on EVs will change, and the real benefits of owning an EV will be uniform now," Mercedes-Benz India managing director and CEO Santosh Iyer said.

Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles and Tata Passenger Electric Mobility, managing director Shailesh Chandra said, "When all the manufacturers come in, there's no doubt that if all the OEMs are going for electric vehicle, possibly now customers feel confident that this is possibly the technology of future. That boost of confidence should expand the market."

NEWER PORTFOLIO

NEW LAUNCHES by Maruti Suzuki India's eVITARA and Hyundai Motor India's Creta Electric will help change the negative narrative regarding EVs in India.

TATA MOTORS and Mahindra & Mahindra lead in domestic EV passenger vehicle segment.

EVS CONTINUE TO BE THE MAIN DRAW IN THE BHARAT MOBILITY GLOBAL EXPO 2025.

EV SALES in India crossed 14 lakh units in 2024, achieving a market penetration rate of 5.59%, up from 4.44% in 2023.

THERE'S NO doubt that if all OEMs go for EVs, customers feel confident that this is the technology of future.

— SHAILESH CHANDRA, MD, Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles and Tata Passenger Electric Mobility

Eicher brings small commercial vehicles

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, JAN. 19

Eicher Trucks and Buses, a division of VE Commercial Vehicles, has forayed into the electric small commercial vehicle (SCV) segment by launching its pick-up vehicle, the Eicher Pro X Range at Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025.

The Eicher Pro X is assembled on an all-women assembly line at its Bhopal facility with an installed capacity to produce 40,000 units per year.

"With our Pro X Range, we are entering into the rapidly growing 2-3.5-ton segment, which is the biggest in the commercial vehicle segment," Vinod Aggarwal, managing director and CEO at VE Commercial Vehicles told *Financial Chronicle*.

He said SCV segment sold 3.19 lakh units in last year, valued at ₹35,000 crore. In January-December, the SCV accounted for 2.43 lakh units, and 438 electric units were sold.

"The electric SCVs are here to grow and that is the future," Aggarwal said, adding that the company had invested ₹500 crore to design and develop the Eicher Pro X Range for the Indian market.

TACKLE FRAUDS

BANKS and other regulated entities have been asked to monitor and clean their customer database.

MOBILE NUMBER of a customer has emerged as a ubiquitous identifier, instrumental in account authentication and verification process.

TO ENHANCE fraud risk monitoring and prevention, banks have been asked to develop standard operating procedures.

LENDERS to ensure compliance with the instructions by March 31.

RBI: Use 1600 series nos for customer transactions

FC BANKING BUREAU MUMBAI, JAN. 19

In a bid to tackle rising financial frauds, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has asked lenders and payment companies to use only the '1600xx' phone numbering series to call customers for transactional purposes and '140xx' numbering series for promotional purposes.

Banks and other regulated entities (REs) have also been asked to monitor and clean their customer database.

The proliferation of digital transactions, while offering convenience and efficiency, has also led to a surge in frauds, a pressing concern underscoring the need for concerted action,' said RBI while issuing the circular titled 'Prevention of financial frauds perpetrated using voice calls and SMS – regulatory prescriptions and institutional safeguards'.

The mobile number of a customer has emerged as a ubiquitous identifier, instrumental in account authentication and verification process, receiving sensitive payment communication, such as OTPs, transaction alerts, account updates, etc.

The mobile number, however, can also be misused by scammers in multiple ways for online and other frauds, the RBI said.

The RBI further asked the lenders to utilise the mobile number revocation list by the department of telecommunications to monitor and clean their customer database.

To enhance fraud risk monitoring and prevention, banks have been asked to develop standard operating procedures incorporating the required action to be taken, the central bank report further said.

NEW | TOOL Release of ChatGPT sparked frenzy of investments in artificial intelligence firms

OpenAI to launch new reasoning AI model o3 mini

San Francisco, Jan. 19: ChatGPT maker OpenAI has finalised a version of its new reasoning AI model o3 mini and will be launching it in a couple of weeks, chief executive officer Sam Altman said.

The Microsoft-backed company has considered user feedback and, consequently, plans to release the application programming interface (API) and ChatGPT simultaneously, Altman wrote in a post on social media platform X.

Last December, OpenAI said it was testing the reasoning AI models, o3 and o3 mini, indicating growing competition with rivals such as Alphabet's Google to create smarter models capable of tackling complex problems.

The artificial intelligence (AI) start-up had planned to launch o3 mini by the end of January, and the full o3 thereafter, as more robust large language models could outperform existing models

BIG WAVE

GROWING competition to create smarter models capable of tackling complex problems.

IN SEPTEMBER 2024, OpenAI released o1 AI models to spend more time processing queries.

and attract new investments and users.

In September 2024, the generative artificial intel-

OPENAI'S beta feature called Tasks to ChatGPT signals foray into the virtual assistant space.

ligence pioneer released o1 AI models designed to spend more time processing queries to solve harder

TOYOTA PLANS TO LAUNCH ELECTRIC VEHICLES IN INDIA

New Delhi, Jan. 19: Japanese auto major Toyota will launch EVs in India, as part of its multi-technology approach towards combating carbon emission in the country, which EVs alone cannot tackle, according to company's officer.

The company feels that under the current circumstances, strong hybrid is the most practical solution supplemented by other technologies, including electric, flex fuel, electrified flex fuel, and plug-in hybrid in India, Toyota Kirloskar Motor and Lexus India, deputy managing director, sales-service-used car, Tadashi Asazuma said.

"India itself is one of the most important country markets that we recognise. So in terms of the technologies, we are thinking of how to contribute to the Indian auto market, what will best suit India."

"However, as of now, we think that the strong hybrid is a kind of practical answer to start with," he said here on the sidelines of the Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025.

Meanwhile, China's EV major BYD is keen to have manufacturing operations in India as soon as all factors suggest a go ahead and the plan is under constant evaluation. Despite political tension between India and China resulting in visa issues, the company has not felt any impact of it on its operations in the country. —PTI

Personal loans turning riskier

SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, JAN. 19

Personal loans have been witnessing a rise in both short-term and long-term delinquencies. Delinquencies have risen predominantly in personal loans of small ticket sizes.

Portfolio at Risk (PAR) between 31 and 90 days has moved up to 1.8 per cent at end of September 2024 against 1.5 per cent in year-ago month. PAR 91-180 has worsened from 1.1 to 1.2 per cent. Long term delinquencies of PAR past 360 days rose from 3.2 per cent to 3.3 per cent.

PAR 31-180 days has increased across geographies since March 2024. Top 8 cities saw an increase from 2.4 per cent to 2.6 per cent, top 9-50 cities saw it going up from 2.9 per cent to 3 per cent.

Cities between 51 and 100 witnessed a growth from 3 per cent to 3.2 per cent and towns beyond 100 saw it growing from 3.3 per cent to 3.6 per cent, finds an analysis by CRIF and DLAI.

Among personal loans of less than ₹10,000, par 31-90 days has gone up from 3.7 per cent to 3.9 per cent in



one year, while PAR 91-180 is up from 5.9 per cent to 6.2 per cent. PAR 360+ rose from 24.5 per cent to 39.7 per cent.

Personal loans of value between ₹10,000 and ₹50,000 too have seen delinquencies rising. PAR 31-90 for this group rose from 2.6 per cent to 3 per cent and PAR 91-180 grew from 4.2 per cent to 4.8 per cent.

While originations value of personal loans fell 5.5 per cent in H1 FY25 compared to H1 FY24, originations volume saw growth of 3.4 per cent due to an increase in smaller loans of less than ₹10,000.

In the case of personal loans, NBFCs have gained dominance in originations with a value share of 38.7 per cent and volume share of 90.7 per cent in H1 FY25.

Cos face shortage of high-level staff

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JAN. 19

There is a shortage of top level executives in India as companies have expanded. Today, the concept of retirement is going away in C-suite executives with executives being retained above 70 years of age, said K Sudarshan, managing director, EMA Partners India, an executive search firm.

The company recently announced its maiden initial public offering.

C-suite executives are high-ranking executives. They have titles that start with the letter 'C,' which stands for 'chief' in roles like CEO, CFO and others. C-suite executives are responsible for ensuring that a company's policies and plans are carried out.

"There is also a succession crisis that they need to manage as the scale and complexity of companies is increasing and local and global talent is needed. There is new demand for executives in digital, artificial intelligence domains by companies," Sudarshan said.

The Reserve Bank of India has also extended the retirement age of chief executive officers of private banks to 70 years, he said.

Demand for leadership



talent is robust across sectors, especially manufacturing, he added.

In India 900 million people are working but only 9 million are placed through recruitment firms but expansion of economic activities presents tremendous opportunity to hiring firms, Sudarshan said.

"About 88 per cent of professionals aged 18-24 are contemplating a career change, compared to 64 per cent of those aged between 45-54 in the next one year. Young professionals are considering switching jobs this year for higher wage and work-life balance and flexibility," said the draft red herring prospectus of EMA Partners India said.

The company's ₹76-crore small and medium enterprise (SME) initial public offer on NSE Emerge platform in price band of ₹117 to ₹124 per equity share of ₹5 face value will close on January 21.

CII: PRIVATE FIRMS KEEN TO INVEST, CREATE MORE JOBS

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, JAN. 19

Industry body Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) on Sunday said that 75 per cent of companies that participated in its survey believe that the current environment is conducive for private investments and significant hiring. It also said that over 70 per cent of firms surveyed plan to invest in FY'26.

The survey would be completed for 500 firms by the first week of February. The interim results are based on a sample of 300 firms across large, medium and small firms.

"Even though geopolitical fault lines have disrupted global supply chains and have posed serious challenges to global growth, India has emerged as a bright spot amid this challenging global backdrop," said Chandrajit Banerjee, director general of CII.

The average increase in direct employment next year is expected to be 15 to 22 per cent between manufacturing and services.

— Reuters

SHORT TAKES

Arrest warrant against Shakib

Dhaka: A Dhaka court, on Sunday, issued an arrest warrant against Bangladesh all-rounder and former Awami League MP Shakib Al Hasan over two bounced bank cheques. Shakib hasn't returned to Bangladesh fearing threat to his life after deposed PM Sheikh Hasina was forced to flee the country due to civil unrest last year.

"Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Ziadur Rahman issued the arrest warrant asking police submit a report on the execution of the order on March 24," a court official told reporters.

He said the warrant was issued as Hasan, also the chairman of an agriculture farm, failed to appear in the court as ordered earlier over a case related to bounced cheques.

Another identical warrant was issued against managing director of the farm Gazi Shahagir Hossain as well as since he too did not respond to the summons.

Shakib, Bangladesh's greatest ever cricketer played his last Test match against India in Kanpur late last year. Champions Trophy in Dubai is supposed to be his last appearance in Bangladesh colours.

— PTI

Jadeja to play Ranji Trophy tie

New Delhi: India all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja is set to play in Saurashtra's Ranji Trophy tie against Delhi from January 23 after turning up for the team's practice session in Rajkot on Sunday. Jadeja last played for Saurashtra in January 2023. Following the tour of Australia, the BCCI had made participation in domestic cricket mandatory unless the player is unavailable due to an injury. "Jadeja has turned up for training today. He will play the next match," Saurashtra Cricket Association president Jaydev Shah said on Sunday. India captain Rohit Sharma, who battles poor form in Australia, confirmed his availability for Mumbai's next Ranji Trophy against Jammu and Kashmir. The likes of Rishabh Pant, Shubman Gill and Yashasvi Jaiswal will also turn up for their respective sides. While Pant will be part of Delhi's playing eleven against Saurashtra, Virat Kohli will not take part in the game due to an injury.

— PTI

MI Cape Town, Paarl Royals win

Cape Town: Two Western Cape teams, MI Cape Town and Paarl Royals, completed brilliant run chases in the SA20 here. After missing a couple of matches, Ryan Rickelton returned to the MI Cape Town line-up and made an immediate impact with a fabulous 89 off only 39 balls (8x4s, 6x6s) to power the home team to an seven-wicket bonus point victory over Joburg Super Kings. In the other game, Joe Root delivered a T20 masterclass to steer the Royals to an equally thrilling eight-wicket victory over Pretoria Capitals at Centurion on Saturday. After winning the toss and electing to bat, Joburg captain Faf du Plessis led from the front with a superb 61 from just 38 balls (6x4s, 3x6s). Du Plessis passed 11,000 T20 career runs in the process — the most by any South African batter. Devon Conway (35 off 31 balls) played the supporting role in the 97-run first wicket partnership, but a middle-order collapse saw the Super Kings lose four wickets for the addition of just nine runs.

— PTI

Mumbai Marathon has new winners

Mumbai: New champions emerged in the 20th edition of the Tata Mumbai Marathon, as Eritrean Berhane Tesfay and Kenyan Joyce Chepkemoi Tele won the men's and women's categories, respectively. The top three winners each took home prize money of \$50,000, \$25,000 and \$15,000 respectively. It was a first-ever marathon win for Tesfay, while Tele had her second successive win in three months in a marathon. Six men, including defending champion Lemi Berhanu, ran together in a bunch in most parts of the race. At the same time, pacer Timoty Kibet from Kenya pulled them to 27 km before withdrawing at that stage. After the 30K, Kenyan Philemon Rono and Lemi exchanged the lead briefly among themselves. Anish Thapa won his first Mumbai Marathon Indian men's title while Thakor Nirmaben retained her Indian Elite women's crown.

SUPERLENKA!

Aryna surges into quarters, Djokovic sets up Alcaraz clash

Melbourne, Jan. 19: Novak Djokovic surged into an Australian Open quarter-final clash against Carlos Alcaraz with a dominant straight-sets victory on Sunday while women's world number one Aryna Sabalenka was a ruthless winner.

Double defending champion Sabalenka is on a collision course with in-form world number three Coco Gauff in the semi-finals in Melbourne if both win in the last eight.

On the hottest day of the tournament so far with temperatures hitting 34 degrees Celsius (93 Fahrenheit), Alcaraz went through when Britain's Jack Draper retired injured.

The 37-year-old Djokovic then kept up his end of the bargain with a 6-3, 6-4, 7-6 (7/4) win over Czech 24th seed Jiri Lehecka in the prime-time match on Rod Laver Arena.

Djokovic appears to be growing into the tournament in an ominous sign for his rivals, as he pursues a record-extending 11th Melbourne crown and historic 25th Grand Slam title.

He dropped a set in each of his opening two matches but has won the previous two in straight sets.

Djokovic and Alcaraz have played each other seven times with the Serb leading 4-3, including victory in their last clash in the Paris Olympics final.

But they have never played at Melbourne Park, where Djokovic has achieved his greatest success.

"When we are seeing him playing, he seems like he's young again... it's unbelievable. He's in a really good shape," said Alcaraz, who has vowed to get a kangaroo tattoo if he wins the Australian Open for the first time.

The 21-year-old Spaniard, who has never gone beyond the quarter-finals in Melbourne, was leading 7-5, 6-1 when Draper pulled the plug.

Draper had come through all three of his previous matches in five sets, and all from 2-1 down, and it appeared to have taken its toll.

"It's not the way I wanted to win, but obviously I'm happy to play another quarter-final here in Australia," said Alcaraz.

The 23-year-old Draper, whose rise has been held back by issues with his body, said his hip injury had been a "ticking time bomb" and he had "multiple areas really in pain".

American 12th seed Tommy Paul destroyed Spain's Alejandro Davidovich Fokina for the loss of just three games as he bids to match or better his semi-final appearance from 2023.

Paul will meet German second seed Alexander Zverev, who survived a mid-match wobble to oust France's Ugo Humbert.

Zverev, who is zeroing in on a maiden Grand Slam



Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus returns to Mirra Andreeva of Russia during their fourth round match at the Australian Open in Melbourne on Sunday.

— AP

THE RESULTS

■ **Men's singles fourth round (number in brackets denotes seeding):** Novak Djokovic (SRB x7) bt Jiri Lehecka (CZE x24) 6-3, 6-4, 7-6 (7/4); Carlos Alcaraz (ESP x3) bt Jack Draper (GBR x15) 7-5, 6-1, 0-0 ret; Tommy Paul (USA x12) bt Alejandro Davidovich Fokina (ESP) 6-1, 6-1, 6-1; Alexander Zverev (GER x2) bt Ugo Humbert (FRA x14) 6-1, 2-6, 6-3, 6-2.

■ **Women's singles fourth round (number in brackets denotes seeding):** Aryna Sabalenka (BLR x1) bt Mirra Andreeva (RUS x14) 6-1, 6-2; Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova (RUS x27) bt Donna Vekic (CRO x18) 7-6 (7/0), 6-0; Paula Badosa (ESP x11) bt Olga Danilovic (SRB) 6-1, 7-6 (7/2); Coco Gauff (USA x3) bt Belinda Bencic (SUI) 5-7, 6-2, 6-1.

title, won 6-1, 2-6, 6-3, 6-2.

SABALENKA WARNING

Sabalenka blew away Russian 17-year-old Mirra Andreeva 6-1, 6-2 in a chilling warning to sweep into the quarter-finals.

The Belarusian was out on a roasting centre court for only 62 minutes before registering an 18th consecutive win at Melbourne

Park. "I'm super happy to get through this difficult match in straight sets," said Sabalenka, who faces Russian 27th seed Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova next.

Sabalenka struggled with her serve in colder conditions during the first week, but was untouchable as the mercury soared. "The ball was fly-

ing like a rocket," said Sabalenka.

A dangerous Gauff faces Spain's 11th seed Paula Badosa after the American fought back to beat Belinda Bencic 5-7, 6-2, 6-1.

Gauff dropped a set for the first time in 2025 but extended her unbeaten streak to 13 matches going back to last year's WTA Tour Finals.

"Two out of three sets at this stage of my career is not that physically hard for me," said the 20-year-old Gauff, who is chasing a first Melbourne title.

"The off-season I just put in so much work physically so I'm not worried at all about recovering emotionally or mentally."

Badosa declared she "loves" Gauff — but said that will not prevent her looking for "revenge".

— AFP

NO APOLOGY, NO POST-MATCH QUOTES: NOVAK

Melbourne, Jan. 19:

Novak Djokovic declined to do a customary post-match TV interview at the Australian Open after his win Sunday night to protest comments made on air by someone who works for the official broadcaster of the tournament in the host country.

Djokovic said he wants an apology from Channel 9 and Tony Jones, who called the 24-time Grand Slam champion overrated and a has-been during an on-air appearance at Melbourne Park where a crowd of the player's supporters were chanting. Djokovic, a 37-year-old from Serbia, did not name Jones, but said a "famous sports journalist who works for official broadcaster, Channel 9 ... made a mockery of Serbian fans and also made insulting and offensive comments toward me."

Djokovic said he will continue to avoid speaking to the network.

"I leave it to Channel 9 to handle this the way they think they see fit. That's all," Djokovic said.

After beating Jiri Lehecka in three sets at Rod Laver Arena to reach the quarterfinals, Djokovic was expected to speak to former player Jim Courier on television. Instead, Djokovic held the microphone and told the crowd: "Thank you very much for being here tonight. I appreciate your presence and the support. I'll see you next round. Thank you very much."

— AP

BOPANNA-SHUA! REACH MIXED QUARTERFINALS

Melbourne, Jan. 19: Veteran Indian tennis player Rohan Bopanna and his Chinese partner Zhang Shuai entered the quarterfinals of the mixed doubles event at the Australian Open after they got a walkover in a second round match here on Sunday.

Bopanna and Shuai were up against fourth seeds Taylor Townsend of the United States and Hugo Nys of Monaco but the Indian-Chinese pair moved to the last eight round without taking the court.

The Indo-Chinese pair had earlier defeated Kristina Mladenovic of France and Ivan Dodic of Croatia 6-4 6-4 in its opening match.

— PTI



Olympic medalist Neeraj Chopra and Himani Mor during their wedding.

— PTI

Chopra ties knot with Himani Mor

New Delhi, Jan. 19: India's javelin superstar Neeraj Chopra tied the knot with Himani Mor from Sonipat two days ago in a marriage that took everybody by surprise.

The 27-year-old Chopra announced the marriage on his social media handles.

"I began a new chapter of my life with my family. Grateful for every blessing that brought us to this moment together. Bound by love, happily ever after," Chopra wrote in a post with the pictures of the marriage ceremony.

Chopra's uncle Bhim said that the marriage took place in the country and the couple has left for honeymoon.

Mor is currently studying in the USA.

"Yes, the marriage took

place in India two days back. I can't tell the place where it took place," Bhim told from his village at Khandra near Panipat in Haryana.

"The girl is from Sonipat and she is studying in the US. They have left the country for honeymoon and I am not aware of the places where they are going. We wanted to keep it like that," said Bhim, who stays with the Olympic double medalist at Khandra, when asked about the surprise development.

Chopra, who won a gold in Tokyo Olympics and a silver in the Paris Game, was earlier training in South Africa after he roped in world record holder javelin legend Jan Zelezny of Czech Republic.

— PTI



India bowler Mohammad Shami with coach Gautam Gambhir (left) during a training session ahead of the first T20 against England in Kolkata on Sunday.

— PTI

KNEE STRAPPED, SHAMI TURNS UP THE HEAT AT INDIA PRACTICE

Kolkata, Jan. 19: As Team India gathered for their white-ball series opener against England, the spotlight during the intense three-hour practice session was on veteran pacer Mohammed Shami.

Returning to the national set-up after a 14-month injury lay-off, Shami displayed promising signs, bowling at full tilt for over an hour.

Sporting heavy strapping on his left knee, Shami began with a gradual warm-up session under the watchful eyes of bowling coach Morne Morkel.

Initially running in with short strides, he bowled for nearly an hour before participating in a cautious fielding drill to test his knee.

Just as doubts arose about his full readiness, the seasoned pacer turned back the clock with a long run-up and trademark fiery spells,

bowling to youngsters like Abhishek Sharma, and Tilak Varma in the nets.

Shami's rhythm improved with each delivery, as he extracted bounce and movement, troubling the batters on multiple occasions.

However, young wicket-keeper-batter Dhruv Jurel managed to take on Shami, hitting some aggressive strokes, providing the veteran with a stern test.

Despite a taxing session, Shami continued to bowl at full team for nearly 45 minutes without requiring assistance from the team's physiotherapist or strength and conditioning coach.

After the nets, Shami wasn't done yet.

He moved to the adjacent length-bowling practice area where he engaged in a detailed discussion with Morkel.

— PTI

GUKEESH TURNS THE TABLES ON ANISH IN TATA OPENER

Wijk Aan Zee (The Netherlands), Jan. 19: World champion D. Gukesh got lucky and came back from a tough position to beat Anish Giri of Holland in the first round of the Tata Steel Masters now underway here. Receiving his Khel Ratna on Friday and then taking a flight to Amsterdam, Gukesh reached here barely hours before the start of the first round. That probably had its toll on the young Indian but he got into top gear when it mattered the most.

The game was almost looking lost when Gukesh found moves that left Giri with some difficult choices and the Dutchman found all but the final winning move. It was an eventful first round with three decisive games and making the most of his white pieces was P. Harikrishna who crashed through the defenses of compatriot world number four Arjun Erigaisi.

— PTI

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