

SHORT TAKES

Hussain begins
poll campaigning

New Delhi: Former AAP councillor and 2020 Delhi riots accused Tahir Hussain on Wednesday launched his campaign in Mustafabad for the February 5 Delhi Assembly polls, seeking people's votes which he said can save his life. Hussain is out on a six-day custody parole granted by the Supreme Court on Tuesday. He is contesting on an All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) ticket. He addressed his supporters with a couplet, *"Deke vote tum apna mujhe, zindagi de dena"* (by giving me your vote, give me life). He was welcomed outside his office with rose petals and chants of "Tahir Bhai zindabad" while being escorted by the armed security personnel. Accompanied by nearly 300 supporters, Hussain conducted a door-to-door campaign in the narrow lanes of Mustafabad, specifically in Gali Number 6, 7 and 8, holding his party's election symbol, a kite.

Firm claims success
in kids' autism care

New Delhi: Despite growing awareness and advancements in autism care, measurable short-term progress has remained a challenge for children on the spectrum. However, recent data from Continua Kids, a leading provider of specialised pediatric therapy, reveals a remarkable 88 per cent improvement in developmental outcomes within just six months, signaling a breakthrough in the field. In a comprehensive evaluation conducted across 11 centers in Delhi-NCR (Dwarka, Ghaziabad, Lajpat Nagar, Pitampura, Rajouri, Noida, Gurugram, and Faridabad), data from 100 patients aged 2 to 8 years highlighted consistent success. The company's structured, process-driven approach ensures a seamless patient journey from diagnosis to treatment.

Key member of ATM
robbery gang held

New Delhi: The Delhi Police arrested a 32-year-old key member of the Farooq Adbar gang, involved in multiple ATM robberies across various states, an official said on Wednesday. The police stated that the accused, Jahid, a proclaimed offender, is a resident of Mewat in Haryana. "Jahid was traced and apprehended in Gurgaon on January 28 following a tip-off. He had been declared a proclaimed offender by a Delhi court after skipping trial proceedings. Jahid's criminal record includes over 35 cases across Delhi, Haryana, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Chennai, involving ATM thefts and armed robberies," said the police officer. According to the police, Jahid specialised in targeting unguarded ATMs, using gas cutters to break in.

DELHI COPS WIN
TROPHY FOR BEST
R-DAY MARCH

New Delhi: The Delhi police has been adjudged the 'best marching contingent' at the Republic Day Parade 2025 held at Kartavya Path on January 26, an official said on Wednesday. The team included three sub-inspectors, 44 head constables and 100 constables, all donned in iconic 'Red Safa' attire. This marks its 17th victory in the parade's history, following the Delhi police women's contingent last year, the official said. The contingent, led by additional DCP Rishi Kumar Singh, secured the prestigious 'best marching contingent' among CAPFs/other auxiliary forces' award under the judges choice. The newly formed all-women Delhi police band, participating for the second time, captivated audiences with its melodious tunes. Led by band master Ruyanguuo Kense, the contingent consisted of four women sub-inspectors and 64 women constables, trained to perform with precision, the officer said. The team was trained under inspector Ramesh Tushir (chief drill instructor), with supervision from senior IPS officers, including special CP Neeraj Thakur, joint CP MN Tiwari, and Delhi commissioner of police Sanjay Arora.

Water from Yamuna tested, no poison found: Haryana CM
Yamuna row: Haryana books
Kejriwal, CM Saini sips waterAGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 29

The Yamuna ammonia controversy has emerged as a critical point of contention ahead of the February 5 Delhi Assembly polls with the Haryana government on Wednesday filing a case against AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal and also moving the court over his statement that Haryana was mixing "poison" in the Yamuna water coming to Delhi.

In a new twist to the ongoing row, Haryana chief minister Nayab Singh Saini took a sip of water from the Yamuna banks at Palla ghat in Dahisara village, the last point in Haryana, after which the river enters Delhi.

Mr Saini said, "An unfortunate statement by Mr Kejriwal was made to create fear in the minds of people for his political benefits. Today, I came here to the banks of river Yamuna and took a sip of the water from Yamuna." Accusing Mr Kejriwal of having lied "all his life," Mr Saini claimed that water from the Yamuna



AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal addresses a public meeting in New Delhi. — PTI

► **HARYANA CM'S** Cabinet colleague, Vipul Goel, said the government has filed a case in the Sonapat chief judicial magistrate court under the Disaster Management Act over AAP chief's statement

was sent for testing and no poison was found.

The Haryana CM had said Mr Kejriwal should seek an apology from the public of Haryana and Delhi.

"Kejriwal has lost his mental balance seeing his possible defeat in the elections. He should seek an apology from the public of Delhi and Haryana immediately, or we will file a defamation suit against him. Kejriwal has insulted the land where he was born," he said.

Mr Saini's Cabinet colleague, Vipul Goel, said the government has filed a case in the Sonapat chief judicial magistrate court under the Disaster

Management Act over the AAP chief's statement.

The revenue and disaster management minister said the water supplied to Delhi is the same water consumed by the President, Prime Minister, and Union ministers. He accused Mr Kejriwal of spreading fear among the people of not only Delhi but also Haryana with his false claims.

Section 2(D) of the act defines a disaster, while Section 54 deals with the punishment for creating a false alarm or warning about a disaster.

"Whoever makes or circulates a false alarm or warning as to disaster or its severity or magnitude, leading to panic, shall on conviction, be punishable with imprisonment which may extend to one year or with fine," Section 54 of the act states.

Notably, the Election Commission (EC) has sought proof from Mr Kejriwal of his claim.

The poll body has asked the former chief minister to submit his response by 8.00 pm on Wednesday.

CM slams L-G over remarks
on Kejriwal: 'Disappointing'AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 29

A day after Delhi lieutenant-governor V.K. Saxena wrote to chief minister Atishi alleging that AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal's accusations that "poison" is being mixed in the Yamuna water and there is an "attempt of genocide" in the national capital are highly objectionable and unfortunate, and amount to endangering national security, Ms Atishi on Wednesday lashed out at the L-G terming it "deeply disappointing" and accused

him of "bowing to political interests".

In a hard hitting letter to the L-G, the Delhi chief minister said, "It is deeply disappointing but hardly surprising that instead of addressing the pressing issue of dangerously high ammonia levels in Delhi's water, you have placed baseless accusations and peddled a false narrative to deflect from your utter failure in fulfilling your responsibilities."

Ms Atishi asserted the L-G's constitutional responsibility is towards the people of Delhi and not towards his "political

masters — the BJP". Defending Mr Kejriwal over his remarks on poisoning of Yamuna, the CM said he raised the issue that the water in the Yamuna has a highly poisonous level of ammonia.

The letter from the CEO of the Delhi Jal Board "outrightly confirms" this, she asserted while listing the harmful effects of the chemical on human health. Even your letter acknowledges that the current ammonia level in the water is 7.2 ppm — a figure that is 700 per cent above the permissible limit, Ms Atishi said.

Delhi comes alive with campaign jingles, posters

New Delhi, Jan. 29: As the Delhi Assembly elections approach, the city has come alive with the clamour of campaign jingles, colourful posters, and loudspeakers blaring messages from competing political parties.

From the narrow lanes of Chandni Chowk to the bustling streets of Dwarka, each party is pulling out all the stops to make its presence felt.

Music has become the lifeblood of the election campaigns.

The BJP, known for its glitzy campaigns, unveiled a remixed version of its popular 2017 anthem, "BJP Dil Mein, BJP Dilli Mein," sung by Manoj Tiwari.

The peppy tune resonates in crowded markets and residential colonies, promising "desh ke liye kiya vikas, ab Dilli ki baari hai" (development has been done for the nation, now it's Delhi's turn).

The Congress is countering with a soulful melody

titled "Har jarurat hogi puri, Dilli mein Congress hai jaruri" (Every need will be fulfilled, Congress is necessary in Delhi), aiming to revive its connect with voters.

Meanwhile, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has stuck to its roots with its catchy track "Phir Layenge Kejriwal" (We will bring back Kejriwal), highlighting the party's welfare schemes in health and education.

Along with striking jingles, campaign posters

BJP holds 34 rallies; Assam, U'khand CMs join campaign

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, JAN. 29

Keeping up its aggressive campaign, BJP leaders, including Uttarakhand chief minister Pushkar Dhama and his Assam counterpart Himanta Biswa Sarma, held 34 public meetings across the city on Wednesday.

Further, Union ministers Nitin Gadkari and Manohar Lal Khattar too addressed rallies.

In a series of public meetings, Mr Dhama on Wednesday highlighted the implementation of the Uniform Civil Code in the hill state and urged voters to elect the BJP for the all-round development of Delhi.

Addressing gatherings in Najafgarh and Kalkaji in support of BJP candidates Neelam Pahalwan and Ramesh Bidhuri, respectively, Mr Dhama said, "I am proud to share that on January 27, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Uttarakhand became the first state in India to implement the UCC."

HC asks EC to ensure parties
do not use 'vilifying' materialAGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 29

The Delhi high court on Wednesday directed the Election Commission to ensure political parties and their candidates did not use any "vilifying" material during election campaigns.

A bench of Chief Justice D.K. Upadhyaya and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela passed the direction on a PIL alleging spam calls and voice messages were made to the public by unknown numbers to vote a particular political party to power to get freebies. The bench disposed off the plea taking note of the proposed action by the Election Commission on the petitioners' complaint.

The court said the state election officer, chief election officer and the district election officers



Supporters during a public meeting of Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Kartar Nagar in New Delhi. — PTI

"This law will guarantee equal rights and opportunities for all citizens, regardless of religion, caste, or community," Mr Dhama added.

Emphasising her "continuous efforts" in improving the area, Mr Dhama urged people to vote for Ms Pahalwan to prioritise development and good governance.

He also promised that if the BJP forms the government in Delhi, it will implement the Ayushman Bharat health insurance

scheme at its first Cabinet meeting.

The Assam CM criticised Arvind Kejriwal for his claims about Haryana poisoning Yamuna water.

"To divert the issue of the polluted Yamuna River, Mr Kejriwal started a new story and said that Haryana is supplying polluted water to Delhi...How can he speak like this for his birthplace...I will die but never speak wrong about my birthplace...This statement by Kejriwal shows his mentality," Mr Sarma said.

Verma files
plaint against
Kejriwal for
CCTV 'graft'AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 29

BJP's New Delhi seat candidate Parvesh Verma has filed a complaint with the anti-corruption branch against AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal and Delhi government officials over alleged corruption in installing CCTV cameras.

In his complaint, Mr Verma has alleged a large-scale corruption in the installation of CCTV cameras in the New Delhi Assembly constituency, a project funded under the Member of Legislative Assembly Local Area Development (MLA-LAD) scheme, according to a statement.

Mr Verma has been fielded against Mr Kejriwal in the February 5 Assembly polls. He has accused the Delhi government ministers, officials from public works department (PWD), Delhi Jal Board (DJB), and other departments, of misusing approximately ₹12 crore in public funds allocated for the installation of CCTV cameras.

He claims that the cameras installed under the project were of substandard quality, with many of them remaining non-functional or failing to meet expected standards.

4 of family rescued from Burari building

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 29

More than 30 hours after a multi-storey building collapsed in Burari here, four members of a family were pulled out alive from the debris in a late-night operation, officials said on Wednesday.

They said Rajesh (30), his wife Gangotri (26), and sons Prince (6) and Ritik (3) — who were rescued on Tuesday night — have been hospitalised.

The family was trapped inside a space created after a ceiling slab of the newly constructed building fell on a cooking gas cylinder. It prevented the



Rescue work underway after a multi-storey building collapsed at Burari area in New Delhi. — PTI

family members from being crushed under the debris, according to the officials.

A video showing the family members sitting inside an ambulance with two children went viral

on different social media platforms.

"My elder son is six years old and my younger son is three. We are thankful to God that we are saved," Mr Rajesh can be heard telling reporters.

The four-storey residential building near Oscar Public School collapsed on Monday evening, killing five people, including two minors.

"The rescue operation is still underway and is likely to continue till late Wednesday night. Multiple teams — the Delhi police, NDRF, and Delhi Fire Services — are working round-the-clock," DCP (north) Raja Banthia said.

So far, 21 people have been pulled out from the rubble. While 16 of them were alive, five died, he said.

"The rescue operation is still underway. More people could be trapped under the rubble. Teams are taking extra precautions while carrying out the rescue operation. The NDRF teams are also using highly advanced gadgets to know about alive people," said the police officer.

The police has registered an FIR against building owner Yogendra Bhati under various sections of the BNS, including culpable homicide, and arrested him.

Amid rise in pollution, GRAP-3
curbs invoked in Delhi-NCRAGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 29

The Centre's panel on Delhi-NCR's air quality on Wednesday invoked curbs under Stage 3 of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) amid a sharp rise in pollution due to unfavourable meteorological conditions, according to an official order.

The air quality in Delhi deteriorated sharply amid calm winds, smog

situation and low mixing height with the 24-average AQI rising to 365 at 4 pm, prompting the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) to implement the curbs.

GRAP Stage 3 entails a ban on non-essential construction work. Classes up to grade 5 are required to shift to hybrid mode. Parents and students have the option to choose online education wherever available.

The use of BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel cars (4-wheelers) is restricted in Delhi and nearby NCR districts. Persons with disabilities are exempt. Stage 3 also bans non-essential diesel-operated medium goods vehicles with BS-IV or older standards in Delhi.

During winters, the Delhi-NCR region enforces restrictions under GRAP, which categorizes air quality into four stages.

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 29

The Delhi police has claimed to have averted a gang war by arresting two members of Ankit Sersa gang from Narela area of outer north Delhi, an official said on Wednesday. The accused — Raj Mishra (22) and Ajay (22) — were arrested from Narela on Tuesday. They were in an attempt to kill a member of the rival Gogi Gang, he said.

"The operation began when sources indicated

that the suspects were planning an attack. Staff intercepted a Honda City near a school in Narela. Mishra, driving the car, was found in possession of a country-made pistol, while Ajay had two live cartridges," said deputy commissioner of police (DCP), outer north, Nidhin Valsan, during a press conference.

The DCP said that the suspects were on a mission to eliminate a rival gang member Chota after receiving threats from the Gogi Gang.

NORTHERN RAILWAY TENDER NOTICE (Through e-tendering)	
Name of work with its location	Provision of Fiber based GPON Technology at San Martin Railway Officers Colony New Delhi.
App. Cost of the work (₹)	₹ 55,00,468.33/- only
Earnest Money Deposit (₹)	₹ 1,10,000/- only
Address of the office	Senior Divisional Signal & Telecom Engineer-C, Northern Railway, 3 rd Floor, Annex-1, DRM office, New Delhi-110055.
Date & Time for upload the tender/closing of tender	Tender uploading / closing date & time- 21.02.2025 up to 15.00 hrs.
Website particular & notice board location where complete details of the tender can be seen etc.	See the Northern Railway website www.reps.gov.in & Notice board at S&T branch, 3 rd Floor, DRM office, State Entry Road, New Delhi-110055.
Tender No. 558-Sig-16-Tel-OT-1003 Dated: 29.01.2025 318/2025	

NORTHERN RAILWAY TENDER NOTICE (Through e-Tendering)	
Name of work with its location	Signalling work in connection with Provision of dual axle counter (except supply, installation & commissioning of Axle Counter) in block sections with absolute block working over Delhi Division
Approx. Cost of work(₹)	₹ 8,16,03,901.17 Bid Security(₹) ₹ 4,58,000/-
Address of the office	Senior Divisional Signal & Telecom Engineer-C, Northern Railway, 3 rd Floor, Annex-1, DRM Office, New Delhi-110055
Date and time for uploading the tender/closing of the tender	Tender uploading 29.01.2025 / closing date & time 20.02.2025 up to 15.00 hrs.
Website particular & notice board location where complete details of the tender can be seen etc.	See the Northern Railway website www.reps.gov.in & Notice board at the S&T branch, 3 rd Floor, DRM office, State Entry Road, New Delhi-110055
Tender No.: 558-Sig-16-M-Tender-1441 Dated : 29.01.2025 319/2025	

Government of Punjab Tender Notice Reference no. 2025/4045 dated 27.01.2025	
The Department of SPO, PAU, Ldh invites online e-tender for the following purchase:	
1. ANSYS Academic Research Software 2. MATLAB Software with License, of Dept. of Mechanical Engg, COAE&T, PAU Ludhiana.	
Closing date and time : 13.02.2025 at 11:00 A.M. For details log on to : www.eproc.punjab.gov.in and www.pau.edu	
Note:- Any corrigendum(s) to the Tender Notice shall be published on the above website only.	
Admn-cum Accounts Officer Store Purchase Ludhiana Punjab Agricultural University Ludhiana (e-mail: spocaa@pau.edu)	
RO No : NA/12/27782/2023/41213	

SHORT TAKES

Now a monk, family finds kin after 27 yrs

Dhanbad: A Jharkhand family on Wednesday claimed to have traced their lost member at the ongoing Kumbh in Prayagraj, ending a search for 27 long years. The lost member, Gangasagar Yadav, is now a 65-year-old “Aghori” monk Baba Rajkumar, who belongs to a particular monastic order of sadhus. Mr Yadav, who went missing in 1998, after travelling to Patna, was traceless so far, according to his family. His wife, Dhanwa Devi, was left to raise their two sons, Kamlesh and Vimlesh, alone. Murli Yadav, younger brother of Mr Yadav said, “Over the years, we lost hope of ever seeing him again until one of our relatives attending the Kumbh noticed a man resembling Gangasagar. I, along with Dhanwa Devi and their two sons, rushed to the Kumbh, determined to bring him back.” — PTI

Give management to Army, says Akhilesh

Lucknow: Opposition leaders in Uttar Pradesh, including SP president Akhilesh Yadav, on Wednesday targeted Yogi Adityanath government over the stampede at the Maha Kumbh, saying it highlighted the failure of the state government. Mr Yadav demanded that those who claimed “world-class arrangements” in the Maha Kumbh should resign from their posts, taking moral responsibility for the stampede. “In order to re-establish faith in the system among the saint community and the devotees who have come to the Maha Kumbh, it is necessary that the administration and the management of the Maha Kumbh should immediately be handed over to the Army instead of the UP government,” he said on X. “Now that the truth of the claims of making world class arrangements has come out in front of everyone, those who were claiming and spreading false propaganda about it should resign from their posts taking moral responsibility for the people killed in this accident,” he said. — PTI

13 akharas take holy dip at Sangam

Mahakumbh Nagar: The “Amrit Snan” by saints and seers of all 13 akharas on Mauni Amavasya, which was deferred after a stampede at the Maha Kumbh here, concluded at the Sangam on Wednesday evening, officials said. The bathing ritual of akharas, which commenced in the afternoon after crowd control measures were implemented, ended by about 7.30 pm, they said. The ritual, which was scheduled for “Brahma Muhurat” (auspicious hour), was postponed due to the stampede near Sangam Nose early in the morning. At least 30 people were killed and 60 injured in the pre-dawn stampede in the Sangam area as millions of pilgrims jostled for space to take a holy dip on Mauni Amavasya. An official said that, for the first time, saints of akharas and Naga ascetics had to break their tradition of taking the first dip in the Sangam due to circumstances. — PTI

‘Mismanagement’: Opp. slams UP, Centre

Accuses Yogi govt of ‘VIP movement’, paying more attention to ‘self-promotion’

New Delhi, Jan. 29: The Opposition on Wednesday hit out at the Centre and the Uttar Pradesh government over the Maha Kumbh stampede, with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi saying that mismanagement and the administration’s special focus on the VIP movement were responsible for the tragic incident. Mr Gandhi also said “VIP culture” should be reined in and the government should make better arrangements to fulfil the needs of common devotees at the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said that “half-baked arrangements, VIP movement, paying more attention to self-promotion and mismanagement are responsible for this”. Such arrangements despite spending thousands of crores of

rupees are condemnable, he said. At least 30 people were killed and 60 others injured in the stampede that broke out at the Maha Kumbh in the early hours of Wednesday, officials said. The pre-dawn stampede at the Sangam area broke out as millions of pilgrims jostled for space to take a holy dip on Mauni Amavasya, considered one of the most auspicious days during the mela. Opposition leaders in Uttar Pradesh targeted the Adityanath government over the stampede. BSP supremo Mayawati said the incident was saddening and worrisome. West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee offered her condolences to the bereaved families. Ms Banerjee in a post on X emphasised the need of “maximal planning



A devotee attempts to cross a barricade amid restrictions after a “stampede-like” situation broke out at the Sangam in Prayagraj on Wednesday. — PTI

and care” to handle huge assemblies such as the Kumbh, citing her experience of organising the annual Gangasagar Mela in West Bengal. Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren also offered

his condolences to pilgrims who lost their family members in the stampede. Mr Soren hoped that the Union government would investigate the incident thoroughly and take necessary steps to prevent such accidents in the

future. “We all must learn from such tragedies and ensure proper safety arrangements in the future so that such incidents do not happen again,” he said. Mr Kharge said the news of “many people losing their lives” and many getting injured due to the stampede on the banks of the Tirthraj Sangam during the Maha Kumbh is extremely heart-breaking. “Our deepest condolences to the families of the devotees and we wish for the speedy recovery of the injured,” he said. “Half-baked arrangements, VIP movement, paying more attention to self-promotion, and mismanagement are responsible for this. Such arrangements despite spending thousands of crores of rupees are condemnable,” the Congress chief said in a post in Hindi on X. — PTI

Devotees stopped at MP border, denied UP entry

AGE CORRESPONDENT BHOPAL, JAN. 29

Thousands of Prayagraj-bound devotees were on Wednesday stopped at the border of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh following the early morning tragic incident in Maha Kumbh, in which over 30 people died. The devotees were stopped at various “holding points” created by the police in the Jhiria toll plaza-Chakghat route in Madhya Pradesh’s Rewa district, to deny them entry into Uttar Pradesh, officials said. “The Prayagraj route is closed”, Rewa sub-divisional officer of police Udit Mishra said. Official reports said a long queue of stranded vehicles on the 25km Madhya Pradesh-Uttar Pradesh route was witnessed, following the decision to stop the devotees pouring into Prayagraj from the MP side.



Sadhus take a holy dip at the Sangam on Mauni Amavasya during the ongoing Maha kumbh in Prayagraj on Wednesday. — PTI

‘Sudden surge of devotees led to stampede’

Mahakumbh Nagar, Jan. 29: Shoes, slippers and clothes scattered at the site speak about the chaos that unfolded at the Sangam area of the Maha Kumbh early Wednesday. Devotees recounted the horrific incident, saying people were pushing each other to take a dip at the auspicious time on Mauni Amavasya. Several people were killed and many injured in the stampede which took place at around 2 am, as crores of pilgrims jostled for space to take the holy dip. Going by eyewitness accounts, one of the reasons for the tragedy was the sudden surge of pilgrims at the Sangam, who had gathered at the Maha Kumbh from across the country, all driven by an obvious desire to take the holy dip at 3 am, the start of the auspicious hour.

Many devotees had patiently waited for the auspicious hour. Several of them were sitting on the ground, and some were even lying down near the ghats. The bathing site was barricaded. “Past midnight, a sudden surge of devotees led to barricades coming apart, and in the melee many people who were sleeping or sitting on the ground were run over,” said Madhumita, a devotee from Assam who claimed to have witnessed the tragedy. Badama Devi, an elderly woman from Bihar’s Begusarai, broke down while recounting the tragedy, saying she had come to the Maha Kumbh to take the dip at the propitious moment. “We knew that this moment would not come again in our lifetime, and that is why we had travelled from so far and waited all

We were aware that this sacred moment was coming after 144 years. None of us wanted to miss it. Scores of devotees were lying on the ground waiting for the auspicious hour to begin to take the dip. A sudden crowd pressure escalated that led to tragedy.

— Ram Sumiran
Maha Kumbh devotee

this while to be able to take the bath in the Ganga at the auspicious moment,” she said. “*Laagta hai Ganga Mai ka ihai manzoor rahan* (it seems that mother Ganga willed it so),” Ram Sumiran from Palamu, Jharkhand, reflected on the stampede. “We were aware that this sacred moment was coming after 144

years. None of us wanted to miss it. Scores of devotees were lying on the ground waiting for the auspicious hour to begin to take the dip. A sudden surge out of nowhere led to a stampede. Many were got trampled, as crowd pressure escalated after barricades collapsed,” he said. “Scattered shoes, slippers, and clothes at the site speak about the chaos that unfolded,” said Sumiran, who was still in a state of shock. He said that many people waited for long not just for the auspicious hour to take the dip but also to catch a glimpse of Naga sadhus. Before the tragedy, a video of the Prayagraj divisional commissioner Vijay Vishwas Pant urging devotees to take precautions has now gone viral. — PTI

Aug. 27, 2003 39 people were killed and around 140 injured in a stampede during the holy bath at the Kumbh Mela in Maharashtra’s Nashik district.



Jan. 25, 2005 Over 340 devotees were trampled to death and hundreds injured during an annual pilgrimage at the Mandhardevi temple in Maha’s Satara district. The accident occurred when some people fell down on the steps made slippery by the devotees breaking coconuts.



Aug. 3, 2008 62 dead, 47 injured in a stampede triggered by rumours of rock-slides at the Naina Devi temple in Himachal Pradesh’s Bilaspur district.

Sept. 30, 2008 Nearly 250 devotees were killed and over 60 injured in a stampede triggered by rumours of a bomb going off at the Chamunda Devi temple in Rajasthan’s Jodhpur city.

March 4, 2010 About 63 people were killed in a stampede at the Ram Janki temple of Kripalu Maharaj in UP’s Pratapggarh district, as people gathered to collect free clothes and food from the self-styled god-man.

PREVIOUS TRAGEDIES

The religious congregation at the Maha Kumbh turned into a nightmare as 30 were killed and 60 injured when crores of pilgrims jostled for space to take a holy dip on the occasion of Mauni Amavasya. However, this tragic event is not unique. Here is a list of some previous tragedies:

July 2, 2024: More than 100 people were killed after a stampede broke out at a ‘sat-sang’ organised by self-styled godman Bhole Baba aka Narayan Saakar Hari in UP’s Hathras.

March 31, 2023 At least 36 people died when the slab constructed on top of an ancient ‘bawdi’ or well collapsed during a havan held on the occasion of Ram Navami at a temple in Indore city.

Jan 1, 2022 At least 12 people died and over a dozen were injured in a stampede at the famous Mata Vaishno Devi shrine in J&K, triggered by a heavy rush of devotees.

July 14, 2015 27 pilgrims were killed and 20 others were injured in a stampede at a major bathing spot on the banks of the Godavari river on the opening day of ‘Pushkaram’ festival in Andhra Pradesh’s Rajahmundry



Oct. 3, 2014 32 people were killed and 26 injured in a stampede at Gandhi Maidan in Patna, shortly after the Dussehra celebrations ended

Oct. 13, 2013 115 people were killed and over 100 injured in a stampede during the Navratri festivities near Ratangarh temple in MP’s Datia district

Nov. 19, 2012 Around 20 people were killed and many others injured as a makeshift bridge caved in, triggering a stampede during the Chhath Puja at Adalat Ghat on the bank of the Ganga river in Patna

Nov. 8, 2011 At least 20 were killed in a stampede in Haridwar at the Har-ki-Pauri ghat

Jan. 14, 2011 At least 104 Sabarimala devotees were killed and over 40 were injured in a stampede when a jeep crashed into homebound pilgrims at Pulmedu in Kerala’s Idukki district.



Maha mantri seeks ban on burqa during exams

BHAGWAN PARAB MUMBAI, JAN. 29



Nitesh Rane

In a move which is likely to snowball into a major controversy, Maharashtra minister Nitesh Rane has demanded a ban on wearing burqa during the Class 10 and 12 state board examinations. He has expressed concerns that the full-body covering could facilitate cheating and the smuggling of unauthorised materials into examination halls. Mr Rane has written a letter to school education minister Dada Bhuse saying that allowing female candidates to wear a burqa inside examination halls could lead to malpractices and also create security issues. “If examinees are allowed to wear burqas, it will be difficult to determine whether electronic devices or other means are being used to cheat. In case of any untoward incident, it could lead to social and law-and-order issues, affecting many students,” said the BJP minister.

Mentioning that his government will not tolerate the politics of appeasement, he wrote, “The rules that are applicable to Hindu students, the same should apply to Muslim students as well. Those who want to wear a burqa or hijab can wear it at their homes but at examination centres, they should write their exams like other students. There have been incidents of cheating and copying in cases where students were wearing a burqa. All this should not happen in Maharashtra so I have written a letter to the concerned minister.” Students appearing for the board exams should not be permitted to wear a burqa. If necessary, female police officers or female staff should be appointed to conduct checks.

PSLV takes the cake with 62 launches Isro hits a century, vows 100 more missions in next 5 yrs

Sriharikota (Andhra Pradesh), Jan. 29: The Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) on Wednesday achieved a historic milestone with its 100th mission, and revealed an ambitious future plan of crossing the next 100 launches in five years. Starting off with the SLV in 1979, the space agency crossed the 100-mission mark after 46 years, but what stands out is the PSLV’s dominance through the years with 62 missions. The Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) has turned out to be Isro’s most trusted rocket, thanks to its unmatched reliability. While the PSLV has been used for 62 missions, the GSVL with indigenous cryogenic upper stage comes next with 17. LVM3 (Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle



Isro’s GSLV-F15 lifts off from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh, on Wednesday. — PTI

MkIII — the heaviest rocket) with 7 and SSLV (Small Satellite Launch Vehicle) 3, follow suit. The others are Reusable

Launch Vehicle, TV (Test Vehicle) and PAT (Pad Abort Test). The PSLV, often dubbed as the “trusted workhorse of Isro” by scientists, has been used consistently to inject various satellites into precise low earth orbits. The vehicle, which is 44.4 metre tall, is equipped to take payloads of up to 1,750 kg to Sun-Synchronous polar orbits of 600 km altitude. However, on account of its unmatched reliability, Isro said the PSLV was also used to launch various satellites into Geosynchronous and Geostationary orbits, like satellites from the IRNSS constellation. The PSLV comes in four variants — PSLV-CA, PSLV-DL, PSLV-QL, PSLV-XL. The first launch of PSLV was PSLV-D1 launched on September 20, 1993. — PTI

SC: Give data on FIRs against men who invoked triple talaq

RAKESH K. SINGH NEW DELHI, JAN. 29

The Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the Centre to furnish data on FIRs and chargesheets filed against men for pronouncing instant triple talaq to divorce spouses in contravention of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights in Marriage) Act 2019. The direction came from a bench of Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar while hearing petitions challenging the constitutional validity of the 2019 Act. “We want the list of cases all over India where FIRs are filed. Now in all states, FIRs are centralised. Just give us a list of that... We will examine the data,” CJI Khanna told solicitor-general Tushar Mehta, who appeared for the Centre. The SC was hearing a clutch of petitions filed by various Muslim individuals and outfits challenging

SC urges govt for legal framework to safeguard domestic helps’ rights

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JAN. 29

The Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the Centre for a legal framework to provide a safeguard to domestic workers observing their rights. A bench of Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan said, “The simple reason for this harassment and rampant abuse, the constitutional validity of the 2019 Act that criminalises the practice of instant triple talaq. “The respondent (Centre) shall file the total number of FIRs and chargesheets pending under Sections 3 and 4 of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights of Marriage) Act 2019. The

which seems to be prevalent throughout the country, is the legal vacuum that exists vis-a-vis the rights and protection of domestic workers.” “Indeed, domestic workers in India remain largely unprotected and without any comprehensive legal recognition. As a result, they frequently endure low wages, unsafe environments, and extended hours without effective recourse,” the bench added. parties must also file written submissions not exceeding three pages in support of their contention,” the bench said. The SC asked the Centre and other parties to file written submissions to the pleas and posted the matter for final hearing in the week commencing March 17.

SHORT TAKES

NCB destroys ₹300cr drugs seized in MP

New Delhi: The Narcotics Control Bureau has destroyed nearly 4,000 kilograms of drugs, valued at ₹315 crore, seized in multiple cases in Madhya Pradesh, the officials said here on Wednesday. The agency move came after the direction of the Union home minister Amit Shah to launch the nationwide drug disposal programme under the Centre's zero tolerance policy against the drugs menace, the NCB officials said. Under this programme, the NCB's Bhopal zonal unit on Tuesday destroyed various seized drugs weighing nearly 1,000 kg and valued at more than ₹270 crores, they further said. Apart from this, the NCB's Indore zonal unit destroyed around 3,000 kg of the seized contraband of more than ₹45 crore, they added. Chairing a regional conference of the agency on January 11 here, Mr Shah had launched the 'Drug Disposal Fortnight' wherein one lakh kilograms of seized narcotics worth about ₹8,600 crore to be destroyed by the various zonal offices of the agency.

29 Naxals surrender in C'garh Narayanpur

Narayanpur: Twenty-nine Naxalites surrendered in Chhattisgarh's Narayanpur district on Wednesday, an official said. The cadres belonging to Kutul area panel of Maoists turned themselves in before the police, BSF and ITBP officials here citing disappointment with the "hollow" Maoist ideology and growing internal differences within the banned outfit, Narayanpur SP Prabhat Kumar said. They also said they are influenced by the development work being carried out in Maad area of Narayanpur, including rapid construction of roads, and said they wanted to lead a normal life henceforth, he said. The surrendered cadres were active as members of Janatana Sarkar, militia, Chetna Natya Mandli and lower rungs of Maoists, he said, terming development as a success for forces. With this, 71 senior and lower cadres have surrendered so far in the district since January 2024. — PTI

JPC adopts Waqf Bill,

■ **Continued From Page 1**

poor, women and orphans have been included among beneficiaries of the waqf, an endowment made by Muslims for charitable religious purposes.

However, one of the main concerns of the Opposition was the appointment of non-Muslims on the Waqf Board, which they claimed was violative of Article 26 of the Constitution that granted citizens freedom to manage their religious affairs, including establishment and maintenance of institutions for religious and charitable purposes.

TMC MP Kalyan Banerjee claimed the observations and recommendations of the committee were "wholly perverse".

He claimed statements of witnesses and the observations of the MPs were not taken into account.

"The committee was duty bound to consider witnesses and our statements. But that did not happen. The proceedings turned into mockery. Why was this JPC constituted in the first place? The report indicated it was made with a predetermined mind by the ruling side. What is the use of the whole exercise if this outcome was predetermined?" said Mr Banerjee.

According to the amendments accepted by the committee, the state Waqf Boards will now include one member from the Muslim OBC community, ensuring broader representation. It also has provisions that allow the state government to establish separate Waqf Boards for Aghakhani and Bohra communities and safeguard women's inheritance rights in Waqf Alal Aulad (family waqfs). The amendments also allow the income from Waqf Alal Aulad to support widows, divorced women, and orphans, if specified by the waqif (creator of the waqf).

The BJP members, however, said the bill seeks to bring modernity, transparency and accountability in the management of Waqf properties. "This report is a significant document that empowers the Muslim community," BJP MP Tejasvi Surya said.

Canadian inquiry finds no foreign link in Nijjar killing

Backs India, says Trudeau's allegations unsubstantiated

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 29

A Canadian commission's report has said that no definitive link to a foreign state in the murder of Khalistani separatist Hardip Singh Nijjar could be proven, thus vindicating India's stand claiming it has no role in his killing.

The Public Inquiry Into Foreign Interference in Federal Electoral Processes and Democratic Institutions in its final report said this while talking about disinformation being used as a retaliatory tactic to punish decisions that run contrary to a state's interests. The report said this may have been the case with a disinformation campaign that followed former PM Justin Trudeau's announcement regarding suspected Indian involvement in the

killing of Nijjar.

Nijjar, a Canadian citizen, was killed in Vancouver in June 2023, triggering a diplomatic crisis after Mr Trudeau accused "agents" of India of being involved. He claimed "credible information" had been shared with intelligence partners, including the US. India has vehemently denied these allegations.

While the report alleged India of spreading disinformation on Nijjar's killing, it also mentioned that Canada could not find a link to a foreign state on his killing.

"India responded not only by declaring a Canadian official persona non grata but by lifting the diplomatic immunity of 41 Canadian diplomats in India, effectively expelling them. India may also have launched a disinfor-

mation campaign against Trudeau," the report said.

The report further said India perceives Canada as not taking India's national security concerns about Khalistani separatism seriously. "India focuses its foreign interference activities on the Indo-Canadian community and on prominent non-Indo-Canadians to achieve its objectives. This interference has targeted all levels of government.

Like the PRC, India conducts foreign interference through officials and proxies in Canada. A body of intelligence indicates that proxy agents may have, and may continue to be, clandestinely providing illicit financial support to various Canadian politicians.

India has rejected the claim on its interference in electoral processes.

'Unconstitutional': SC junks domicile PG medical quota

'Such reservations would undermine quality of education, healthcare'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 29

In a significant verdict, the Supreme Court on Wednesday held that domicile-based reservations in PG medical seats is unconstitutional for being violative of Article 14 of the Constitution which deals with the right to equality. A three-judge bench comprising Justices Hrishikesh Roy, Sudhanshu Dhulia, and S.V.N Bhatti delivered the verdict.

Reading out the operative part of the judgment, Justice Dhulia said, "We are all domiciles in India and there is no provincial domicile... This gives us a right to pursue trade across India. The benefits of reservation in education to those who reside in

SC directs hospitals to regularise docs' absence during R.G. Kar stir

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 28

The Supreme Court on Wednesday directed hospitals, including AIIMS, New Delhi, to regularise the unauthorised absence of doctors that were part of the protests against the rape and murder of a trainee doctor at R.G. Kar Hospital, Kolkata.

"Taking note of the submissions of a doctors' body that some hospitals had regularised the absence of the doctors, following its August 22, 2024 order, but a few others,

certain areas can be given only in MBBS in some

including AIIMS, Delhi, decided to treat the period as leave of absence, a bench comprising Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar said, "We deem it appropriate to clarify that if protesting workers had joined work post the Supreme Court order then their absence shall be regularised and not be treated as absence from duty."

This is issued in peculiar facts and circumstances of the cases and is not laying down any precedent."

cases. But reservation in higher levels on the basis

of residence is violative of Article 14."

The apex court noted that some degree of domicile-based reservation in undergraduate (MBBS) courses after Neet UG might be permissible, it categorically stated that this should not extend to PG medical courses due to their specialised nature. The top court held that such reservations would undermine the quality of education and healthcare in India.

The top court clarified that the judgment would not affect any domicile-based reservations that have already been granted for PG medical admissions. Existing policies will remain intact but future admissions in Neet PG will be governed by the new legal framework.

UP tableau bags 1st prize, Tripura 2nd

J&K Rifles best marching contingent

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 29

Uttar Pradesh's tableau, showcasing the ongoing Maha Kumbh during the Republic Day Parade 2025, won the first prize. The marching contingent of J&K Rifles was adjudged the best among the three services. Tripura's tableau, with the theme "eternal reverence," won second prize among tableaux from states and UTs, as per defence ministry.

The tableau from Andhra Pradesh, which showcased eco-friendly wooden toys, was adjudged the third-best. The government had constituted three panels of judges to assess the performance of marching contingents and the tableaux from various states, UTs and departments.

The best marching con-

tingent among CAPFs/other auxiliary forces was Delhi police marching contingent. The best tableau from ministries/departments was from ministry of tribal affairs (Janjatiya Gaurav Varsh).

In addition, an online poll was conducted on the "MyGov" portal from January 26 to 28 for the citizens to vote for their favourite tableau and marching contingents as "popular choice category."

Under this the best marching contingent among services was the signals contingent and from CAPFs it was the CRPF marching contingent.

The top three tableau (States/UTs) was first Gujarat (Swarnim Bharat: Virasat Aur Vikas), second Uttar Pradesh and third Uttarakhand (Uttarakhand: Cultural Heritage and Adventure Sports).

Govt okays ₹10K-cr Pinaka system deal for Indian Army

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 29

To add punch to India's defence, the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) on Wednesday cleared a ₹10,000-crore ammunition deal for the Pinaka multi-barrel rocket launcher systems for the Army. The CCS has cleared two types of ammunition: area denial munitions and Pinaka enhanced range rockets.

The deal is likely to be signed before the end of the current fiscal year i.e. March 31. Army Chief Gen. Upendra Dwivedi in his annual press conference on January 13 had said that the contract for Pinaka weapon systems munitions, including ₹5,700 crores for high-explosive ammunition and ₹4,500 crores area denial munitions, were expected to be cleared soon by the government.

Proposals expected to generate over 12.88 lakh employment opportunities: CM Odisha attracts ₹16.73L-cr investment proposals

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, JAN. 29

The Utkarsh Odisha-Make in Odisha Conclave 2025, held in Bhubaneswar, has set an unprecedented benchmark by securing a staggering ₹16.73 lakh crore in investment intents—far surpassing its initial target of ₹5 lakh crore. With 595 proposals spanning across 20 sectors, the conclave has proved to be a resounding success.

Speaking to the media about the outcome of the landmark event, chief minister Mohan Charan Majhi expressed immense

pride in the overwhelming participation and the massive investment interests shown by global and domestic investors. He highlighted that 145 investment-related memorandum of understanding (MoUs) were signed during the summit.

"The Utkarsh Odisha-Make in Odisha Conclave 2025 has exceeded expectations in every way. We saw unprecedented investor participation, and the volume of investment proposals has been remarkable. Prominent business magnates from across the globe have not only committed to setting up new projects but

► **THE INVESTMENTS** cover sectors such as chemicals and petrochemicals, textiles, mining and metallurgy, renewable energy, IT/ITeS, tourism, food processing

also expanding their existing operations. The proposed investments cover diverse sectors such as chemicals and petrochemicals, textiles, mining and metallurgy, renewable energy, IT/ITeS, tourism, and food processing."

The CM added that once the investment proposals come to fruition, they are expected to generate over

12.88 lakh employment opportunities, further boosting Odisha's economy and industrial landscape.

The ₹16.73 lakh crore in investment commitments made at the 2025 conclave sets a new record, surpassing the total investment proposals garnered in the previous three editions of the summit. In past conclaves, the Odisha government, under the leadership of former chief minister Naveen Patnaik, secured investment proposals of ₹2.03 lakh crore in 2016, ₹4.19 lakh crore in 2018, and ₹10.5 lakh crore in 2022.

Rahul, Kharge slam Modi & Kejriwal

■ **Continued From Page 1**

classes, minorities, and the poor. He also challenged Mr Kejriwal to drink water from the Yamuna.

The LoP said he and his party do not fear Prime Minister Narendra Modi and on the contrary, "the PM is afraid of the Congress" and asserted that the Congress is a party with an ideology and does not make false promises.

Addressing an election rally in Bawana, Mr Gandhi slammed AAP over the issue of the Yamuna river pollution, saying, "Arvind Kejriwal once promised to clean the Yamuna and drink its water. Today, I challenge him — go and drink Yamuna water. You make Delhi residents drink contaminated water; but if you try it, we will meet you in the hospital."

Recalling the legacy of former Delhi chief minister Sheila Dikshit, he said, "During Sheila ji's tenure, roads were built and development took place because we never made false promises. But both Kejriwal and Modi mislead people 24/7." Notably, Sheila Dikshit's son, Sandeep Dikshit, is contesting against Mr Kejriwal in the New Delhi constituency.

Upping the ante, he attacked Mr Kejriwal with the "sheesh mahal" jibe and said that though he talked about clean governance, the "biggest scam" in Delhi took place under his watch.

The LoP said he used to move around in a small car wearing a muffler and claim that he will do clean politics but the biggest scam in Delhi, worth crores of rupees, was done by his party and his people.

He also accused both Mr Modi and Mr Kejriwal of opposing reservations and being against the interests of Dalits, minorities, and backward communities. "Kejriwal should say clearly that he would get caste surveys done and breach the wall of 50 per cent cap on reservation, but he will not do so as he is against Dalits, backwards and minorities. When riots were taking place, where was he? Did he stand with you?" Mr Gandhi said.

"When our government comes to Delhi, we will do a caste census. I had said that we will breach the wall of 50 per cent cap on reservations. We will break down this wall," the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha reiterated.

Taking a swipe at the media, he said that instead of focusing on real issues,

it only shows Ambani's wedding, Modi's face and talk of hatred 24x7. He also claimed that no matter what people do, they will not get employment under Mr Modi and Mr Kejriwal governments.

"We have to open shops to spread love in Modi's market of hate," Mr Gandhi said, adding that people can see his past speeches and they will not be able to point out even one lie in his remarks.

"I and the Congress party never lie, we had said loans will be waived off, there will be a caste census, women will get free bus rides in Karnataka, Telangana. These promises were fulfilled by the Congress (in these states). Whenever any citizen in India is attacked, tortured or faces injustice, Rahul Gandhi is seen standing there to help," he said.

PM slams 'poison in Yamuna' claim

■ **Continued From Page 1**

turnout at his rally despite Wednesday being a working day. The PM also condoled the death of 30 pilgrims at the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj.

Addressing an impressive rally in Trans-Yamuna's Kartar Nagar, the PM accused the AAP of committing a "sin" that history, the people of Haryana and the country will not forget. "A former CM (Arvind Kejriwal) has made malicious allegations against the people of Haryana. Is Haryana different from Delhi? Don't they have children and relatives in Delhi? Will they mix poison for their own people?" Mr Modi said.

He said, "The people of Delhi, the PM and other dignitaries, diplomats and judges staying in Delhi drink the same water from Haryana. Can anyone contemplate to poison Modi, the BJP government in Haryana has mixed poison in the water? It is in Indians' character to forgive mistakes but neither Delhi nor India forgives sins committed with ill intention.

"The holy Yamuna river will swallow the AAP in the polls for ruining its course", Mr Modi said, indicating the shifting sands against the ruling party in the city due to its failures, misgovernance and neglect of the river at the altar of city residents.

He said that during the last two elections, the AAP

asked for votes on the promise of cleaning the Yamuna and now it asserts that the issue does not yield votes. "They (AAP government) want to make people struggle for water and compel the Purvanchalis to perform chhathi maiya's puja surrounded by garbage in Yamuna," he said.

Mr Modi also trashed the AAP's claim over schemes, saying: "They're claiming that the BJP will end welfare schemes. But the BJP has never stopped any schemes which were for the benefit of the people, even if they came from the Congress."

Lashing out at the AAP over the corruption issue, the PM said: "Those who built 'Sheesh Mahal' and those who looted public money worth thousands of crores of rupees can never think of the welfare of the poor. That is why they (AAP leaders) are spreading lies in Delhi. These AAP-da people speak lies with such innocence that people get trapped." The "sheesh mahal" refers to the extravagant renovation of the CM's residence when Mr Kejriwal was living there.

Mr Modi asserted that the BJP has promised to roll out schemes which will benefit all sections of society.

"When a BJP government is formed, all promises made to people by the party will be fulfilled in a time-bound manner; this is Modi's guarantee, this is Modi's guarantee. Modi's guarantee means the guar-

antee of fulfilling a guarantee," he said.

Delhi has made it clear that now excuses, fake promises as well as "loot and lies" of the "AAP-da" government will not work. Mr Modi said, as he made a fervent appeal to voters to give him a chance to serve after 25 years of Congress and AAP governments.

"This is the 21st century and its 25 years have passed. The first 14 years of the 21st century you have seen... The Congress government and then for 11 years you saw the AAP-da government but Delhi's problems have remained (unresolved). For 25 years, they have destroyed two generations. Who can take people out of such circumstances... Not Modi but one vote of yours," he said, cautioning people that the AAP and the Congress have secretly formed an alliance.

Urging people to give the BJP a chance, Mr Modi said: "I will take care of you like a family member, your dream will be my dream and I will put in all efforts to fulfil your dreams. The BJP has a track record of fulfilling its promises."

"This shows the mood of Delhi and is an indication of the mandate. Delhi is saying now that excuses, fake promises and loot and jhooth of AAP-da will not work. People of Delhi want a double-engine government that works simultaneously on the welfare and development of Delhi," he added.

30 killed in stampede at Maha Kumbh

■ **Continued From Page 1**

belongings were seen scattered on the ground.

The chaos unfolded when people were bathing at the sacred Ganga Sangam. Suddenly, a commotion broke out, and in the midst of some confusion, many were separated from their companions. One eyewitness recalled hearing the sound of ambulance sirens blaring through the continuous chants of mantras in every direction, signaling the emergency situation, as the police arrived to manage the growing crisis. All that remained visible were police vehicles and ambulances, amidst the silence that followed the chaos.

Those injured were taken by the security personnel and rescue workers on stretchers to the central hospital established in the Kumbh Mela area. Some seriously injured people were taken to Bailey Hospital and Swaroop Rani Medical College for treatment.

Sharing their heart-wrenching accounts of the stampede, a devotee from Deoria district described the moment he was about to bathe in the Sangam when the crowd became overwhelming. After hearing a loud noise, he looked back and realised his wife, Poonam Devi, had gone missing. Despite extensive search, he was unable to trace her.

A woman from Bihar said she was taking a dip in the Sangam when the stampede occurred, causing her to lose sight of her 52-year-old grandmother. "I have been searching for her since midnight and won't leave until I find her," she said, her voice trembling. She described the scene as one of total pandemonium, with nothing but the sound of ambulance sirens filling the air.

The CM said the incident took place between 1 am and 2 am when some devotees climbed over the barricades at Akhara Marg. "Between 1 am to 2 am, at the akhara route where arrangements were made for the Amrit Snan of the akharas, some devotees crossed over the barricades and were critically injured. They were immediately rushed to hospital where treatment was promptly ensured," he said after a high-level meeting in Lucknow.

On the Amrit Snan, Mr Adityanath said a consensus has been reached with the akharas that they would take the holy dip only after the crowd pressure has decreased at the ghats. "I have personally spoken to Akhara Parishad heads and other seers, including Maha Mandaleshwars and the respected saints have politely agreed to let devotees take the dip and only after the crowd pressure decreases will they take the dip," he said. "Our first priority is to ensure the safety of devotees," the CM said, adding "the situation in Prayagraj is under control but the crowd pressure is still there." He said about 9-10 crore people are in Prayagraj and appealed to devotees to take a dip in the Ganga at their nearest ghats and not try to reach the Sangam Nose to avoid overcrowding. "The elderly, children and asthma patients need to be extremely cautious and bathe at ghats nearest to them. All are Ganga ghats and all would get the same 'punya' (divine blessings) onk Mauni Amavasya," he added.

Describing the tragedy as extremely sad, President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union home minister Amit Shah and several leaders offered their deepest condolences to the

devotees who lost their family members in the stampede. In a post on X, Mr Modi said the local administration in Prayagraj is giving all possible help to the victims and wished a speedy recovery to the injured.

Later, at a poll rally in New Delhi, Mr Modi said, "We lost some good souls in the tragic incident at Kumbh and some people have also got hurt. I convey my condolences to the families of those who lost their lives and pray for the early recovery of those injured." "I am in constant touch with the Uttar Pradesh government. Due to

'Mauni Amavasya', crores of devotees have reached there. "For some time, the process of bathing had been halted, but now for several hours, the yatris are taking a bath. I once again convey my condolences to the families," he said.

The Congress, however, blamed "half-baked" preparations and "focus on self-publicity" for the stampede. Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi said the news from Prayagraj was heart-rending. "Poor management and prioritising VIP movement over ordinary pilgrims is responsible for this tragic incident," he said, adding that the government should make proper arrangements to prevent a recurrence of such an incident. "VIP culture should be checked and better arrangements must be made for the pilgrims," Mr Gandhi said.

Hoping for the swift recovery of those injured, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said in a post on X: "Half-baked preparations, VIP movement and a focus on self-publicity instead of management is responsible for this. Such preparations despite spending thousands of crores are condemnable."

THE ASIAN AGE

30 JANUARY 2025

More kids in school, but ASER flags issues to ‘fix’

The findings of the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2024, brought out by a non-governmental organisation, with the help of state government agencies and educationists, have come out as a mixed bag. While it paints a rosy picture of the progress the nation has made towards educating its children, it also points at certain major lapses and holes which the governments need to check and plug. Findings in the report also support the demand for higher governmental involvement in education, especially at the lower level.

The most encouraging part of the report is that enrolment of children aged 3-5 years at the pre-primary level has gone up steadily between 2018 and 2024. The figure for the three-year-olds has gone up from 68.1 per cent to 75.8 per cent and some states, such as Gujarat, Maharashtra, Odisha and Telangana, have achieved near-universal enrolment. The figures have gone up in other age groups as well. Karnataka, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Kerala and Nagaland have enrolment exceeding 90 per cent in pre-primary institutions.

The study brings to light an important result that governmental interventions in education have made happen over the decades: Anganwadi centres remain the go-to place for Indian children in the pre-primary age group and they serve more than half of all children aged between three and four years. It was widely feared that Covid-19 pandemic was a disruptor in education, especially for the poorer sections of society. It now transpires that technology has helped those children continue with their education. Access to gadgets, their use and digital skills have all reported positive trends. True, only half of the children aged between 14 and 16 years use smartphones for education, but they offer a ready channel through which quality education can reach an otherwise neglected section of the population. Technology has indeed proved to be the great leveller.

One important trend that the survey has spotlighted is that children who have left private schools and joined government-owned ones during the pandemic have reversed their choice once the threat vanished. The pandemic made education of their wards in private schools unaffordable for many parents but they revised their choice as soon as they got the chance. This could be a reflection on the quality of education and infrastructure in government schools. Private education is here to stay but the Union and state governments which spend precious resources running schools must introspect why those become a second choice for the most important category of people they intend to serve — the students. The report is a reminder that the nation must provide not only its resources but also political will in a more focused manner on educating its children if it pins its growth prospects on the so-called demographic dividend.

Fishing in troubled waters

Not a week goes by without Indian fishermen, mostly from Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, being arrested by personnel of the Sri Lankan Navy and arraigned before courts in northern Sri Lanka. Events follow a pattern with the Tamil Nadu and Puducherry chief ministers writing to the external affairs minister urging him to get the fishermen and their boats released. Not often in the last few years has the Sri Lankan Navy fired on fishermen crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line and fishing in Lankan waters closer to Katchatheevu, the island that was gifted to Sri Lanka by India when Mrs Indira Gandhi was Prime Minister.

Events around the Indian Republic Day with arrests of fishermen and seizure of boats escalated to Navy personnel opening fire on fishermen on January 28. New Delhi's view of the festering problem may vary from that held in Fort St George in Chennai, but the perennial problem of arrests by the Sri Lankan Navy and, occasionally, by the Pakistan Navy off the coast of Gujarat, has never had a satisfactory solution. True, Indian fishermen are generally harassed only when they cross the IMBL and fish in foreign waters where the catch may be better simply because those waters have not been overfished.

This overreaction of the Lankan Navy, charging TN and Pondy fishermen of acting aggressively, is a bigger embarrassment presently after India and Sri Lanka reset their ties post-Sri Lankan economic crisis and scaled them up further after the new government took office. While emotions have tended to run high over the issue, particularly with the gifting of Katchatheevu in Palk Strait, solutions lie in gearing up our fishermen to go deep sea fishing rather than cross the IMBL while refusing to give up the practice of bottom trawling that is deleterious to marine life.

The issue may be complicated, but Sri Lanka must train its Navy to respect the fishermen's hazardous livelihood and not indulge in trigger happy confrontations. On its part, India can do a far better job of funding its fishermen with navigation aids and better Coast Guard support in helping to keep them within the IMBL. Deep sea fishing in international waters would be the ultimate solution. That would take money and political will.

THE ASIAN AGE

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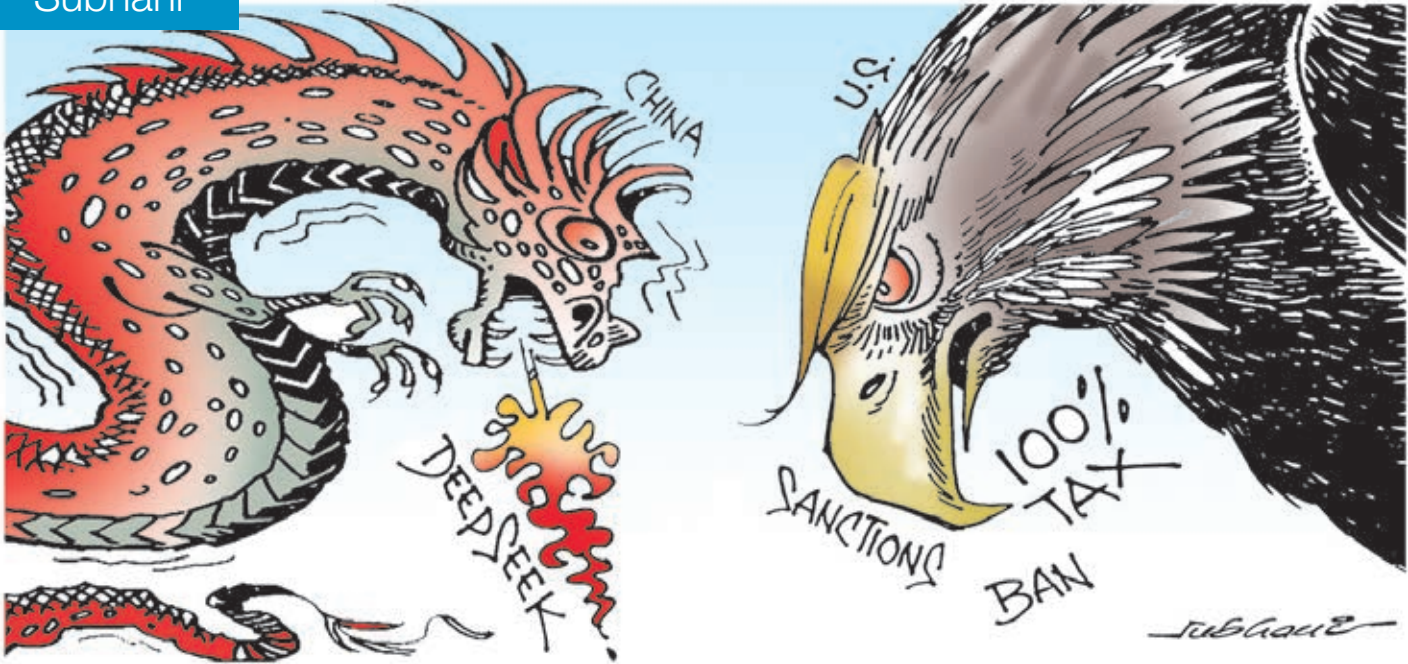
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Subhani



Conflicts fester, statecraft missing as Republic is 75



Shikha Mukerjee

The Republic is now 75 years old. It's not a peaceful republic, even though it's better off, in terms of poverty and hunger, than in 1950. Peaceful is not how India is at the borders on the east, west and north; peaceful is not how it is within these borders.

Between 1950 and now, the country has acquired internal opponents who have used the force of arms to fight whatever causes they believe in against the immensely powerful State. Successive elected governments, including the one headed by Narendra Modi, have used force against such enemies of the State and then realised that force alone cannot resolve conflicts and bring peace.

Talking pays better dividends if the search is for a long-lasting solution. The festering conflicts, some that have festered for decades, have their reasons for being as tenacious as they are. This is not to argue those reasons are right and the State, represented by the elected government, today and in the past, are or were wrong. This is to argue that the resolution of conflicts is the responsibility of whoever is in power, at the national level or in the states. A militarist solution thrown at a militarist movement does not address the problem, which is fundamentally political. That may cover many reasons, from a clash of ideologies, to a clash over identities such as belonging to a nation different from India or a clash over policies.

The Maoists, the separatist movements in Nagaland, the liberation movement in Assam, among Bodos, Karbis and Kamtapuris, and in Mizoram, Manipur, the Khalistanis in Punjab, have been around for decades. The response of successive governments

has been to use force against them. The spiral of violence had its peaks and troughs, but it hasn't gone away, regardless of the asymmetry of resources between armed insurrectionists or extremists and the State.

The current fragile ceasefire in the genocidal war in Gaza waged by Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu government is a reminder that the use of force isn't a solution, especially in a republic, as the State's enemies cannot be annihilated, for "the last enemy to be destroyed is death". The grandstanding of the "Operation Finish" variety, setting a 2026 deadline by when armed Maoist conflict against India will end, is unbecoming of a government that has vowed to uphold the Constitution and ensure "that our journey is rooted in democracy, dignity and unity", though the word "peace" is noticeably absent in the lineup.

To uphold the Constitution, including India's integrity, the Narendra Modi government has to use statecraft that involves a mix of tactics as a combination adding up to a sophisticated strategy that is appropriate to a route that is democratic and dignified. The way democracy works is through dialogue and a capacity to respect the views of the other side, even enemies of the State, in order to hammer out a deal, perhaps unsatisfactory to both sides, but a deal nevertheless that achieves the objective of a peaceful and negotiated end to conflict, as all parties to it are citizens, within the borders of India.

To deal with an intractable problem and what was deemed as irreconcilable differences, the Modi 1.0 government in 2015 engaged in talks with the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Mulivah) to end insurgency. Though the draft

The Maoists, the separatist movements in Nagaland, the liberation movement in Assam, among Bodos, Karbis and Kamtapuris, and in Mizoram, Manipur, the Khalistanis in Punjab, have been around for decades

framework to find a solution to a "political conflict of two sovereign entities" seems to be failing and the NSCN-IM has warned of resumption of armed resistance against India, the fact is the Modi 3.0 government is still trying to talk even as the military and special security forces continue to operate in the area.

The combination of intimidation and persuasion has been how governments in the past have dealt with volatile and violent internal security issues. Past governments would use force and open up channels to negotiate a peace, be it with the Asom Gana Parishad-United Liberation Front of Assam, the Maoists, the Khalistanis in the 1980s and 1990s, the Naga, Mizo, Bodo, Manipuri insurgents and other organised movements for specific demands.

In the 10 years of the United Progressive Alliance, the Maoists were reckoned to be the "great internal security threat". Special security units trained in counter-insurgency were set up in undivided Andhra Pradesh and now in Telangana, too. Other states also set up special counter-insurgency units. Eleven years later, the Maoists are still there; the special counter-insurgency units and the police are battling the Maoists in Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Maharashtra and keeping watch on such people-supported movements in Bihar and Jharkhand.

As people's movements are deeply embedded for decades, it is improbable that the State, represented by the Modi government, can "finish" off the organisations that spearhead them. Apart from being grassroots entities, they are organically grown

insurrections against State policies, mainstream politics and ideologies of the right, the centre and the left, as well as social hierarchies and economic liberalism.

Organised peoples' protests, be it fisherfolk on the east and west coasts, tribal communities living in forest areas or in places coveted by, for instance, the mining industry, farmers with small and marginal landholdings or commercial scale farms, living in areas impacted by development like railways, roads and dams, all have a reason to get into a confrontation with the government in power. These movements are not illicit; people, that is, citizens, invest their time and their lives to confront the government for reasons that cannot be rejected because these are not aligned with the views of the government.

The renewal of the farmers' protest movement, the surge in the number of deadly conflicts between the police and Maoists, the unresolved conflicts in the Northeast, including in Manipur and Nagaland, the series of protests along India's coasts against ports, pipelines and other such "development" activities, are signs that the successive Modi governments over 10 years have not worked out a conflict resolution strategy. People's protest movements can be aggressive or relatively peaceful. How the government responds to these protests is key to the resolution of or escalation of the conflict. In order to resolve the fairly long list of unresolved internal conflicts, the Modi 3.0 government has to create a new repertoire of responses.

To do so would require, among other things, confidence building in its trustworthiness, patience and a willingness to give as well as take, instead of opting for the "might is right" attitude that it uses in dealing with the Opposition in the legislative space. Statecraft, or the art of the possible, is not Narendra Modi's strength; the absence of such skills is his weakness.

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist based in Kolkata

LETTERS

VIP DARSHAN

When all are equal in the eyes of God, what is the need for VIP darshan? Those who are in charge of the administration of religious places of worship and devotion would do well to answer the question. At all such religious occasions, one can find the VIPs strutting like royalty while the others are made to wait for hours. Something similar has happened at the Kumbh Mela where the politicians were able to take the holy dip but ordinary devotees were made to walk for hours only to be told that gates were closed and entry was denied due to presence of VIPs. God cannot be pleased with this kind of partisan treatment of his creations.

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

RELIGION KILLS

EVEN BEFORE the two incidents of stampedes that took place in Hyderabad and in Tirupati in recent months could die away from our memories, the nation has witnessed yet another stampede at Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj where around 30 people have reportedly been killed when devotees had gathered in large numbers in the wee hours yesterday to take a holy dip. Kumbh Mela has witnessed several deadly incidents in the past. Deadly crowd crushes are becoming a regular feature in India, especially during religious festivals, and the Kumbh Mela, with its unfathomable throngs of devotees, already had a grim track record of deadly crowd crushes before the latest incident.

R. Sivakumar
Chennai

CYNICAL POLITICS

IF A POLL comes, Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh Insaan cannot be behind bars. The rape and murder convict has been released from jail after being granted a 30-day parole — just a week before the Delhi Assembly elections. The BJP has been out of power in Delhi for the past 26 years. Looking to turn the tables on AAP at long last, the saffron party is going the whole hog in wooing voters. Ram Rahim can do his bit by working behind the scenes.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal



Kavita Bhatnagar

How we need to redefine our entire approach to healthy eating

We all aspire to eat healthy, but what does "healthy" really mean? For some, it's a diet rich in vegetables and fruits. For others, it's about balance, moderation, or even accessibility. However, healthy eating isn't just about the food itself — it's about cultivating a sustainable and mindful eating pattern that supports overall well-being. The definition of "healthy" is deeply personal and varies based on individual needs, cultural influences, and even life stages.

Food abundance encourages indulgence, while many health conditions demand eating less. For someone with anorexia or recovering from illness, the challenge is eating more, even in a world urging restraint. A competitive athlete has vastly different dietary needs compared to someone working at a desk job. This paradox highlights the need for compassion and tailored approaches to nourishment.

But "healthy eating" isn't just about individual meals. It's about the bigger picture: our overall diet, our habits, and how food fits into our lives. Health itself is multidimensional. Beyond physical well-being, it includes mental and social health. Food affects all these areas. So, when we strive to "eat healthy," we need to expand our understanding beyond nutrients and calories to include our mindset and emotions around food.

Food doesn't just fuel us; it connects us to culture, community and comfort. Yet, as much as it is vital,

it shouldn't control us. A healthy relationship with food is essential. And just like in any good relationship, we need boundaries. Food should enhance our quality of lives, not diminish it. Here are five actionable steps to eat healthy, holistically and sustainably:

1. Tune into your hunger and satiety cues. Our body sends us signals about hunger and fullness, guiding us toward balance. How many times have you eaten when you weren't hungry or kept eating when you were already full? Pay attention to hunger and fullness cues. Ask yourself: Are you eating because you're physically hungry or because you're bored, stressed, or sad? There's no shame in emotional eating, but recognising it allows you to make intentional choices.

Start by observing how different foods make you feel. Does your breakfast keep you energised until lunch, or leave you crashing mid-morning? Does a particular meal feel satisfying, or does it leave you craving more? By listening to your body, you can begin to identify patterns and make adjustments. 2. Healthy eating isn't about "good" or "bad" foods. It's about the sum total of what you eat over time. No single food will make or break your health. Instead of obsessing over cutting out certain items, focus on adding variety and balance. A healthy diet typically includes whole grains, enough proteins, healthy fats, and plenty of fruits and vegetables. But it also

allows for occasional indulgences. Deprivation often leads to bingeing, so give yourself permission to enjoy your favourite treats in moderation.

Think of your diet as a fabric, where each meal is a thread. Together, these threads weave the larger tapestry of your health and well-being. One meal high in sugar or fat is not necessarily "unhealthy" if the rest of your week is balanced.

3. Food is more than just fuel, it's tied to celebrations, tradition and memories. A bowl of gajar ka halwa might remind you of your grandmother; a slice of pizza might evoke feelings of joy.

Healthy eating doesn't mean stripping food of its emotional significance. However, emotional eating can become problematic when it's your only coping mechanism. Recognise when you're turning to food for comfort, and explore other ways to address your emotions. Talking to a friend, or taking a walk can provide relief without over-relying on food.

4. Create clear boundaries: Just as healthy relationships thrive on boundaries, so does your relationship with food. Boundaries aren't about rigid rules or extreme restrictions; they're about making intentional choices that support both your immediate needs and long-term goals.

Instead of labelling foods as "good" or "bad", consider this question: "Does this food serve me right now, and does it align with my bigger picture?" What feels right at the moment may not fully align

with your long-term goals, and that's okay. Awareness, not perfection, is what fosters balance and growth. Boundaries can also mean learning to say no: to unnecessary second helpings, to fad diets that promise quick fixes, or to societal pressures to eat a certain way. Honour what works for you.

5. Be kind to yourself. Perhaps the most overlooked aspect of healthy eating is self-compassion. We often set unrealistic expectations for ourselves, aiming for perfection and beating ourselves up when we fall short. Life is unpredictable. Some days, you'll cook a nutritious home-made meal. Other days, you'll grab fast food because you're exhausted. Neither defines your worth or your health. Celebrate small victories, like drinking more water or adding an extra serving of vegetables to your plate. Healthy eating is about consistency, not rigidity. Remember: Eating healthy is a journey, not a destination. It's about finding what works for your unique body and life.

By focusing on the big picture, listening to your body, you can create a sustainable, joyful relationship with what you eat. Healthy eating isn't about being perfect; it's about nourishing yourself in every sense of the word.

Dr Kavita Bhatnagar is a food scientist, dietician and India's first eating behaviour psychologist. She is the author of The Power of Imperfect Eating and a Harvard alumnus.

SHORT TAKES

ACCIDENTAL
FIRING INJURED
INDIANS: LANKA

Colombo, Jan. 29: Two Indian fishermen who sustained serious injuries during the apprehension of 13 Indian fishermen in the proximity of Delft Island were injured by accidental firing during their arrest by the Sri Lankan Navy, the island's top naval official said on Wednesday.

Vice Admiral Kanchana Banagoda, the Commander of the Sri Lanka Navy, said that according to initial investigations, the two Indian fishermen were injured due to the accidental discharge of a firearm by a Navy personnel.

UK BACKS THIRD
RUNWAY AT
LONDON AIRPORT

Eynsham, England, Jan. 29: Britain's Labour government will back the construction of a third runway at London's Heathrow Airport to boost trade and economic growth, finance minister Rachel Reeves said.

Successive governments have dithered over whether to expand the site to the west of London, with politicians and the legal system caught between the need to build more capacity and concerns around the impact on pollution.

Reeves said the case for a third runway at Heathrow, one of the world's busiest hubs, was stronger than ever.

META DATA
PRACTICES FACE
MORE SCRUTINY

Luxembourg, Jan. 29: US tech giant Meta's data gathering operations in Europe face further scrutiny after a EU court on Wednesday told Irish authorities they have a duty to probe the firm's processing of sensitive data.

The European General Court dismissed an appeal by Ireland's data protection agency, which in 2022 was ordered to investigate whether Meta's handling of sensitive data is in line with EU rules — but has been reluctant to do so.

The ruling stems from a case initiated in 2018 by privacy campaigning group Noyb.

75 ROHINGYA
BLOCKED ON
INDONESIA BEACH

Jakarta, Jan. 29: At least 75 Rohingya refugees arrived by boat at a tourist beach in western Indonesia on Wednesday, but were stopped by authorities from disembarking, local officials said.

The mostly Muslim Rohingya are heavily persecuted in Myanmar — their predominantly Buddhist homeland — and thousands risk their lives each year on long and dangerous sea journeys to reach Malaysia or Indonesia.

The latest group of refugees, including four children, arrived on a beach in Aceh province at 2 pm.

H5N1 BIRD FLU
REPORTED ON
LITHUANIA FARM

Paris, Jan. 29: Lithuania has reported an outbreak of highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza, commonly called bird flu, on a laying hen farm in the western part of the country, the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) said.

The outbreak killed 20,000 birds out of a flock of 2,46,387 in the Silute district, the Paris-based body said, quoting information from Lithuanian authorities. All remaining birds were culled. The spread of avian influenza, commonly called bird flu, has raised concerns among governments and the poultry industry.

PAK PREZ SIGNS
CYBERCRIME BILL
INTO LAW

Islamabad, Jan. 29: Pakistan's controversial cybercrime law became effective in the country on Wednesday after President Asif Ali Zardari formally endorsed it, ignoring protests by the media groups.

The Prevention of Electronic Crimes (Amendment) Bill 2025 was passed by the Senate on Tuesday. The law initially was enacted in 2016 and commonly known as Peca (Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act).

The changes in the old law sparked protests by the media organisations which denounced it.

Trump freeze on fed grants,
loans temporarily blocked

WH says ready to fight in court; Brazil to set up deportee reception centre

Washington, Rio de Janeiro, Jan. 29: The White House said on Wednesday it was prepared to fight in court after a US judge temporarily blocked part of the Trump administration's sweeping directive to pause federal loans, grants and other financial assistance.

"Everything this administration does is within the confines of the law, so we're prepared to fight this battle in court," White House spokesperson Karoline Leavitt told reporters outside the White House.

On Tuesday, the Brazilian government said it will create a reception centre for deported migrants from the United States following controversy over conditions on a recent deportation flight.

President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva gave the green light to establish a humanitarian reception post at Confins, a municipality in Minas Gerais state, Brazil's minister of human rights and citizenship Maca Evaristo told journalists in Brasilia.

The Trump administration plan plunged the US government — and states and organisations that rely on federal funding — into panic and confusion and set the stage for a constitutional clash over control of taxpayer money.

The order from US District Judge Loren L. AliKhan came minutes before the funding freeze was scheduled to go into effect on Tuesday afternoon. The administrative stay, prompted by a lawsuit brought by nonprofit groups that receive federal funds, lasts until Monday afternoon and applies only to existing programmes.

Administration officials said the decision to halt loans and grants — a financial lifeline for local governments, schools and nonprofits — was necessary to ensure that spending complies with Trump's recent blitz of executive or-



People protest against a funding freeze of federal grants and loans following a push from President Donald Trump to pause federal funding near to the White House in Washington, on Tuesday.

— AP

80% GREENLANDERS DON'T WANT TO BE PART OF U.S.: POLL

AN OPINION POLL indicated that 85% of Greenlanders do not wish their Arctic island - a semi-autonomous Danish territory — to become a part of the United States, with nearly half saying they see interest by US President Donald Trump as a threat.



ROBERT F. KENNEDY JR., President Donald Trump's pick to lead the top US health agency, is set to face a grilling from Senate Democrats and Republicans on Wednesday over his views on vaccines, abortion, and potential conflicts of interest.

NORTH KOREAN leader Kim Jong Un inspected a facility that produces nuclear material and called for bolstering the country's nuclear fighting capability, state media reported Wednesday, as the North looks to increase pressure on the United States following the inauguration of President Donald Trump.



THE TRUMP Administration has announced that it will allocate seats in the White House press briefing room to representatives from "new media" outlets, including podcasters, social media influencers, and content creators.

8 MONTHS' PAY
BUYOUTS FOR
FED. WORKERS

Washington, Jan. 29: The Trump administration announced on Tuesday that it is offering buyouts to all federal employees who opt to leave their jobs by next week — an unprecedented move to shrink the US government at breakneck speed.

A memo from the Office of Personnel Management, the government's human resources agency, also said it would begin subjecting all federal employees to enhanced standards of suitability and conduct and ominously warned of future downsizing. The email sent to millions of employees said those who leave their posts voluntarily will receive about eight months of salary, but they have to choose to do so by February 6.

— AP

MADONNA: SAD
GOVT DISMANTLING
ALL FREEDOMS

Los Angeles, Jan. 29: Pop icon Madonna has criticised the Donald Trump administration for its decision to remove protections for transgender people and end diversity, equity and inclusion efforts.

It's the latest push by Trump to reverse policies set by ex-president Joe Biden's government to protect transgenders and their care. Madonna, a longtime advocate for the LGBTQ community, expressed her disappointment in an X post on Wednesday.

"It's so sad to watch our new Government slowly dismantling all the Freedoms we have been fighting for and WON over the years. Don't give up the Fight!" she wrote.

— PTI



Tents are set up next to houses destroyed by Israeli bombardment in Beit Lahia, in northern Gaza Strip, on Wednesday, after Israel began allowing Palestinians to return to the heavily damaged area.

— AP

Trump invites
Bibi next week

Wadi Gaza, Jerusalem, Jan. 29: Israel said that a total of eight hostages, three Israelis and five Thais, were to be freed from Gaza on Thursday.

The three Israelis were Arbel Yehud, Agam Berger and Gadi Moses, the office of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Wednesday.

Amid this development, US President Donald Trump has invited Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to the White House next week as the first foreign leader to visit in Trump's second term, Netanyahu and the White House said on Tuesday.

It came as the United States pressures Israel and Hamas to continue a ceasefire that has paused a devastating 15-month war in Gaza. Talks about the ceasefire's more difficult second phase, which aims to end the war, begin next Monday.

The White House letter shared by Netanyahu's office, dated Tuesday, said I look forward to dis-

EXPLOSIVES FOR
ANTI-SEMITIC
PLOT SEIZED IN OZ

Sydney, Jan. 29: Australian authorities said on Wednesday they had seized explosives stored in a caravan in greater Sydney possibly intended for a "mass casualty" anti-Semitic attack.

More than 100 officers were investigating after the discovery 10 days ago in the semi-rural suburb of Dural, police said. "That caravan contained explosives and some indication that those explosives might be used in some form of anti-Semitic attack," New South Wales police deputy commissioner David Hudson told a news conference.

— AFP

cussing how we can bring peace to Israel and its neighbours, and efforts to counter our shared adversaries.

— Agencies



Rescuers of the State Emergency Service work to extinguish a fire in a building after a drone strike in Kharkiv, on Wednesday.

— AFP

Aussie 'killed' in
Ukraine is alive

Sydney, Jan. 29: An Australian national reportedly killed after his capture by Russian forces in Ukraine is "alive and in custody", foreign minister Penny Wong said on Wednesday.

In a development, Ukrainian investigators have opened a criminal case involving defence minister Rustem Umerov, a move likely to deepen a standoff in his ministry over arms procurement that could strain Kyiv's ties with important Western allies.

Umerov said last week that the DPA, which coordinates weapons purchases, had failed to deliver results for Ukrainian forces, comments that brought ministry infighting over arms procurement out into the open.

"The Australian government has received confirmation from Russia that

Oscar Jenkins is alive and in custody," she said in a statement.

"We still hold serious concerns for Jenkins as a prisoner of war." In December, video emerged of Jenkins — who fought with Ukrainian forces — being questioned and slapped in the face by a man speaking Russian.

"The government calls on Russia to release Jenkins," Wong said.

"If Russia does not provide Jenkins the protections he is entitled to under international humanitarian law, our response will be unequivocal," she said.

"We have made clear to Russia in Canberra and in Moscow that Jenkins is a prisoner of war and Russia is obligated to treat him in accordance with international humanitarian law, including humane treatment," she said.

— Agencies

Killer of ex-suspect in
1985 AI bombing jailed

Ottawa, Jan. 29: A Canadian court has sentenced a 24-year-old man to life after he pleaded guilty to the killing of a Sikh businessman, a suspect in the 1985 Air India bombing who was later acquitted, according to local media reports.

A British Columbia Supreme Court judge on Tuesday sentenced Tanner Fox to life with no parole for 20 years for killing the Sikh businessman Ripudaman Singh Malik, the CBC news reported.

On July 15, 2022, Malik was shot dead while he was sitting in his car in Surrey, British Columbia.

Malik and co-accused Ajaib Singh Bagri were acquitted of mass murder and conspiracy charges in 2005 related to the Air India bombing that killed 329 people on board.

Two weeks after Malik's murder, Canadian police arrested Fox, a resident of Abbotsford, British Columbia, a city about 75 km east of Vancouver, and accomplice Jose Lopez, from the Vancouver suburb of New Westminster.

They pleaded guilty in October last to the second-degree murder of Malik. Lopez will be sentenced on Friday.

— PTI

B'desh to discuss
India 'unfair deals'

Dhaka, Jan. 29: Bangladesh interim government's home affairs adviser Lt Gen (Retd) Md Jahangir Alam Chowdhury on Wednesday said all "unequal agreements" made with India during the tenure of ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League will be discussed.

Addressing a press conference on the upcoming border conference between the chiefs of India's Border Security Force and Border Guard Bangladesh, he accused Indian nationals in border areas of manufacturing drugs and smuggling them across the border. The *Dhaka Tribune* newspaper reported. "They manufacture Phensedyl and smuggle it into Bangladesh. Although they claim to produce it as medicine, it is actually made as a narcotic," Chowdhury was quoted as saying.

He said any activity within 150 yards of the border requires mutual approval from both sides and added that there is no provision for unilateral action. The adviser added that if a mosque or temple is to be built for devel-

AWAMI LEAGUE
GIVES PROTEST
CALL IN FEB.

New Delhi, Jan. 29: Ousted ex-prime minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League has announced a series of protests demanding the resignation of Muhammad Yunus-led interim government for its "oppression" of Hindus in Bangladesh. This is the first major demonstration by the Awami League, whose leaders have either been arrested or underground since the fall of the Hasina-led government on August 5 last year.

— PTI

opment purposes, the consent of both countries is necessary. "Emphasis will be placed on ensuring that such consent is obtained in the future," he said. Chowdhury said discussions will be held during the conference regarding stopping alleged border killings and shooting at unarmed Bangladeshi citizens at the border.

— PTI

South Korean airplane
fire leaves seven injured

Seoul, Jan. 29: Seven people sustained mostly minor injuries in Tuesday's airplane fire in South Korea, authorities said on Wednesday, with local media suggesting the blaze may have been caused by a portable battery stored in the overhead bin.

The Air Busan plane, an Airbus A321, was set to fly to Hong Kong from Gimhae International Airport in southeastern Busan but caught fire in the rear section on Tuesday night, according to the country's transport ministry.

A total of 169 passengers and seven flight attendants and staff were evacuated down inflatable slides, it said. Authorities initially reported three injuries but revised the number to seven on Wednesday.

"One of them is currently hospitalised," the ministry added. "The accident left nearly half of the fuselage burnt but its wings and engines on both sides remain undamaged. The cause of the fire is currently under investigation. It is unclear when we will be able to disclose the investigation findings," it said.

— AFP



Firefighters and other officials visit the site where an Air Busan airplane caught fire at Gimhae International Airport in Busan, on Wednesday.

— AP

SOUTH SUDAN PLANE CRASH KILLS 20

Nairobi, Jan. 29: A small aircraft carrying oil workers in South Sudan's Unity State crashed on Wednesday, killing 20 people, an official said.

The plane crashed at the Unity oilfield airport on Wednesday morning as it was heading to the capital Juba, Gatwech Bipal, Unity State's information minister, said.

Bipal said the passengers were oil workers of the

Greater Pioneer Operating Company (GPOC) a consortium that includes China National Petroleum Corporation and state-owned Nile Petroleum Corporation. He said among the dead were two Chinese and one Indian.

Bipal gave no more details on the circumstances that led to the crash. Media reports had initially put the death toll at 18.

— Agencies

LUNAR | NEW YEAR

It is Spring Fest in China, Tet in Vietnam, Seollal in Korea

Year of Snake underway around world

Beijing, Jan. 29: Lunar New Year festivals and prayers marked the start of the Year of the Snake around Asia and farther afield on Wednesday — including in Moscow.

Hundreds of people lined up in the hours before midnight at the Wong Tai Sin Taoist temple in Hong Kong in a bid to be among the first to put incense sticks in the stands in front of the temple's main hall.

"I wish my family will be blessed. I hope my businesses will run well. I pray for my country and wish peo-

ple peace. I hope this coming year is a better year," said Ming So, who visits the temple annually on the Lunar New Year eve.

The holiday — known as the Spring Festival in China, Tet in Vietnam and Seollal in Korea — is a major festival celebrated by diaspora communities around the world. The snake, one of 12 animals in the Chinese zodiac, follows the just-ended Year of the Dragon.

The pop-pop-pop of firecrackers greeted the new year outside Guan Di tem-

ple in Malaysia's capital, Kuala Lumpur, followed by lion dances to the rhythmic beat of drums and small cymbals.

Ethnic Chinese holding incense sticks in front of them bowed several times inside the temple before sticking the incense into elaborate gold-coloured pots, the smoke rising from the burning tips. Many Chinese who work in bigger cities return home during the eight-day national holiday in what is described as the world's biggest annual movement.

— AP



Dragon dancers perform during celebrations of Lunar New Year in Moscow, on Tuesday.

— AP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	76,532.96	0.83
Nifty 50	23,163.10	0.90
S&P 500*	6,055.76	-0.20
Dollar (₹)	86.55	0.01
Pound Sterling (₹)	107.50	0.20
Euro (₹)	90.05	0.28
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	80,556.267	0.33
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	76.93	-0.72
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.683	0.002
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.532	-0.017

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Indian Bank Q3 net profit up 35% to ₹2,852 crore

Indian Bank on Wednesday reported a 35 per cent increase in net profit at ₹2,852 crore for the third quarter ended December 2024, helped by core income. The bank had earned a net profit of ₹2,119 crore in the same quarter a year ago. Its total income increased to ₹17,912 crore from ₹16,099 crore a year ago, Indian Bank said. The interest income also rose to ₹15,759 crore during the quarter under review.

Ambuja Cements reports net profit of ₹2,620 cr in Q3

Ambuja Cements on Wednesday reported a consolidated net profit of ₹2,620.09 crore for third quarter ended December 2024. It had reported a net profit of ₹1,090.73 crore a year ago. Its consolidated revenue from operations was ₹8,415.31 crore during the December 2024 quarter. It was ₹8,052.4 crore in year-ago period. The company's consolidated sales volume stood at 16.5 million tonnes during the quarter.



De Beers to open 15 Forevermark stores this year

De Beers, a global leader in the diamond industry, on Wednesday said it will foray into the retail segment with the opening of 15 Forevermark brand stores in India this year. De Beers India managing director Amit Pratihari said the plan is to establish 100 retail stores by 2030 with a revenue target of \$1 million. "We will open the 15 stores, eight in Delhi and the rest in Mumbai this year," Pratihari said.

Sony appoints Hiroki Totoki as chief executive

Sony Group is appointing Hiroki Totoki as chief executive officer (CEO), a stamp of approval for the longtime finance chief's push to expand the Japanese company's entertainment reach. Along with outgoing CEO Kenichiro Yoshida, Totoki helped steer the technology conglomerate to focus on growing its entertainment offerings. Yoshida will remain as chairman of the board, Sony said in a statement.

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Govt for balancing act as tax expectations rise

Middle class, youth, farmers, elderly, MSMEs likely to be central

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, JAN. 29

As anticipation builds for Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's Budget presentation on February 1, expectations are high across various sectors. The government is expected to maintain its reform agenda while balancing relief measures for the middle class, youth, farmers, elderly, and small businesses. Additionally, new initiatives in artificial intelligence (AI) are reportedly in the pipeline to drive economic growth.

Consumption, Taxes The government aims to stimulate consumption demand. It could potentially adjust income tax slabs in the new tax regime and increase exemptions. Measures could include raising deductions for health and life insurance premiums and allowing voluntary NPS contributions as deductions in the new tax regime. Industry leaders are pushing for relief for salaried individuals, with speculation that the old tax regime may be phased out and income up to ₹10 lakh could become tax-free.

GDP, fiscal strategy Gross domestic product (GDP) grew 5.4 per cent in Q2 2024-25 (a seven-quarter low from 8.1 per cent in the same period last year).



STRESS OF UNSECURED LOANS TO INCREASE BANK NPAs: FITCH

FC BANKING BUREAU MUMBAI, JAN. 29

Increasing stress in unsecured retail loan portfolios could pose a challenge to asset quality of Indian banks in 2025, according to Fitch Ratings. The global ratings agency anticipates that despite an overall decline in the sector's impaired-loan ratio, new bad loans could see a notable rise. Fitch has projected that Indian banks' impaired-loan ratio will drop by 40 basis points to 2.4 per cent for FY25, with a further 20-basis-point improvement in FY26. However, new bad loans in FY25 and FY26 are expected to be 25 per cent higher than in FY24, driven primarily by rising defaults in unsecured retail lending. "Rapid retail lending growth in recent years - in particular, for unsecured loans - has heightened medium-term risks. However, we still expect the sector's impaired-loan ratio to fall in FY25-FY26, driven by robust loan growth, as well as recoveries and write-offs, which are expected to offset the increase in fresh bad loans," said the rating agency.

KEY TERMS GDP: TOTAL VALUE OF ALL GOODS AND SERVICES PRODUCED DURING A YEAR. IT IS ABOUT ₹4 L-CR.

TOTAL RECEIPTS: Government's income from various sources, excluding any loans or borrowings. For FY25, total receipts are estimated at ₹32 lakh cr.

The government is expected to project a higher growth rate in the Economic Survey. Key fiscal measures will likely include rationalising subsidies, boosting nominal GDP, and increasing revenue through consumption revival. Economists stress the need for policies that encourage private investment while maintaining fiscal discipline.

Capex and infra push The 2024-25 Budget allocated ₹48.2 lakh crore (8.5 per cent higher than the previous year), with infrastructure receiving ₹11.1 lakh crore (3.4 per cent of GDP). This year, capital expenditure is expected to

TAX REVENUE: Income tax, GST, customs duties make up tax revenue. Interest on loans, dividends from PSUs, fees for services is non-tax revenue.

FISCAL DEFICIT: Gap between the government's total expenditure and its total receipts. The fiscal deficit for 2024-25 is targeted at 4.9% of GDP.

TOTAL EXPENDITURE: This encompasses all spending by the government, including on sectors like defense, infrastructure, and social services. The total expenditure for 2024-25 is projected to be ₹48.21 lakh crore.

increase further, focusing on infrastructure, railways, defense, and social sectors, with the goal of job creation and economic expansion.

Inflation and fiscal prudence With inflation concerns persisting - 5.48 per cent in November after hitting a 14-month high of 6.21 per cent in October - the government is expected to take additional measures beyond the RBI's efforts to maintain inflation within the 2-6 per cent target range. Food price inflation remains a key challenge. Fiscal prudence will also be a focus, given risks like a weakening rupee and declining FDI. The gov-

NET TAX REVENUE: Taxes after accounting for transfers to states. For 2024-25, it is estimated at ₹25.83 lakh crore.

CAPITAL EXPENDITURE: Funds used to acquire or maintain fixed assets, such as infra projects. About ₹11.11 lakh cr allocated in 2024-25.

ernment is targeting a fiscal deficit below 4.5 per cent of GDP for 2025-26, down from 5.6 per cent in 2023-24 and an estimated 4.9 per cent for the current fiscal year.

Defence sector Given ongoing military tensions, particularly at the LAC with China, defense spending will be a key focus. Last year's defense budget stood at ₹6.2 lakh crore, the highest among ministries, with a 5 per cent increase from ₹5.94 lakh crore. This year, further increases are expected, particularly in capital expenditure for indigenous weapon procurement under the Atma Nirbhar Bharat initiative.

Markets shed 2% in Jan.

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JAN. 29

Market recovered from recent sell off for a second consecutive session with close to one per cent gain for Nifty-50 and Sensex ahead of Thursday's monthly equity derivatives expiry. Badly hit broader markets made sharp gains with the BSE small-cap index up 3.28 per cent and BSE mid-cap index up 2.54 per cent. The Sensex gained 631.55 points or 0.83 per cent to close at 76,532.96 while Nifty-50 index gained 0.90 per cent or 205.85 points closing at 23,163.10. Sensex and Nifty-50 are down little over two per cent in January now in line with the last five year trend when the market has been cautious ahead of Union Budget, said analysts in a Budget preview. "Presently, benchmark Nifty-50 index has fallen more than 2.7 per cent so far in January, which is

BEARISH TREND

- Broader markets made sharp gains with BSE small-cap index up 3.28% and BSE mid-cap index up 2.54%.
- Sensex gains 631 pts to close at 76,532.96 while Nifty-50 rises 205 points to end at 23,163.

- Benchmark indices are down little over 2 per cent in Jan.
- Nifty IT index gains 2.6%, mirroring rebound in US equities as AI-linked stocks staged a recovery.

consistent with the stock market's one-month performance before the budget in last five years," said Siddharth Bhamre, head-Research, Asit C Mehta Investment Intermediates. This trial signals that markets would be 'cautious' in light of fiscal announcements where investors are wary about the potential policy impacts, Bhamre said. But volatile moves may continue, said a Budget preview research note by Motilal Oswal Financial

Services (MOFSL). "Nifty 50 index has recorded its fourth consecutive monthly decline, something that has not happened in the last 23 years. The last time Nifty fell for four straight months was in 2001," MOFSL said. "IT and financial stocks gained ahead of the US Fed's interest rate decision late on Wednesday and the Union Budget on Saturday," said Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Research, MOFSL.

MS, OpenAI probing DeepSeek data source

Redmond (US), Jan. 29: Microsoft and OpenAI are investigating whether data output from OpenAI's technology was obtained in an unauthorised manner by a group linked to Chinese AI start-up DeepSeek, according to people familiar with the matter. Microsoft's security researchers in the fall observed individuals they believe may be linked to

DeepSeek exfiltrating a large amount of data using the OpenAI application programming interface, or API, said the people. Software developers can pay for a license to use the API to integrate OpenAI's proprietary artificial intelligence (AI) models into their own applications. Microsoft, an OpenAI technology partner and a noted investor, notified OpenAI of the activity, the

people said. Such activity could violate OpenAI's terms of service or could indicate the group acted to remove OpenAI's restrictions on how much data they could obtain, the people said. DeepSeek earlier this month released a new open-source AI model called R1 that can mimic the way humans reason,



CRITICAL MINERAL MISSION GETS CABINET'S NOD

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, JAN. 29

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the national critical mineral mission (NCMM) at a cost of ₹16,300 crore and an addition of ₹18,000 crore from PSUs and other companies, envisaging a total outlay of ₹34,300 crore spread over seven years to establish a framework for self-reliance in this space to accelerate green energy transition.

Besides, it also cleared the administrated ex-mill price of ethan-ol derived from C Heavy Molasses at ₹57.97 per litre, under the ethan-ol blended petrol programme, earlier it is ₹56.58 per litre. Information and broadcasting minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said that the mission aims to reduce the dependence on import of critical minerals and ensure self-reliance. "The major objectives of this mission are to increase exploration, reduce import dependence, acquire mineral blocks overseas, develop technologies for processing of critical minerals and recycle the minerals," minister said. The mission will intensify the exploration of critical minerals within the country and in its off-shore areas.

HOLIDAY HOMES TURN VIABLE INVESTMENTS FOR HNIs: REPORT

SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, JAN. 29

The interest in high net-worth individuals (HNIs) in the Indian real estate market has moderated in 2025 from 2024 levels. In the real estate sector, the outlook among UHNIs and HNIs has moderated, with 62 per cent planning to invest in the next 12-24 months compared to 71 per cent in 2024, finds the survey by India Sotheby's International Realty. A rising interest in second and holiday homes was seen with 54 per cent of respondents considering properties in hill or beach destinations. HNIs and UHNIs remain motivated by capital appreciation, with 55 per cent citing it as their main reason for investing in luxury residential real estate in 2025, up from 44 per cent in 2024.

Divestment plans need Budget push



Anitha Rangan

In 2024, India topped the global IPO market with nearly 27 per cent volume share and second after the USA with a 16 per cent share in value (\$19.9 billion). It would have been only natural that the government too should have used this opportunity to speed up its divestment plan. But such is not the case. The budget of February 2021 presented a strategic divestment policy with the objective of "minimising presence of central government public sector enterprises (CPSEs) including financial institutions and creating new investment space for private sector".

As per that plan, in all non-strategic sectors CPSEs would be privatised. Four years since, we have been awaiting progress. At least in FY21 and FY22, divestment targets were ₹2.1 and ₹1.8 trillion, although what was achieved was 15-8 per cent of the target. In FY23-25 even the divestment plan has been only ₹600 billion with achievement of 50 per cent. A similar slow trend would likely continue into FY26 as the center increases focus on enhancing the intrinsic value of state-owned com-

panies over outright asset sales with the expectation of making them more competitive, especially with a coalition government at play.

While Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has done some heavy lifting with its dividend in the last two years and may be able to disperse another large dividend this year (FX sales, lower provisions), reliance on RBI is not prudent as central bank is not a revenue generating institution for government.

Government must fast track the divestment plan if it needs large chunks of revenue to spur capex for growth especially as parts of tax revenues may fall short. RBI dividend cannot be counted as a sustainable income, especially if spending needs continue to grow larger than revenue and fiscal consolidation needs to be addressed as well.

Despite the divestment strategy announced in 2021, actuals have been lacklustre. For speeding up capex spending and bringing growth to its potential, capex needs to grow at two times of GDP growth. FY25 YTD (Apr-Nov'24) divestment is only 18 per cent of BE.

Expect FY25 divestment to be approximately ₹150 billion to the ₹500 billion of BE. For FY26, while estimate a conservative ₹400 billion, a higher target will certainly bring cheer. A push on divestment will help the capex/GDP ratio to improve over 3 per cent.

(The writer is economist at Equirus)

Maruti Q3 net rises 16% to ₹3,727 cr

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, JAN. 29

Maruti Suzuki on Wednesday reported a 16 per cent year-on-year (YoY) jump in its consolidated net profit for Q3FY25, reaching ₹3,726.9 crore, up from ₹3,206.8 crore in the same quarter last year. Total consolidated revenue from operations for the December quarter rose 15.7 per cent YoY to ₹38,764.3 crore from ₹33,512.8 crore in December quarter of FY24. On a standalone basis, the company's profit rose 13 per cent YoY to ₹3,525 crore from ₹3,130 crore in

the same quarter last year. Maruti said it registered the highest-ever net sales of ₹36,802 crore during the quarter against ₹31,860 crore in the same period the previous year. The company sales rose nearly 13 per cent year over year. It sold 5.66 lakh vehicles during the quarter, compared to 5.01 lakh units a year ago. In the domestic market, it sold 4.66 lakh units in the quarter against 4.29 lakh units in last year's same quarter. It exported 99,220 units in the quarter which was the highest-ever in any quarter.



McLAREN SELLS 50 CARS IN INDIA SINCE LAUNCH IN 2022

New Delhi, Jan. 29: Bullish on the Indian market, British supercar maker McLaren is looking to cash in on the growth opportunity in the country having crossed the cumulative sales milestone of 50 units, according to a top official of the company's distributor. Since officially entering the Indian market in 2022, McLaren, which sells high-end supercars priced ₹6.5 crore onwards, feels that in 2025 it can perform better than what it achieved last year, said Lalit Choudhary, dealer principal of McLaren Mumbai. "We have crossed the 50 car mark (cumulatively) which is quite a bit for us. It is a good number to achieve in a period of three years for a brand like McLaren," he said. Reflecting on 2024, Choudhary said it was a good year partly on account of continued momentum on the high luxury segment. —PTI

NEW | HELP

Monetising investments in AI infrastructure continues to remain challenge to AI firms

ChatGPT nets \$529 mn as AI apps spend hits \$1.4 bn

San Francisco, Jan. 29: OpenAI's ChatGPT is leading a major surge in spending on artificial intelligence apps and services on smartphones. The seminal chatbot has grossed \$529 million since its release as a mobile app in early 2023, nearly four times the second-highest earner, according to a new report by Appfigures. The market researchers saw artificial intelligence (AI) apps spending nearly quadruple in 2024 over the prior year — to \$1.4 billion — and accelerated in the final quarter of the year.

The \$2 billion market opportunity is driven by consumers in the US, who have contributed about half of all AI app sales to date. Assistant apps, such as ChatGPT and the globally disruptive DeepSeek, are by far the most popular category of AI apps, Appfigures found. Eight of the 10 most downloaded AI apps and the entirety of the top 10 earners were chatbots over the past two years, the data showed. Since July, ChatGPT has earned more each month than the aggregate rev-

- 8 of 10 most downloaded AI apps and top 10 earners were chatbots in last two years.
- Arrival of DeepSeek may cast some doubt on ChatGPT's growth.

enue of all other top assistant apps across Apple Inc.'s iPhone App Store and Alphabet Inc.'s Android Play Store. The arrival of DeepSeek

DIGITAL ASSISTANTS

- Revenue across categories of AI apps exploded in 2024, with an average 862% growth across segments.

may cast some doubt on ChatGPT's growth, though it was welcomed by OpenAI Chief Executive Officer Sam Altman, who said it was

"invigorating to have a new competitor." Altman and other industry leaders, including chipmaker Nvidia Corp., see DeepSeek attracting more attention and potentially more users to the AI field as a whole, and he said OpenAI would move up the release of some upcoming products. Among other notable findings in the report, more than half of ChatGPT's mobile users are aged between 18 and 24, and the vast majority of AI users are male. Revenue across various

categories of AI apps exploded in 2024, with an average growth of 862 per cent across 12 market segments that were analyzed. The challenge of monetizing the hundreds of billions of dollars invested in AI infrastructure remains an unsolved problem for companies from OpenAI to Microsoft Corp. and Meta Platforms Inc., though smartphone users at least are showing increasing willingness to part with cash to help support the effort and access novel software. —Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Tilak rises to 2, Varun in top 5

Dubai: Talented India batter Tilak Varma climbed one spot to second, while mystery spinner Varun Chakravarthy made a massive leap of 25 places to break into the top five in the latest ICC men's T20I rankings released on Wednesday.

Varma now sits just behind Travis Head in the batters' list, with the Australian maintaining a 23-point lead at the top.

The young Indian left-hander has been in sublime form, posting scores of 19 not out, 72 not out, and 18 in India's ongoing T20I series against England. With two matches remaining in the series, Varma has a chance to overtake Head and become the youngest-ever player to top the rankings — a record currently held by Babar Azam, who reached No. 1 at the age of 23 years and 105 days.

Varma's current rating of 832 points is the fourth-highest ever achieved by an Indian batter in T20I history, behind only Suryakumar Yadav, Virat Kohli, and K. L. Rahul.

India's Abhishek Sharma also made significant strides, jumping 59 places to 40th. — *PTI*

Khawaja, Smith tons power Oz

Galle, Sri Lanka: Steve Smith stood unbeaten on 104 after crossing 10,000 Test runs and helped Australia pummel Sri Lanka alongside fellow centurion Usman Khawaja on day one of the opening Test on Wednesday. Australia reached 330/2 in 81.1 overs when rain stopped play for the day after the tourists elected to bat first in Galle at the start of the two-match series.

Left-handed opener Khawaja, on 147, and skipper Smith put on an unbeaten stand of 195 to thwart the opposition attack in two wicketless afternoon sessions.

Milestone man Smith got three runs off spinner Nishan Peiris to reach his third ton in four matches as he took off his baggy green and raised his bat to acknowledge the crowd's cheers. Smith took the crease in the first session with 9,999 runs and calmly nudged his very first delivery to mid-on for a single off Prabath Jayasuriya. — *AFP*

Brief scores: Australia 330/2 (Usman Khawaja 147 batting, Steve Smith 104 batting, Travis Head 57, Jaffrey Vandersay 1/93) vs Sri Lanka.

Capitals stay in playoff contention

Centurion, South Africa: A rejuvenated Pretoria Capitals registered a six-wicket bonus point victory over Joburg Super Kings to remain in the race for the SA20 playoff berth here.

The Capitals restricted the Super Kings to a paltry 99 for 9 and then eased past the target losing just four wickets for a crucial win.

With this win, the Capitals moved up to 14 points — just one point behind the fourth-placed Super Kings on 15. The captain's armband was also passed to Kyle Verreynne after Rilee Rossouw withdrew due to the birth of his child.

Knowing that only a victory would keep their hopes of qualifying for the playoffs alive, the Capitals produced their most clinical performance of the season thus far.

Will Jacks set the tone with the ball, conceding just two runs from his two overs in the Powerplay, which was just the confidence booster the Capitals required. Super Kings, on the other hand, were unable to set any form of a platform, especially after the in-form Devon Conway was forced to leave the field in the third over after being hit on the arm. — *PTI*

Srikanth advances to second round

Patumwan, Thailand: Former world no.1 Indian shuttler Kidambi Srikanth entered the second round of the Thailand Masters BWF Super 300 event with a straight-game win over his opponent here on Wednesday. Srikanth defeated Israel's Daniil Dubovenko 21-13, 21-18 in the men's singles opening round. This is Srikanth's second straight win over Dubovenko, having defeated him previously in the 2024 Macau Open back in September 2024. Srikanth will next face Hong Kong's Jason Gunawan.

Among other Indians in men's singles, S. Sankar Muthusamy Subramanian defeated Malaysia's June Wei Cheam 15-21, 21-15, 21-19 in a tough three-game contest. Ayush Shetty was shown the door by Malaysia's Jing Hong Kok 15-21 17-21, while Mithun Manjunath lost to another Malaysian in Sholeh Aidil 14-21, 13-21 in men's singles. — *PTI*

BACK TO BASICS

Virat to play Ranji after 12 yrs as Delhi aim to end on high

New Delhi, Jan. 29: Virat Kohli's magnetic presence has not only lifted the profile of Ranji Trophy but also the Delhi team's sagging spirits as it eyes a winning end to an otherwise listless campaign in the final Group 'D' game against Railways starting here on Thursday.

Interestingly, Railways (17 points from six games) have more than a fair shot at making the knock-out stages if they beat Delhi with bonus points and take their tally to 24.

Delhi (14 from six games) only have mathematical impossibility to rely upon but the 10,000 odd crowd expected to watch isn't bothered about the results.

Tamil Nadu (25 points from six games), Chandigarh (19 from six games) and Saurashtra (18 from six games) are in a better position compared to these two teams in terms of probability of qualification.

If Delhi bowl first, the turnout is not going to exceed 3000 but in case Delhi is batting first, the crowd would prefer a Sanat Sangwan or Arpit Rana to get out quickly and make way for Kohli.

But what would happen if the 'King' gets out early? For starters, Ranji Trophy will go back to being 'Ranji Trophy' with four-five journalists and 200 odd spectators taking interest in the proceedings.

Such has been the interest level in Kohli's comeback that the Feroz Shah Kotla ground will have broadcasters joining the festivities gearing up for the live stream of the match, which is the star batter's first Ranji outing in 12 years and three months.

"I have played against Virat *bhaiyya* in the IPL. It is an honour that in back to back matches I have now led Rishabh and Virat *bhaiyya*," Delhi skipper Ayush Badoni said on the eve of the game.

It is expected that Kohli will come in place of left-hander Jonty Sidhu, whose form has tapered off in past few games as he didn't get enough chances.

The skipper would be vacating his own batting slot so that Kohli can bat at his usual position.

"He will bat at No. 4. He has told us to be positive and express ourselves confidently," Badoni said.

Kohli wouldn't mind getting a big one before the Champions Trophy which actually solves his purpose of playing this particular game.

While the BCCI has made it mandatory for all players to turn up in Ranji, the result of this particular game will have no bearing on whether Kohli will be picked in the Indian team after Champions Trophy. The Kotla track has a greenish tinge to it and Badoni indicated that they will play an extra pacer looking at the conditions. — *PTI*



Delhi player Virat Kohli during a training session ahead of the Ranji Trophy match against Railways at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi on Tuesday. — *PTI*

KARNATAKA GET KL BOOST IN CRUNCH TIE AGAINST HARYANA

Bengaluru, Jan. 29: Locked in a three-way tussle for a quarterfinal berth, Karnataka will have K. L. Rahul's experience to bank on in the quest for a bonus point win over table-toppers Haryana in their final league match of the Ranji Trophy Elite Group 'C', beginning here on Thursday. Karnataka currently have 19 points and Haryana have 26 points, but Kerala with 21 points are putting pressure on both the teams.

If the former champions manage a bonus point victory (7 points) at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium, their tally will be swelled to 26 points.

In that scenario, the home side can enter the last eight either as the top team or the second-placed team of the group, depending on Kerala's outing against Bihar in

Thiruvananthapuram.

A win even without a bonus point will take Kerala to 27 points, and they will end up as Group 'C' leaders. In that event, Haryana, who will stay on 26 points, will be knocked out as Karnataka will have more bonus point wins (2) to their credit than Haryana (1).

This will be Rahul's first Ranji match since 2020, and it could not have come at a more appropriate time. Karnataka coach Yere Goud said the seasoned batter will come out at No. 3 against Haryana. "He brings a lot of experience and also adds a lot of value to the side in all aspects of the game. We will see who (Rahul) will replace in the eleven) depending on the conditions and who suits where. But Rahul might be batting at number 3," Goud said. — *PTI*



Hyderabad players during a training session ahead of the Ranji Trophy match against Vidarbha in Nagpur on Wednesday. — *PTI*

MUMBAI UNDER PRESSURE TO SCORE BIG WIN

Mumbai, Jan. 29: With their backs pressed firmly against the wall, defending champions Mumbai will be in desperate pursuit of a victory with bonus points when they take on Meghalaya in the final Ranji Trophy Elite Group 'A' match here from Thursday.

Mumbai's title defence took a heavy blow last week when an unfancied but better-prepared Jammu and Kashmir stuck to their principle of "keeping it simple" and defeated the Ajinkya Rahane-led side by five wickets here at the BKC Ground.

The return of India captain Rohit Sharma, batting sensation Yashasvi Jaiswal and the presence of mainstays like Shreyas Iyer and Rahane did not have much impact on the proceedings as J&K kept chipping away with consistent pressure on the hosts.

Only Shardul Thakur was able to put up a stoic resistance with his 51 and 119 in the two innings to give Mumbai a fighting chance but his efforts were not enough in a game in which batters failed to cash in on a friendly surface. Thakur personified resilience and gumption particularly in the second innings when he battled cramps while putting on a massive partnership of 184 runs for the eighth wicket with Tanush Kotian.

Mumbai will now be without Rohit, Jaiswal and Iyer who will link up with the Indian team ahead of the upcoming ODI assignments against England followed by the Champions Trophy. — *PTI*

THIRD T20 | vs ENGLAND

Varun blames pitch for loss

Rajkot, Jan. 29: India's in-form spinner Varun Chakravarthy feels the Rajkot pitch playing slower in the second innings than team's expectations contributed to its first loss of the five-match T20I series against England.

The match was expected to be a high-scoring affair but it wasn't to be. England did rather well to post 171 for 9 from 127 for 8. But India fell way short of the target, by 26 runs to be specific, as leg-spinner Adil Rashid produced a decisive bowling effort in the middle overs.

"I thought the dew might set in and the ball will start skidding on. But the pitch became very slow and their cutters and their leggies started working more. While if you see in the first innings it was not that slow. So, that definitely played in their favour."

"And obviously, Adil Rashid is a legend and he knows how to bowl. He has that control over his speed," said Chakravarthy on Tuesday night.

Rashid, who found Tilak Varma's middle stump with a classical leg-break, got welcome support from Jamie Overton, who struck thrice at run a ball in his four overs.

It was the second time that Chakravarthy's five-wicket haul came in a losing cause. The mystery spinner has been India's standout bowler since his comeback last year and had the England batters guessing once again.

"No, I can't, I can't complain because that's the nature of the game. There



have been times, even when I don't take five wickets, we might end up losing. So, I can't complain.

"But my job is to just keep focusing on what I can do, what I can perform for the team. And that's all in my control," he said.

Putting more overspin on the ball has yielded rich dividends for Chakravarthy and he is also working on perfecting the flipper. Has he attempted anything new of late?

"Nothing new, but the work doesn't stop because consistency is a constant work."

"As in, even if I can bowl a ball — a stock ball, I need to keep working on it, keep pushing it. I need to get nine on ten consistency. That work is always there. So, right now my focus is on consistency and line and length," said the 33-year-old from Tamil Nadu. — *PTI*

PAKISTAN INSISTS THEY ARE READY TO HOST CT

Karachi, Jan. 29: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) insists that the National Stadium here will be ready to host matches of the upcoming Champions Trophy despite mounting concerns around the venue's preparedness for the marquee event starting February 19.

Pakistan's respected leading English daily *Dawn* on Wednesday carried a story which stated that "it seems absolutely impossible to contemplate the renovation work being completed within the deadline, but the personnel handed the responsibility are beaming with confidence."

"The board would either be hero or zero for taking up such a mammoth task," the newspaper commented. Although PCB Chairman Mohsin

Naqvi inspected the Rawalpindi stadium on Tuesday and assured that the Champions Trophy would be held as planned, it seems unlikely that the Board would get control of the renovated venues in Lahore, Karachi and Rawalpindi by the January 31 deadline.

The other upcoming major international matches at these venues include the four-match tri-series with New Zealand and South Africa from February 8 to 14 with the first two games in Lahore and then two matches, including the final, in Karachi. Bilal Chohan, the man responsible for the renovation work, is reportedly complaining about not getting required equipment and clearances on time to complete the work in Karachi. — *PTI*

GUKESH BEATS MENDONCA TO JUMP INTO SOLE LEAD

Wijk Aan Zee (The Netherlands) Jan. 29: World champion D. Gukesh crashed through the defenses of compatriot Leon Luke Mendonca in the ninth round to jump into sole lead at the Tata Steel Master here.

On a day when R. Praggnanandhaa lost his first game against Dutch GM Anish Giri, veteran P. Harikrishna also found himself under the spotlight, falling to Russian-turned-Slovenian Vladimir Fedoseev.

"I'm happy that I played a good game today and there are still four rounds left so I'm not thinking much about the standings. I'm just happy as to how I am playing," Gukesh said after his game.

With the win, Gukesh took his tally to 6.5 points out of a possible nine and

a half points ahead of Uzbek Nodirbek Abdusattorov and Russian turned Slovenian Fedoseev, who are both on 6 points.

Praggnanadhaa on 5.5 points shares the fourth spot and it remains to be seen if things are going to get better for the Indian. — *PTI*

THE RESULTS

Round 9 Masters: Anish Giri (Ned, 4.5) bt R Praggnanandhaa (Ind, 5.5); D Gukesh (Ind, 6.5) bt Leon Luke Mendonca (Ind, 2.5); Vladimir Fedoseev (Slo, 6) bt P Harikrishna (4); Jorden van Foreest (Ned, 3.5) drew with Max Warmerdam (3.5); Wei Yi (Chn, 5) drew with Arjun Erigaisi (Ind, 2.5); Alexey Sarana (Srb, 5) drew with Vincent Keymer (Ger, 3.5); Fabiano Caruana (Usa, 5) drew with Nodirbek Abdusattorov (Uzb, 6).