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UNIQUE GIFT OF KRIYAYOGA ASHRAM AND RESEARCH INSTITUTE TO GIVE IMPETUS TO WORLD BUILDING AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT.

## S Jaishankar's key insights on Pakistan's terrorism tactics, India's global diplomacy

● "Jaishankar further addressed criticisms about the state of democracy in India, often highlighted in foreign media"



**New Delhi**  
In an interview with ANI, external affairs minister S Jaishankar has shed light on India's approach to dealing with Pakistan and its global diplomatic strategies under the Modi government. Jaishankar emphasized that India has effectively neutralized Pakistan's policy of using cross-border terrorism as leverage in diplomatic dialogues. He said, "Pakistan was trying to use cross-border terrorism...we have made that policy irrelevant." Jaishankar highlighted that India is open to dealing with Pakistan but not under conditions where terrorism is seen as a legiti-

mate tool for diplomacy. He said, "It's not a case that we won't deal with a neighbour... but it is that we will not deal on the basis of terms that they set where the practice of terrorism is deemed as legitimate and effective in order to bring you to the table." The minister also touched upon the broader aspects of India's foreign policy, particularly in relation to the United States. Discussing US President Joe Biden's inability to visit India for the Republic Day celebrations, Jaishankar revealed that the visit was linked to the pro-

posed Quad Summit and the dates did not align for all partners. "It was tied to Quad Summit...couldn't get everything agreed by everybody," he explained. Jaishankar further addressed criticisms about the state of democracy in India, often highlighted in foreign media. He urged a critical view of such narratives, saying, "Don't necessarily take what comes in foreign media at face value." He defended India's democratic credentials, saying that the country meets any standard of democracy, from fair elections to institution-

al functionality. "I'm not saying we're perfect. I'm not saying we don't have room for improvement. Everybody does. We certainly do. But I would say, please look at their motive and their agenda. They are not agenda-less, they are not motive-less, they are trying to push a certain line because they have a certain interest, so don't necessarily take what comes in foreign media at face value...because when you look at the multiple standards that they practice...you are talking of state of democracy in this country, give me any yardstick of democracy. Are your elections fair, is your participation growing. Are broader and broader sections involved, are your institutions working. I would say I am doing as well as any other democracy. Frankly, if anything, I could be passing judgement on whole lot of other....," Jaishankar added.

## Indian youths are creating a brave new world: PM Modi

**TIRUCHIRAPPALI:**

Indian innovators took the number of patents from around 4,000 in 2014 to almost 50,000 now, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said here on Tuesday. Addressing the convocation ceremony of state-run Bharathidasan University here, the Prime Minister quoted the 'Puthiyathor Ulagam Seivom' Tamil verses of poet Bharathidasan, after whom the university had been named, and said it meant creating a brave new world which is also the university's



motto. Modi said the Indian youth were already creating such a world. The Indian sci-

entists are on the world map through missions like Chandrayaan and 'our innovators took

the number of patents from around 4,000 in 2014 to almost 50,000 now.' India's 'humanity scholars are showcasing the India story to the world like never before.' Also, the nation's musicians and artists were continuously bringing international awards for the country, he said. Giving back to the people for a better society and country is the true purpose of education, he underlined. Modi is the first prime Minister to address the convocation ceremony of the varsity, established in 1982.

## Soon, Indian Railways to launch one 'super app' for IRCTC train ticket booking, tracking trains & more

**New Delhi**

Among the existing apps, IRCTC Rail Connect stands out as the most popular, boasting over 100 million downloads. Soon a single railway app to book tickets, track trains! Indian Railways plans to introduce a

comprehensive 'Super App,' merging various services currently scattered across its multiple mobile apps. A senior government official has revealed that this initiative aims to streamline user experiences by consolidating ticketing, train

tracking, and other railway services, eliminating the need for numerous app downloads by railway users. The development of this unified app will be undertaken by CRIS, the IT arm of the railway ministry. According to report, the

Super App intends to combine the functionalities of existing apps like Rail Madad, UTS, and National Train Enquiry System. It also aims to incorporate services such as PortRead, Satark, TMS-Nirikshan for operations.

## Tamil Nadu BJP chief K Annamalai flays DMK MP Dayanidhi Maran for his 'jobless barber' jibe

**CHENNAI:** After DMK MP Dayanidhi Maran called the BJP IT wing a 'jobless barber', BJP state president K Annamalai on Monday flayed the central Chennai MP, saying, "Degrading someone by profession or language seems to be the only thing DMK MP Dayanidhi Maran excels in." Recently, a video of his four-year-old speech about people in Hindi speaking states seeking jobs in Tamil Nadu was circulated on social media by BJP leaders. Reacting to the social media posts, Maran had hit back, comparing the BJP IT wing to 'a jobless barber'. "There is an adage in Tamil which says that when a barber does not have a job he will shave a cat. Similarly, the BJP IT wing does not have anything useful to do and hence it is spreading my old videos," Maran told reporters in Chennai. The war of words continued with Annamalai taking to X and saying instead of apologising, Maran was calling "those spreading & reacting to his rants on our North Indian Brothers and Sisters" the work of a "Jobless Barber". He said, "With this constant degrading, it is only evident that even the continuous taste of electoral defeat doesn't seem to shake the resolve of the leaders in the I.N.D.I. Alliance." Joining Dayanidhi Maran, Congress MP Karti Chidambaram slammed the BJP IT wing for "selectively editing" his interview and "spinning it to suit their propaganda." Recently, Karti Chidambaram gave an interview to a Tamil news channel. For the sake of click bait, the channel mentioned in the headline that Karti Chidambaram hailed Prime Minister Narendra Modi and that it would be difficult to break down the image of Modi.

## MM MLA quits, BJP sniffs plan to make Soren's wife new Jharkhand CM

**RANCHI:** A three-time JMM MLA resigned unexpectedly from the Jharkhand assembly within hours of CM Hemant Soren ignoring a seventh ED summons in the Ranchi land scam case, leading BJP to predict Monday the latter would step down and have his wife Kalpana Soren take over the chief ministership via the vacated Gandey seat. Sarfaraz Ahmad, 64,



provided grist for speculation by giving up his assembly membership without citing a reason. Speaker Rabindranath Mahto, who accepted the resignation, said Monday, "Given Ahmed's seniority, I didn't find it suitable to seek an explanation for him quitting." Screenshot 2024-01-02 004842 The assembly secretary notified Gandey was vacated with

effect from December 31. Ahmad did not respond to calls and messages from this reporter. BJP's Godda MP Nishikant Dubey posted on X that the MLA's resignation was meant to prepare for a forced change at the helm. "When chief minister Hemant Soren resigns from the post, Kalpana Soren would be the next CM.

## PIL in Supreme Court seeking to include CJI in selection committee for CEC, EC appointment

**NEW DELHI:** A Public Interest Litigation (PIL) was filed in the Supreme Court seeking direction to the Union of India to implement an independent and transparent system of selection constituting a neutral and independent selection committee for the appointment of the Chief Election



Commissioner (CEC) and other Election Commissioners (ECs). The PIL seeks direction to set aside Gazette issued by the Centre on December

28, 2023, for the appointment of CEC and ECs. It seeks direction to the Centre to include the Chief Justice of India in the selection committee for the appointment of the CEC and ECs which currently comprises of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha and a Union

Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister. "The pivotal legal question placed for the court's consideration in the present writ petition revolves around the constitutional inquiry of whether the Parliament or any legislative assembly possesses the authority to promulgate a gazette notification.

## Following, abusing a woman not offence of outraging modesty: Bombay High Court

**NAGPUR:** Following, abusing and pushing a woman might be "annoying" acts, but did not constitute the offence of outraging the modesty under IPC Section 354, the Nagpur bench of Bombay HC ruled, and granted relief to a man convicted by the judicial magistrate first class court at Wardha. Justice Anil Pansare acquitted the appellant, a 36-year-old labourer, saying the prosecution failed to prove its case beyond reasonable doubt. A college student had filed a police

complaint against the man alleging that he had followed her a couple of times and abused her. Once, when she was going to a market, he followed her on the bicycle and pushed/shoved her, she said in her complaint. The magistrate's court convicted the man on May 9, 2016, and sentenced him to two years' rigorous imprisonment. The sessions court upheld the verdict on July 10, 2023. Hearing the man's appeal, the HC said:

## Suspecting fidelity, Chhattisgarh man kills wife, 3 children

**RAIPUR:** A man was arrested by the police for allegedly murdering his wife and three young children over suspicions of his wife's extramarital affair in Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh on Tuesday. According to the superintendent of police, Santosh Singh, the incident took place late Monday night in Hirri village under Masturi police station limits following which the accused, identified as Umendra Kewat, was arrested. Based on preliminary information, it is reported that Kewat allegedly strangled his wife, along with their two daughters aged 4 and 5, and their 2-year-old son to death due to suspicions surrounding his wife's purported affair, as mentioned by the authorities. The accused faces charges of murder and is currently in custody.

## Wrong to say collegium lacks transparency: CJI DY Chandrachud



**NEW DELHI:** Days after his retired colleague Justice SK Kaul said one has to accept that there is a problem with the collegium method of appointment of judges, Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud defended the system and said steps have been taken to ensure greater transparency. "To say that the collegium system is lacking in transparency would not be correct. We have taken steps to ensure that greater transparency is maintained. A sense of objectivity in the decision-making process is main-

Manipur's Thoubal district remained tense after four villagers were gunned down. Additional security forces were deployed and an inter-faith meeting was held to defuse the situation. Curfew was imposed in five districts of Imphal Valley. The bodies of the deceased were brought to Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences. The Chief Minister condemned the violence and assured that the culprits will be arrested.



## Manipur firing incident: Situation tense in Lilong Chingjao, toll rises to 4

**Manipur**  
The situation in minority-dominated Lilong Chingjao area in Manipur's Thoubal district remained tense after four villagers were gunned down. Additional security forces were deployed and an inter-faith meeting was held to defuse the situation. Curfew was imposed in five districts of Imphal Valley. The bodies of the deceased were brought to Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences. The Chief

Minister condemned the violence and assured that the culprits will be arrested. Manipur firing incident: Situation tense in Lilong Chingjao, toll rises to 4 The situation in minority-dominated Lilong Chingjao area in

## More than 13 crore people have come above the poverty line in nine and a half years: CM Yogi

● "Those who robbed the poor of their rights are indulging in caste politics today: CM



remarked. He added that today not only schemes are being made for the poor in the country, but also being implemented. The benefits of government schemes are reaching the villages, poor and youth without any discrimination. The objective of Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra is to bring happiness on the face of every person, he remarked. CM Yogi interacted with the beneficiaries from Meerut, Basti, Chandauli, Mahoba and Barabanki districts. He connected online with the beneficiaries of schemes during Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra organized at 800 places in all 75 districts of the state. CM Yogi said that 642 Modi Guarantee vans are running in the state under the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra. So

far, Modi Guarantee Van has reached 36983 Gram Panchayats out of 57709 Gram Panchayats of Uttar Pradesh. Also, 1027 programmes have been organised in 762 municipal bodies. Till now, this Yatra has connected with approximately three crore people within the state, he informed. CM Yogi said that wherever Modi Guarantee Van is reaching in Uttar Pradesh today, thousands of people are joining it while camps are set up for registration of those deprived of its benefits despite eligibility. Talking about Prime Minister Modi's five pledges of a developed India, free from a slave's mentality, taking pride in heritage, staying united with solidarity and performing civic duty, he said that when 140 crore

people will move forward with one voice and leadership, no power in the world will be able to stop India from becoming developed in the true sense. Government schemes become the basis of change in every person's life. CM Yogi said that the result of the hard work of the double engine government is that today 55 lakh poor people in the state have got houses under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, three crore people have got toilets and 1.75 lakh poor people have got free gas connections under the Ujjwala scheme whereas free electricity connections have been provided to 1 crore 54 lakh families, electricity has reached 1 lakh 21 thousand villages, 10 crore people are covered under Ayushman Bharat scheme and 15 crore people are getting free ration. These schemes are becoming the basis of comprehensive changes in the life of every person today, he pointed out.

## Ramlala's consecration ceremony will be other-worldly, unprecedented and unforgettable experience: Chief Minister

**Chief Minister's instruction:** Ayodhya's ICC should become functional before January 22. Ayodhya's smart signage will be in languages included in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution and 9 languages of the United Nations. All necessary arrangements should be made for traffic management and welcoming of guests as per protocol in coordination with Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Mandir Teerth Kshetra Trust and central agencies: Chief Minister. Smart signage should be installed on Prayagraj-Ayodhya, Gorakhpur-Ayodhya, Lucknow-Ayodhya, Varanasi-Ayodhya roads, action will be taken in case of encroachment. Devotees coming to Ayodhya by rail will get direct bus service: Chief Minister directs Transport and Urban Development Department to coordinate with Railways. Deepotsav will be celebrated on the evening of 22nd January; temples, all other establishments will be illuminated with Ram Jyoti. Ram Katha Sarita will start after Makar Sankranti, artists/story-tellers/Ramlila troupes



from India and abroad should be invited to take part. Chief Minister's instruction: Get Ayodhya's digital tourist guide app ready, entire Ayodhya will be visible through walk through. Chief Minister reviews development works in Ayodhya, says Shri Ram Temple will be a 'Rashtra Mandir' symbolizing cultural, spiritual and social unity of India? Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has given instructions to make all necessary arrangements at the state government level to make the consecration ceremony of Shri Ramlala at Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Temple in Ayodhya on January 22, other-worldly, unpre-

cedented and unforgettable. The Chief Minister has said that today the whole world is eagerly looking towards Ayodhya. Everyone wants to come to Ayodhya. The whole country has become imbued in the spirit of Lord Shri Ram. This is also an opportunity for global branding of Uttar Pradesh. He has said that the state government will leave no stone unturned to ensure a pleasant and satisfying experience for the guests coming for the consecration ceremony as well as tourists/devotees coming afterwards. With public cooperation, Ayodhya city will be the standard of safety, convenience and cleanliness. In a high-level meet-

ing on Tuesday, the Chief Minister reviewed various projects, which are underway in Ayodhya, and gave necessary directions. Major guidelines given by the Chief Minister in the meeting...? Now only a few days are left for the completion of the much awaited ritual of enshrining Shri Ramlala in the grand and divine Shri Ram Janmabhoomi temple in Avadhपुरi. This Shri Ram temple will be a 'Rashtra Mandir', symbolising cultural, spiritual and social unity of India. This historic programme of 'Pran Pratishtha' (consecration) is an occasion of joy, pride and self-satisfaction for crores of Sanatan believers.

## Ayodhya will witness over 18 forms of Ramlala from India and abroad

**Ayodhya**

The Yogi government has decided to organize performances of over 18 forms of Ramlalas from India and abroad in Ayodhya to showcase the global significance of Lord Shri Ram. Additionally, various cultural, traditional folk arts, and spiritual programs will be organized. The decisions were taken at a meeting chaired by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday. With this, the Yogi government aims to propagate Lord Shri Ram as the center of faith not only in India, but also as a symbol of global faith. Various popular Ramlalas from India and abroad will be staged. While Ramlala is staged in the traditional local styles in various states of India, several forms of Ramlala are also performed overseas. In this context, to enhance the glory of the consecration ceremony of Lord Ram in Ayodhya, the staging of various Ramlala forms will take place in different cultural centers of Ayodhya from Makar Sankranti (January 15) to January 22. It is noteworthy that as the 'Navya Ayodhya' is set to showcase its cultural and spiritual richness after 500 years, on January 22, 2024, Lord Shri Ram will be seated in his grand temple by PM Narendra Modi. To make this occasion unique, unforgettable, and spiritual, artists from India and abroad will perform Ramlala based on the Ramayana, while on the other hand, cultural programs based on folk traditions will also be organized. Through this event, the Yogi government aims to make tourists and devotees coming to Ayodhya, including the present and future generations, aware of the ideals and values of Lord Shri Ram. Ramotsav seeks to tie the entire world in one thread. Ramlala troupes of countries such as Nepal, Cambodia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Indonesia, and more have been invited to the Ramotsav celebrations. Additionally, Ramlala troupes from states such as Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Karnataka, Sikkim, Kerala, Chhattisgarh, Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, and Chandigarh will present various events based on the life of Lord Shri Rama.

## This is an important step towards fulfilling the dream of lasting peace and all-round development in Assam: Shah

**Lucknow**

In a significant move towards achieving lasting peace and comprehensive development in Assam, Union Home Minister Amit Shah hailed a historic agreement with the insurgent group ULFA. The tripartite agreement, involving the central government, the Assam state government, and ULFA, marks the end of decades-long violence in the region and signals the beginning of a new era in the history of Assam. The concerned efforts have been underway under Prime



Minister Narendra Modi's vision of peace and harmony led forward by Home Minister Amit Shah, to end the dark chapter of violence in Assam and the entire Northeast region. The tripartite peace agreement signed on December 29, 2023, is set to bring an end to decades-old insurgency in the northeastern states. Assam, having suffered from ULFA violence for an extended period, has witnessed the loss of thousands of lives since 1979. Considering terrorism as

humanity's greatest enemy, Shah's policies have led to ULFA abandoning violence, disbanding the organisation, and joining the democratic process. Members who have renounced armed struggle are being integrated into mainstream society, with Modi and Shah making every possible effort for their inclusion. The Home Minister's decisive step towards establishing peace in Assam, sets a milestone for the future development of the entire Northeast.

## Buzz grows over Shringla entering Lok Sabha election fray from Darjeeling

**New Delhi:** Could former foreign secretary and G20 coordinator Harsh Vardhan Shringla be a potential Lok Sabha candidate in 2024 from Darjeeling? Posters that emerged all over this West Bengal hill town over the New Year weekend have generated some buzz to the effect. The posters, featuring the 61-year-old Shringla in a suit, in his avatar as president of the Darjeeling Welfare Society, and simply greeting everyone for

the new year, seem innocuous. Still, the launch of the society just a year before the elections, in mid-2023, and the spread of the poster has everyone guessing. Wrap up the year gone by & gear up for 2024 with HT! Click here On Tuesday, Shringla's only response when asked about the posters was a counter question -- on whether there were a lot of them around town. In September, after the launch of the society,

he had brushed off a similar question. "Don't believe media speculation," was what he said then. The secretary of the society Dechen Chimi Wangdi said that the society's objective was to work towards the welfare of the people of Darjeeling. The state Bharatiya Janata Party unit has supported the move. Party member Sanjib Biswas said: "All of us would want a professional after having seen politicians for the last three terms."

## UP will have India's second longest expressway by the end of 2024

**Lucknow**

Preparing to give Uttar Pradesh another big gift before the upcoming Mahakumbh in 2025, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has directed Uttar Pradesh Expressway Industrial Development Authority (UPEIDA) to work on a war footing to complete India's second longest expressway,

Ganga Expressway', by the end of the year. Currently, Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of expressways in the country, with 6 in operation and 7 under construction. The most ambitious project is the Ganga Expressway with a proposed length of 594 kilometers. Ganga Expressway is the second in terms of

length in the country after the longest Mumbai-Nagpur Expressway. Notably, UP currently has four expressways that feature among the top 10 expressways in terms of length in India. Once Ganga Expressway becomes operational, the state will have five of the top 10 expressways in the country. CM instructs officials to

make expressway operational by December 31, 2024. Recently, the Chief Minister, in a meeting with officials of the executing agency UPEIDA, has given directions to make the much-anticipated Ganga Expressway operational by the end of 2024 under any circumstances in view of the Mahakumbh.

## HDFC Bank Acts As a Sponsor and Destination Bank For Facilitating ASBA in Secondary Market

**SEBI has permitted this from January 1, 2024**



**Ambala/Hisar:** HDFC Bank, a leading Clearing and Settlement bank of NSE & BSE in the Cash & Equity Derivatives segments, acted as a Sponsor and Destination bank for "Trading supported by Blocked Amount in Secondary Market" that kicked off from January 01, 2024 on the Indian Stock Exchanges. SEBI and Stock Exchanges permitted Trading in Cash

segment through block mechanism, on optional basis, for Secondary Market from January 1, 2024 on the lines of ASBA for Primary Markets where investor's funds will continue to remain in their savings account with the required funds being blocked instead of the

investor having to upfront transfer the amount to the broker's account for placing the Trades. The bank has been able to support this new initiative of SEBI through integration of its systems with that of Exchanges and respective Clearing Corporations. This system integration facilitates investor validation, block creation, release, revoke, execution and end of day reconciliation and reporting. The UPI backed technology solution of block / release of funds helps investors meet margin and settlement obligations seamlessly.

## YS Sharmila set to join Congress on January 4

**Hyderabad:** YSR Telangana Party (YSRTP) president and Andhra Pradesh chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy's sister, YS Sharmila, is set to merge her party with the Congress on January 4, people familiar with the matter said on Tuesday. The decision follows months of speculation over such a move. The YSRTP did not contest the state elections in Telangana later last year, and chose to support the Congress, which stormed to power in the state. Sharmila held a meeting with her followers and party leaders at her Lotus Pond residence in Hyderabad on Tuesday. People familiar with the discussions said that she told the meeting that she would leave for New Delhi on Wednesday evening and join the Congress in the national capital on Thursday in the presence of the party's top leadership including president Mallikarjun Kharge and former chiefs Sonia and Rahul Gandhi.

## USAID-SUPPORTED SAMRIDH BLENDED FINANCE FACILITY SUPPORTS CIPACA WITH INR 2 CRORE FUNDING TO STRENGTHEN CRITICAL CARE SERVICES IN RURAL HOSPITALS

**Gurugram**

The SAMRIDH Healthcare Blended Finance Facility, a multi-stakeholder innovation and financing platform supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by IPE Global, has provided financial assistance of INR 2 Cr to CIPACA, a leading service provider for Intensive Care Units (ICU) in rural India. The assistance is provided as a Recoverable Grant and is being used to set-up ICUs in partnership with small hospitals in the district, towns, and taluks in Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, and Maharashtra.

This initiative will strengthen the infrastructure and operations of selected hospitals, establishing them as Centers of Excellence for ICU care and providing accessible and affordable healthcare solutions to underserved communities. In India, small rural hospitals face challenges such as resource limitations, inadequate infrastructure, and a shortage of skilled healthcare professionals, in delivering critical care services. CIPACA



overcomes these challenges by collaborating with hospitals in smaller towns, delivering high-quality ICU services that are both accessible and affordable to rural populations. The solution is supported by a 24/7 committed staff of professionals. The company has so far established ICUs in over 10 Indian states and partnered with 20+ hospitals at the district and taluk levels. CIPACA's innovative drop-in ICU concept has demonstrated its ability to enhance patient care, contributing to saving 1,00,000+ lives nationwide. The financial support from USAID-supported SAMRIDH, further accelerates the expansion of these high-impact solutions, marking a significant milestone in bolstering healthcare in rural India. Dr. Raja Amarnath, MD, CIPACA, emphasizes the importance of this collaboration stating, "CIPACA works with the motto to help its partner hospitals become more self-reliant."

## JMM-led coalition convenes meeting amid speculation about Soren's continuation

" Soren questioned what was this Vanvasi and said some forces have deceived tribals for the past 20 years.



Ranchi

The ruling Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM)-led coalition has convened a meeting of its legislators in Ranchi on Wednesday amid speculation about a change in leadership against the backdrop of the Enforcement Directorate (ED)'s repeated summons to chief minister Hemant Soren. JMM lawmaker Sarfaraz Ahmad's resignation from the Gandey seat triggered speculation that Soren might step down and name his wife, Kalpana, as the chief minister.

Kalpana is speculated to be fielded from the vacant seat.

The ED has issued seven summons to Soren for questioning in

connection with an alleged land scam. There has been speculation about possible action against him as has ignored all the summons.

Soren doubled down on his criticism of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Monday and accused it of attempting to topple his government since it came to power in 2019. Soren

added the good work of his government has unnerved the BJP. He said the BJP sent agencies to silence him.

Soren said 2024 will be a year of political upheavals and the BJP will be wiped out completely in a great struggle.

He added the forces who never acknowledged or accepted tribals as Adivasi have

named them Vanvasi. Soren questioned what was this Vanvasi and said some forces have deceived tribals for the past 20 years.

He accused the Union government of trying to finish off the farmers by bringing the "black farm laws", which were eventually withdrawn when cultivators surrounded Delhi for a year.

## SC notice to Centre, UP and Gujarat over sacking of trans woman teacher

**NEW DELHI:** The Supreme Court on Monday sought replies from the Centre and the states of Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat on a petition by a transgender woman, who accused two private schools in the two states of sacking her after her gender identity was revealed. The Supreme Court told the Centre, UP and Gujarat to respond to the trans woman teacher's petition within four weeks "The grievance of the petitioner is that her services were terminated in schools of UP and Gujarat after her



gender identity was revealed. The petitioner says that she cannot pursue her remedies in two different high courts. Issue notice to the Union and the states, returnable after four weeks," a bench led by Chief Justice of India Dhananjaya Y Chandrachud said. The bench, which also comprised justices JB

Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, admitted the petition by Jane Kaushik, 31, who said in her plea that she was first fired by a private school in UP's Lakhimpur Kheri in December 2022 and was told not to join by another school in Gujarat in July 2023 for being open about her gender identity.

The petition filed by

advocate Yashraj Singh Deora challenged Kaushik's termination, lamenting the structural discrimination and harassment she had to undergo because of her gender identity.

Calling the acts of two schools in breach of her fundamental right to equality and against discrimination based on gender, Kaushik's plea asked for her reinstatement, besides seeking proper guidelines from the Union government to ensure no other transgender person faces the difficulties she has been going through.

## Truckers strike enters Day 2, long queues at petrol pumps

New Delhi

The All India Motor Transport Congress had given a call for a strike to protest against provisions in the new law, which is yet to come into force.

In a widespread demonstration against the newly enacted Bharatiya

Nyay Sanhita (BNS), the nationwide strike by transport associations and drivers entered its second day, causing disruptions in fuel supplies and long queues at petrol pumps in various cities. The BNS, which recently replaced the colonial-era Indian Penal

Code, has introduced stringent penalties for hit-and-run cases, particularly targeting motorists involved in serious road accidents who flee the scene without reporting the incident to authorities. Under this new law, individuals responsible for

such incidents may face up to 10 years of imprisonment and a hefty fine of 7 lakh. The government, in response to the ongoing protest, has urged the police to ensure the uninterrupted supply of petrol, diesel, and LPG cylinders.

## Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah justifies arrest of man for post Babri demolition riots, BJP calls for statewide protest

**Koppal (Karnataka) [India],** January 2 (ANI): Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah dismissed the opposition's allegation of hate politics in connection with the arrest of a man linked to the riots that took place after the Babri Masjid demolition in 1992. Speaking on the arrest, CM Siddaramaiah asked, "What should be done to the wrongdoers? Should we just leave them?"

"We have told the police to dispose of old cases. No innocents have been arrested. We will proceed according to the court's direction," he said while speaking to reporters during his visit to Basapur Airport in Koppa. On BJP MLA Yashpal Suvarna's demand for a holiday on January 22 for the Ram Mandir inauguration, CM Siddaramaiah said, "I am not aware of the BJP's demand for a government holiday. I don't know about the leave." "The central government is organizing the program, and they can decide on leave," he added. Responding to the controversy surrounding Ram Mandir inauguration invitation, Siddaramaiah stated, "I don't know whom they invited or left out. Whoever goes, let them go."

BJP condemned the arrest of the man in Hubballi for his alleged role in the post Babri demolition riots after 31 years. The Karnataka state unit has called for a protest against the state government. Speaking on the matter, BJP leader BY Vijayendra said, "They have arrested a Ram bhakt when the state and the whole nation is waiting for January 22. We strongly condemn this." "We are calling for a protest throughout the state against the government and anti-Hindu accusations," he added. Meanwhile, an effigy of CM Siddaramaiah was burnt as a mark of protest against the Hubballi arrest. The demonstration was staged by Peethadheeshwar Jagadguru Paramhans Acharya of Tapaswi camp in Ayodhya. The Ayodhya Tapaswi camp Peethadheeshwar demanded the removal of the Siddaramaiah government and urged to bring President's rule in the state.

## Punjab: DSP found dead along canal in Jalandhar, probe underway

Amritsar

A top police officer was found dead in the Jalandhar district of Punjab, officers informed on Tuesday. Jalandhar (Punjab) [India], January 2 (ANI): A top police officer was found dead in the Jalandhar district of Punjab, officers informed on Tuesday. The mortal remains of Dalbir Singh, who held the rank of the deputy superintendent of police in the district,



were recovered from the Basti Bawa Khel Canal on the intervening night of December

31 and January 1, the police informed. "The body bore an external injury mark on the head.

We are in the process of examining the CCTV footage from nearby areas, which, we believe, would throw some light into the cause of death," Balwinder Singh Randhawa, A-DGP-1, Jalandhar, told ANI on Tuesday. Further investigation is underway, he said.

## Jairam seeks CEC's time for INDIA bloc leaders to discuss VVPATs: 'Perfectly reasonable request'

New Delhi

In a letter addressed to the CEC, senior Congress leader and party's general secretary in charge of communications, Jairam Ramesh, highlighted a series of communications dating back to August 9, 2023, when a memorandum outlining EVM-related concerns of various political parties was submitted to the ECI.



Despite several subsequent requests for a meeting, Ramesh said, no audience or hearing was granted to the delegation representing the opposition parties. The ECI issued a generic clarification in response to the memorandum but did not address the specific concerns raised by the political parties, and no meeting was

arranged despite their repeated requests, the Rajya Sabha member added. "On October 2nd, 2023 a follow-up representation was sent by us through counsel.

The representation raised specific concerns which remained unaddressed in the ECI's clarification of August 23rd, 2023.

## 'Thok dijiye, Sir': Mahua Moitra jabs Yogi Adityanath over IIT-BHU rape accused

New Delhi

Two months after a woman student was allegedly gang-raped inside the IIT-BHU campus in UP, police on Sunday arrested three men. Mahua Moitra of the Trinamool Congress took a swipe at Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath over the alleged involvement of local Bharatiya Janata Party leaders in the gang-rape of a BHU student, asking how much time will it take to run a bulldozer on their properties. "Wonder Ajay Bisht aka @myogiadityanath was doing since Nov 2nd when his BJP Troll Sena aka IT cell vaanars gang-raped a woman. Thok

dijiye, Sir. Is Baar Bulldozer Chalaane Mein Itni Der Kyon?" the expelled TMC MP wrote on X (formerly Twitter) while sharing pictures of the accused with Yogi Adityanath. Sponsored Adityanath, after taking over as the chief minister in 2017, had said in an interview: "Agar aparadh kareng, toh thok diye jayenge (if anyone commits a crime, he will be shot dead)." His 'thok do' policy has led to a number of 'encounters' of alleged criminals in the state in the last three years. Two months after a woman student was allegedly gang-raped inside the IIT-BHU

campus in Uttar Pradesh, police on Sunday arrested three men, while opposition parties alleged that they were BJP functionaries. The three accused claimed themselves to be the BJP's IT cell members on their Facebook page. On Monday, the Congress also took a dig at the BJP, saying the ruling party works exactly opposite of its slogan 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao'. Addressing a press conference at Congress headquarters in Delhi, Mahila Congress chief Netta D'Souza said the truth is that it has become "Balatkaari (rapist) Janata Party" for women.

## Water bodies across Kashmir freeze, minimum stays below freezing point

Kashmir

A thin layer of ice has formed over the surface of the Dal Lake as the minimum temperature in Srinagar on Monday night was minus 4.8 degrees Celsius, officials said. The residents of the lake, who live in houseboats, had a tough time breaking the ice layer while roving their boats towards the banks. Water supply pipes have frozen in many areas of Kashmir due to extreme cold wave conditions. Pahalgam in south Kashmir's Anantnag district, which serves as one of the base camps for the annual Amarnath Yatra, recorded a minimum temperature of minus 6.2 degrees Celsius, down from the previous night's minus 5.7 degrees Celsius, they said. Gulmarg skiing resort in north Kashmir recorded a low of minus 4 degrees Celsius.

## 'Fight 2024 polls from BJP': Brinda Karat dares Kerala gov Arif Mohammed Khan



Governor Khan has been having frosty relations with the state government over a host of issues, including not clearing bills passed by the Kerala Assembly. CPI(M) leader Brinda Karat on Tuesday took a sharp jibe at Kerala governor Arif Mohammed Khan amid his protracted verbal exchange with the state government over pending university bills, saying he should contest the 2024 general elections from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Taking her party's line that the governor interferes in the Pinarayi Vijayan government's affairs at the behest of the BJP, she said Khan should directly enter politics through elections.

Arif Mohammad Khan recently targeted chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan while also claiming that he was "threatened of dire consequences" by the activists of the Left organisations.

Arif Mohammad Khan recently targeted chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan while also claiming that he was "threatened of dire consequences" by the activists of the Left organisations. "If the Honourable governor is so interested in coming directly into politics, he should do so because the 2024 Lok Sabha election is scheduled to be held so it would be part of his political understanding," Karat was quoted as saying by news agency ANI.

## Editorial

### Historic peace deal with ULFA: Another feather in Modi's cap

Although it was somewhat long in the offing, the over a decade-long peace dialogue with the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) [Pro-Talk] finally reached a logical conclusion on December 29, 2023, with representatives of the Government of India led by Union Home Minister, Amit Shah, Government of Assam and senior members of the ULFA. Born on the ramparts of an Ahom amphitheatre in Sibsagar on April 7, 1979, the ULFA had been one of the front-ranking insurgent organisations in the Northeast. Indeed, during its heyday, the organisation's clout and firepower had been considerable and was being touted as a serious national security issue that the Indian state had to grapple with. Its chequered history witnessed three important Indian army operations in Assam, namely Operation Bajrang, Operation Rhino-I and Rhino-II.

Billeted in the hinterland and in all the five outlying countries that made up the strategic encirclement of the Northeast, the organisation had ominous anti-India camps in Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Nepal and Myanmar. Indeed, the group's anti-talk faction, led by Paresh Barua, continues to have watered-down camps in Myanmar's Sagaing Division. But active military operations and strategies which instituted (a) kinetic action (b) psychological initiatives and (c) developmental imperatives won the day and the organisation was soon careening out of control. Bhutan, at the request of India, mounted an armed operation and broke ULFA's back in the Himalayan kingdom. Its move to Bangladesh was marked by shenanigans by Pakistan's ISI and Khaleda Zia's patronage. But with the return of Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government, the scenario witnessed the handing over of almost the entire Central Committee of the organisation to India. Important leaders of the group, such as its chairman, Arabinda Rajkhowa; Foreign Secretary, Sasadhar Choudhury; Operations Commander, Raju Baruah and a few years later, the outfit's General Secretary, Anup Chetia returned to Assam and soon a benevolent Indian government, recognising that the "boys" were indeed our own, was working out modalities for a peaceful settlement with one of the most important insurgent organisations in South Asia. Certain observers of the historic peace agreement may tend to poo-hoo the extraordinary effort of New Delhi in its ability to anvil durable peace in Assam. Indeed, it is true that a small but insignificant section led by Paresh Barua continues to stay away from a dialogue process. Of late, there have even been attempts by ULFA (Independent) to make a comeback. Assam and the other seven states of the Northeast have been sagely christened as India's "Ashta Lakshmi" or the eight personification of the Goddess of Wealth by Narendra Modi. The region is now poised for correct development. Earlier attempts at ethnic resurgences have been industriously addressed by the present government and regional aspirations have joined hands with Modi's national dream. Northeast India and Assam are on the road to developmental vision escape velocity acceleration and take off. On the law and order front, the success story has been no different. Almost all wayward insurgent groups — the Adivasi, Karbi or Dimas — have been brought back to the mainstream. The dreams and aspirations of their respective parishes have been fulfilled by a sympathetic government. The Assam Police, under able leadership, has ushered in an era of peace. The situation has to be seen to be believed. Almost all important festivals that were concluded during the last couple of months, be it the Durga Puja, Diwali or the Chhath Puja, were ones of secure festivities and an alert Assam Police did not leave any stone unturned to ensure that the people of Assam could air their happiness with pomp and gaiety.

When the White House declared that Joe Biden won't be able to meet India's request to attend the Republic Day celebrations on January 26 next year due to 'scheduling issues', India was in a fix. The entire episode was mishandled by the Biden administration that initially let slip the information that such an invite has been made, forcing India to wait on Biden, and the late denial after a period of prolonged suspense — peppered with scepticism over the so-called assassination plot — left New Delhi with a tricky diplomatic problem. India needed someone who may replace Biden in strategic weight and importance for a programme pregnant with symbolism while running the risk of sending an implicit message to the invitee that she/he is a second choice. On December 22, the ministry of external affairs declared in a public notification that French president Emmanuel Macron will visit India as the chief guest for the 75th Republic Day celebrations that also marks the 25th anniversary of the India-France strategic partnership. Prime minister Narendra Modi, incidentally, had attended the Bastille Day parade in Paris as Macron's guest of honour on July 14 this year. The French president promptly responded by posting on X: "Thank you for



your invitation, my dear friend @NarendraModi. India, on your Republic Day, I'll be here to celebrate with you!" Under the circumstances, to get Macron — who has been instrumental in taking bilateral ties to new heights and cementing France's position as one of India's key defence partners — and that too at such a short notice implied India's strength, diplomatic clout, growing stature and a favourable geopolitical landscape. In a difficult year grappling with the after-effects of a once-in-a-century pandemic, along with two wars that have thrown Europe and West Asia (Middle East) in turmoil, stretched America's resources, attention and exposed the limits of its leverage, India emerged as the sole "bright spot on a

dark horizon", to quote the IMF. Rating agencies are predicting that India will remain the world's fastest growing major economy for at least the next three years, and reach the world's third-largest economy milestone by 2030, if not by 2027, according to some estimates. While India's economic growth is expected to comfortably cruise at around 6.5% in 2023-24, by 2027 it may zoom to 7% led by growth in manufacturing sector even as China's pace dips to below five per cent during the same period. Morgan Stanley says India's GDP is set to double from the current \$3.4 trillion to \$8.5 trillion over the next decade and the country will add more than \$400 billion to its GDP every year, a scale surpassed only by the US and China. This

growth is supplemented by monetary policies that have brought down the inflation, which eased to a four-month low in October and a decline in unemployment rate that fell to a six-year low of 3.2% during July 2022-June 2023, according to data released by the National Sample Survey Office. High GDP growth, low inflation, falling unemployment, a scorching surge in stock markets and cooling down of international oil prices has injected incredible optimism in Indian psyche and its economy. India's situation is strikingly different from the depressing mood in Europe where the economy is struggling, and also in the US where the economy is seemingly doing great but has failed to lift the pall of gloom. A Wall Street Journal survey found that 69% of respondents said the "country is headed in the wrong direction. Biden's approval ratings are mired around or below 40%, and approval for his handling of the economy is even lower." In contrast, prime minister Modi remains wildly popular, easily surpassing other global leaders by a mile and recent state elections where BJP recorded handsome victories in three bellwether states may indicate that people are ready to give him one more term. India economy's optimism is complemented by political

stability and key policy reforms at the Centre that has allowed the government to significantly expand its kitty, and that money is being funnelled into giving India a massive and long overdue transportation and infrastructure upgrade through a sharp rise in government's capital expenditure (capex), stressing on improving connectivity across the nation. In a written reply in the Rajya Sabha this month, minister of state for finance Pankaj Chaudhary stated that the government's capex has soared from Rs 4.1 lakh crore in fiscal 2021 to the budgeted Rs 10 lakh crore in FY24, further assisted by the PM Gatishakti Scheme on infrastructure and logistics. The plan is to boost growth and initiate private sector investment. The result has been stunning. India's highway network has risen by more than 50% since 2014, with the pace increasing from 12 km per day to 37km per day in 2020-21. According to Economic Times, the government plans to double the travel speed to 90kmph across the country by constructing and expanding the highway network by 41000 km including 15000km of high-speed corridors by fiscal 2031-32 at a cost of nearly Rs 20 lakh crore. The Vande Bharat Express semi high-speed trains.

## As war escalates in West Asia, India's security requires fancy footwork

The situation could not be more confusing. On one side, virtual trench warfare is being fought in Ukraine. Israel, on the other side, is bombing Gaza in an effort to eliminate a terror group that is wraith-like in its presence, with the idea of a free Palestine spreading across the world. That's already been seen in Delhi, with a blast near the Israeli embassy. Off our coast is another series of attacks allegedly by the Houthis targeting ships in the Arabian Sea. In Kashmir, terrorism is again rising. Further, a glowering super-power waits for its chance, not just against India but also against Taiwan. And here's the curious part: No mediators or peace-makers are around. Not one. Yet the world is at war — not just a remote cyber, espionage, or

information war — and this has people dying. Everyone knows that famous Clausewitzian definition of war, as an extension of policy by other means. 'Warfare' is how you fight that war. War remains a decision by policy makers, except this not about a high level group declaring war, but a series of deniable policy decisions. Along with that warfare has diffused too. For instance, anyone with a smattering of interest in the news, would know that it is the United States which is at war with Russia, with the Ukrainians taking the body count. In Israel, as a former proxy of the Israeli state, Hamas seemingly launched a 'surprise' attack on a state that has a 24x7 security system, with a famed intel

capability.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is as far right as it is possible to get, seems to be seeking, not a capitulation to Hamas, but its extermination together with Palestine itself. As for the Houthis, (who were till a year ago at war with the Saudis) on October 31st, they announced their intention to target Israel for its war, and then followed that up on December 9, with a declaration to target all ships heading to Israel, and later all commercial shipping in an effort to influence the international community on the Palestine war. Decision making among the Houthis is unclear, but that it has outside support is evident from their steadily increasing range of their missiles.

## AI on trial: Legal dimensions of intellectual property in India

India has a wide range of IP laws within its legal framework. It includes several statutes such as Trademark Act, 1999, Copyright Act, 1957, Design Act, 2000 and Patents Act, 1970. However, it is quite obvious and natural for these laws to be proven obsolete when it comes to resolving IPR issues linked with Artificial Intelligence infringement. AI is an entirely different ball game from the rest of the modern tech available. In layman's language, AI is a technology that adapts and learns itself from a set of algorithms and data sets provided to it. Modern-day AI is also known as Generative AI-it consumes existing data, learns from it, and generates data similar to the original one. This method has time and again proven to infringe several copyrights, trademarks and patents. To understand this, one needs to know that according to Section 2(d)(v) and (vi) of the Copyright Act, an author is a person who causes a computer-generated work to be created. But the point in consideration is whether a person could be linked to the output generated by AI as it is based on a self-learning and adapting model. In Navigators Logistics Ltd vs Kashif Qureshi & Ors (2018), the Delhi High Court held that a computer-generated list cannot be claimed under the Copyright Act because there is a lack of human

intervention. Similarly, even the Patents Act lacks clarity on what happens when a patentee technology infringes the IPR of a person/entity. Sections 2(1)(p) and 2(1)(t) explicitly use the word "person" while referring to a patentee. The general stand of the Indian judiciary aligns with that of the judiciary of the United States where neither of the two consider an AI model an author under their respective statutes. Recently The New York Times Company sued Microsoft and OpenAI (founder company of a popular AI Model "ChatGPT") for relying their models on large-language models ("LLMs") which are allegedly created by duplicating and using millions of copyrighted news stories, in-depth analyses, opinion pieces, reviews, how-to manuals, and other content from The Times. In such cases whether or not a person/entity can be directly linked as the author of the content generated by ChatGPT is the ultimate question waiting to be answered by the New York District Court. This not only puts the works of others in jeopardy as they suffer financial and other losses but also a risk of copyright and patent claims from the AI itself, claiming that the work generated by the technology belongs to it and not the original producer. India is facing a technological and IT boom in

the current years. The government aims to regulate all these advancements, especially considering the huge leaps AI technology has made in the past couple of years. In 2023, the Digital Personal Data Protection Act was also passed. It restricts anyone from producing any information/content/media that is not publicly available. Considering this and the wording of the Copyright Act, it is clear that no person can use any content that is not theirs without crediting the original producer. Logically and in principles of natural justice this should also be applicable for AIs to prevent unfair usage of original content. From an Indian point-of-view, it is largely argued that all IPR laws need major amendments and guidelines on how to deal with such patent-related issues. The lack of clarity of statutes leads one to judicial interpretation. The current interpretation in Indian courts is that only content and ideas that could be linked to a human author can be patented. However, the interpretation lacks technical depth, which is to consider whether a human intervention in the form of LLMs should be taken into account or if the AI model is solely responsible for the work it generates. And if the latter is the case, who shall stand liable for such IP infringements? Since AI-generated works.

## Rewind 2023: India's 'star performance' with glittering successes and some misses

As the year 2023 draws down, there is a definite sense of contentment and achievement as India looks back at this very productive year. PM Narendra Modi, in his year ending interview to Financial Times exuded confidence when he said that "our nation is on the cusp of a take-off" adding that today, the people of India have very different aspirations from the ones they had 10 years back. The year which was dominated by India's G20 presidency and SCO chairmanship, had many achievements and 'firsts' that have laid a strong foundation in

the 'Amrit Kal', aimed to ensure India becomes a developed country by 2047. **G20 Summit: Historic milestone** India's growth trajectory and economic outlook for 2024. The G20 presidency and India set the ground running. India hosted the first ever 'Voice of Global South Summit' on 12-13 January 2023 which was attended by 125 countries where PM Modi highlighted the importance of including the voices of the countries of Global South in the global discourse. It finally resulted in the

African Union being included into the G20 during the G20 Summit at Delhi in September. The G20 Summit was a historic milestone in its own sense for India. It was India's first G20 presidency and coincided with the celebrations of its 75th year of independence. The G20 Summit in Delhi, held on 09-10 September 2023 was the largest in the history of G20, attended by more than 30 heads of States/Government. The 'Delhi Declaration' issued at the end of the summit truly justified the theme of this year's G20 ie 'One Earth, One

Family, One Future' and was an apt reflection of the priorities that India proposed, key among them being the inclusion of the Global South in the G20, inclusive and human centric development, climate preservation models and new models for financial inclusion for the developing world. The fact that some key meetings of the presidency were held in Kashmir and Arunachal Pradesh, areas which have been 'contested' by adversaries in the past, gave India a chance to show to the world the strength of its sovereignty.

## Putin: Western elites, not Ukraine, are Russia's true adversaries

Discussing the continuous Western backing of Kiev, Putin emphasized that it's not merely assistance to an enemy, but rather that the elites of the collective West themselves are the true adversaries



**Putin:** Western elites, not Ukraine, are Russia's true adversaries. President Vladimir Putin gestures during an interaction after his visit to a Moscow hospital. President Vladimir Putin has asserted that Ukraine is not the primary adversary in the

ongoing conflict, but rather the Western elites supporting it are the real enemies of Russia. Putin made these remarks while visiting a military hospital in Moscow, where he met with servicemen injured in the conflict. "We're going to intensify the strikes. No crime against civilians will rest unpunished, that's for certain," Putin said during his visit to the military hospital. Putin said Russia would continue to hit what he called "military installations". Discussing the continuous Western backing of Kiev, Putin emphasized that it's not merely assistance to an enemy, but rather that the elites of the collective West themselves are the true adversaries. He said "The

point is not that they are helping our enemy, but that they are our enemy. They are solving their own problems with [Ukraine's] hands, that's what it's all about." Putin suggested that the conflict between Moscow and Kiev was orchestrated by Western elites aiming to defeat Russia. Despite their efforts, he noted, the collective West has failed to achieve its objectives, a fact he believes is evident in the changing rhetoric surrounding the conflict. "Those who only yesterday were talking about the need to inflict a 'strategic defeat' on Russia are now looking for words on how to quickly end the conflict," Putin remarked. He expressed Russia's desire to con-

clude the conflict swiftly but on its own terms, saying, "We want to end the conflict too, and as quickly as possible, but only on our terms. We have no desire to fight forever, but we are not going to give up our positions either." Putin observed that the battlefield situation is evolving, despite the extensive support Kiev has received from the West. He claimed that Russia has been outperforming the entire Western alliance in military production, with expectations for further growth in output. "Despite the fact that from time immemorial [the West] has had such a goal - to deal with Russia, it looks like we will deal with them first," he said.

## Taiwan polls: US-friendly DPP set for election win, survey says

**The Taiwan People's Party's Ko Wen-je trails in third place, according to the publicly released polls.**



Taiwan : US-friendly DPP set for election win, survey says. Taiwan President and Democratic Progressive Party presidential candidate William Lai speaks at the presidential debates in Taipei, Taiwan. Taiwan's final election polls put the ruling party on track to win a record third straight term in power, a setback to President Xi Jinping's efforts to bring the island closer to Beijing. The Democratic Progressive Party's

Vice President Lai Ching-te was the frontrunner in three surveys in recent days, with his lead over main opposition rival, Hou Yu-ih of the Kuomintang, ranging from 3 to 11 percentage points. The Taiwan People's Party's Ko Wen-je trails in third place, according to the publicly released polls. Tuesday is the last day surveys are allowed to be published before a 10-day blackout period ahead of the January 13 election, which has been the island's most hotly contested in

decades. In the TVBS and Taiwan Public Opinion Foundation polls, Lai's lead was slightly larger than the margins of error. "If the DPP is able to sustain its lead right now and gets re-elected, we should expect closer watch from both Beijing and Washington on Lai," said Huang Kwei-bo, a professor of diplomacy at the National Chengchi University. "There's a possibility for cross strait tensions to deteriorate further." Lai has previously described himself as a "political worker for Taiwanese independence," in comments that angered Beijing. He has since stated Taiwan is already a de facto sovereign nation and therefore does not need to declare independence. Taiwan Heads into Tight Election | DPP's Lai has consistent but narrow lead across major opinion polls.

## 'Bill Clinton among 'big names' to be unmasked in court documents related to Jeffrey Epstein'

**NEW DELHI:** Former President Bill Clinton is set to be named as "John Doe 36" in previously redacted documents related to Jeffrey Epstein, a convicted sex offender. ABC News reported that Clinton is mentioned over 50 times in these filings, but there is no evidence of his involvement in illegal activities. Manhattan federal Judge Loretta Preska has ordered the unsealing of numerous documents, revealing connections to Epstein. The release, starting on

January 2, will disclose the identities of over 170 individuals, including various associates, victims, investigators, and journalists involved in the case. 'Bill Clinton among 'big names' to be unmasked in court documents related to Jeffrey Epstein' Former President Bill Clinton is set to be named in documents previously redacted, which are related to Jeffrey Epstein, a convicted sex offender. This revelation comes from ABC News. Clinton is among over 150 individuals,

previously referred to as John or Jane Does, whose identities will soon be disclosed. The former US president is set to be revealed as "John Doe 36", the report said.

A federal judge in New York has ordered the unsealing of numerous documents, revealing connections to Epstein. ABC News has indicated that while Clinton is mentioned over 50 times in these filings, there is no evidence of his involvement in illegal activities.

## 'George Soros becomes latest victim of prank 911 call'



**NEW DELHI:** Billionaire George Soros' estate in Southampton Village, New York, was the latest target of a "swatting" incident on Saturday. This prank involved a false 911 call claiming a violent crime at the residence, a tactic that has recently affected several high-profile individuals. The New York Post reported that the Southampton Village Police Department received a call around 9pm. The caller falsely claimed to have shot his wife and was threatening suicide at Soros' mansion on Old Town Road. Upon arrival, officers, including Southampton Village Detective Sgt Herman Lamison, found the call to be a hoax. It was not clear whether Soros or his family members were at home

during the incident. The practice of "swatting" involves making a bogus police report, typically of a severe crime like murder or a hostage situation, to provoke a SWAT team response at the victim's home.

This not only diverts police resources from real emergencies but also terrorizes the targeted individuals in their homes. Soros, a well-known left-wing billionaire and philanthropist, has been active in supporting various candidates for prosecutor positions across the country as part of his criminal justice system reform efforts. His work extends beyond prosecutors, with his Open Society Policy Center funding initiatives on critical policy issues.

**Xi Jinping makes rare admission that China's economy is in trouble, vows to strengthen recovery**

Chinese President Xi Jinping pledged to strengthen economic momentum and job creation, acknowledging some companies and citizens had endured a difficult 2023 in a rare admission of domestic headwinds facing the country. While China's most-powerful leader since Mao Zedong used his annual new year address to trumpet his nation's achievements, he also conceded some "enterprises had a tough time" and "people had difficulty finding jobs and meeting basic needs." "We will consolidate and strengthen the momentum of economic recovery, and work to achieve steady and long-term economic development," Xi said in the televised message Sunday, beamed to his nation's 1.4 billion people.



## Ukraine military raises air alerts, says missile threat

**KYIV:** Ukraine's military raised air alerts on Tuesday, warning there was the threat of Russian missile strikes. "Missile danger in areas where the air alert is on! Threat of launching cruise missiles from Tu-95MS aircraft. A total of 16 Tu-95MS strategic bombers are in the air," the air force said on Telegram.

## 'Time travel' flight for New Year's eve ends in disappointment

Passengers aboard a United Airlines flight, hoping to experience a unique 'time traveling' journey for New Year's Eve, faced an unexpected turn of events as they welcomed 2024. Flight UA200, which was set to depart from Guam at 7.35am on January 1, 2024, and arrive in Honolulu, Hawaii at 6.50pm on December 31, 2023, promised a rare opportunity to celebrate New Year's Eve twice by crossing time zones.

According to a CNN report, United Airlines had promoted this special flight with enthusiasm, tweeting, "You only live once, but you can celebrate New Year's Eve twice!" and on Instagram, stating, "Time travel is real." This concept of time zone jumping for New Year's celebrations is not new, as several flights each year offer passengers the chance to relive their New Year's Eve festivities. However, the excitement turned to disappointment for those on UA200. Due to a delay, the flight eventually left Guam at 1.49 pm on January 1, arriving in Honolulu at 12:34am on January 1, thus missing the much-anticipated countdown to the New Year, the CNN report said. Passengers expressed their frustration on X, formerly known as Twitter, with one commenting under the original United Airlines tweet, "Great idea, too bad it got delayed! I was supposed to be on this flight. Double new year isn't happening anymore." Another passenger shared, "I booked this flight specifically so I could do this."

## Self-styled MAGA 'prophet' predicts 'overthrow' of US government: Report

Pastor Julie Green, a self-styled prophet and supporter of the MAGA movement, has made a bold prediction about an "overthrow" of the US government. Green, known for her controversial prophecies and her connection to the MAGA movement, often shares messages she claims are divinely inspired on her streaming channels. Her past predictions have been varied, including the death of Democratic Representative Nancy Pelosi before the 2022 midterms and the collapse of legal indictments against former President Donald Trump. Pastor Julie Green, a self-styled prophet and supporter of the MAGA movement, has made a bold prediction about an "overthrow" of the US government.

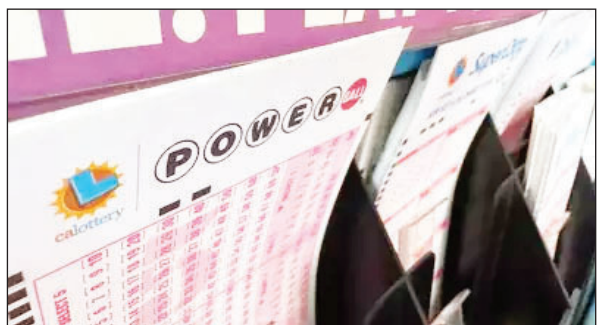
## Thailand, China to permanently waive visas for each other's citizens from March

**BANGKOK:** Thailand and China will permanently waive visa requirements for each other's citizens from March, Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin. Southeast Asia's second-largest economy, which relies heavily on tourism, in September waived

entry requirements for Chinese tourists until February this year. "This will upgrade the relationship between the two countries," Srettha told reporters. In 2023, Thailand welcomed 28 million foreign tourists, slightly above its target, generating 1.2 trillion baht

(\$34.93 billion) of revenue, government data showed. Of that, the top source market was Malaysia with 4.5 million visitors, followed by 3.5 million arrivals from China. That compared with a pre-Covid record of 39 million arrivals with 11 million from China.

## \$842 million Powerball ticket sold in Michigan, 1st time the game has been won on New Year's Day



**JOHNSTON:** Someone in Michigan has won an \$842.4 million Powerball jackpot on the first day of 2024, the first time it has been won on New Year's Day since the game's start in 1992. The winning numbers drawn were: 12, 21, 42, 44, 49 and red Powerball: 1. Final ticket sales pushed the jackpot beyond its

earlier estimate of \$810 million to \$842.4 million at the time of the drawing, making it the fifth-largest Powerball jackpot and 10th-largest US lottery jackpot ever won. Before the big win on New Year's, the jackpot had been growing since mid-October. The chance of winning the Powerball jackpot is 1 in 292.2 million.

## Russia rounds up thousands of migrants at New Year's eve festivities: Reports

**Moscow**

Russia's police detained thousands of migrants in New Year's Eve raids, with scores now facing deportation. In St. Petersburg, about 3,000 migrants were detained during checks to prevent crime, revealing over 600 migrants with migration law violations. In Moscow, a man from Tajikistan dressed as Santa Claus was among the detained migrants. In Chelyabinsk, three migrants are under investigation for an act of hooliganism against Russian servicemen and their wives. The Investigative Committee also opened investigations into migrants' illegal actions in the Sverdlovsk and Moscow regions. Russia's police have detained thousands of migrants across the country in New Year's Eve raids with scores of them facing deportation,



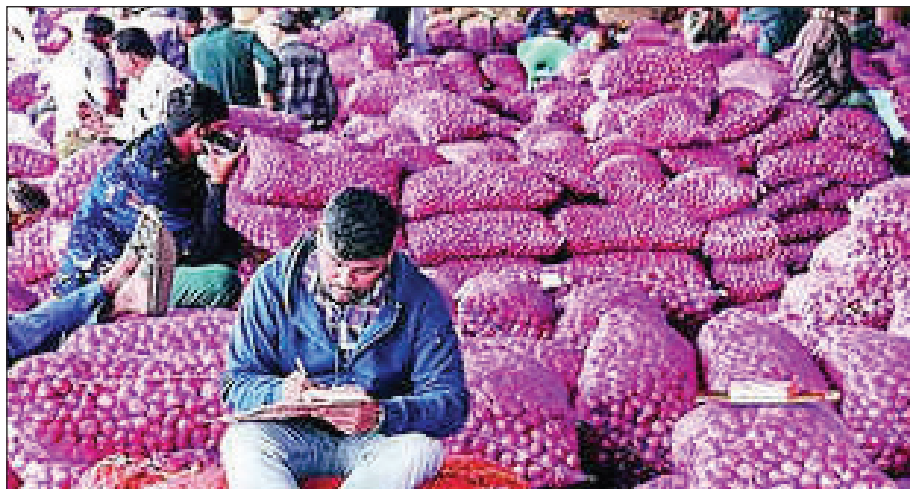
Russian media reported. About 3,000 migrants were detained in Russia's second-largest city of St. Petersburg during checks "to prevent crime," Russia's RIA state news agency reported. "As it turned out, more than 600 of the migrants have been in Russia with various violations of migration legislation," RIA cited an unnamed law enforcement agency source as saying. More than 100 people faced deportation, RIA added. Russia's SOTA

online news outlet said a man from Tajikistan who was dressed as a Santa Claus was among migrants detained in Moscow. In the west-central Russian city of Chelyabinsk, Russia's top investigative organ, the Investigative Committee, said it was opening a criminal case against three migrants for an "act of hooliganism" against Russian servicemen and their wives. "A crowd of drunken migrants attacked two young men demobilized from the front line, one soldier was hit with a baton," the Committee said on the Telegram messaging app. "It is also noted that the migrants insulted the wives of veterans of the special military operation." Russia calls the war it unleashed on Ukraine in February 2022 a "special military operation."

## As prices fall, government may lift ban on onion export

**NEW DELHI:** The government intervention of procuring kharif onion and disposing them of simultaneously have brought down average retail prices by 30% and wholesale prices by 35% in the past one month. Considering the trend of decline in prices and the short shelf life of the summer crop, the government may look at the option of lifting the export ban in a calibrated manner, officials said.

Sources in the onion trade said that they have been informed by government functionaries that the Centre would allow export by government cooperatives. "The government should not have a quota system. They must have



an open policy for export of onions like other commodities. We are waiting for the notification," Jaydyutt Holkar, director at Mumbai APMC, told. So far, central agencies have procured around 25,000 tonnes of kharif onion from farmers and these have been dis-

posed of simultaneously since these can't be stored. Officials said the ban on export and market interventions have brought the desired result as average retail prices have dropped to Rs 39 per kg this week compared to Rs 59 a month back. Similarly, the average wholesale

prices have also fallen from Rs 4,885 a quintal to Rs 3,137 in the past one month. Traders said that in the last few days, the arrival of fresh kharif onions has increased to 15,000 quintals per day and this needs to be used quickly and export of certain quantities would be a

good proposal since now the availability has increased. Bangladesh, Malaysia and Nepal are the main importers of Indian onions. Allowing calibrated exports will also ensure no further fall in prices and ensure farmers get good remuneration. Meanwhile, officials said the government will continue its intervention to keep prices under check. The government has authorised Nafed and NCCF to procure 7 lakh tonne during this fiscal year of which so far 5.3 lakh tonne of onion has been procured.

"So, we can still continue procuring up to 1.7 lakh tonne of both kharif and late kharif onion for market intervention," said an offi-

## Truck drivers protest against new hit-and-run law, long queues at petrol pumps

**NEW DELHI:** Petrol pumps have been witnessing unusually long queues across India as people rush to fill their tanks, driven by fears of a fuel shortage. This situation arises amidst a protest by truck drivers against the new penal law on hit-and-run accident cases involving motorists. The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, which replaces the Indian Penal Code, stipulates up to 10 years imprisonment or a fine of Rs 7 lakh for drivers causing serious road accidents and



fleeing the scene without informing the police or administration. Protests have erupted across India, including Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, with private bus and truck drivers enforcing 'chakka jams' in protest against the new law. Gyansingh Yadav, a cab driver,

expressed his concerns, saying, "The new law attracts a 10-year prison term for errand drivers. I feel it should be reduced to 1-2 years." Drivers' concerns and government legislation under the new Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the punishment for hit-and-run cases has been significantly increased from the previous two years under the IPC. Private transport operators argue that the law is discouraging for drivers and may lead to unjust punishments.

## Unescorted 2-year-old adds to 'donkey flight' mystery

**AHMEDABAD:** Amidst the unfolding saga of the "donkey flight" grounded in France, one passenger stands out — a two-year-old boy from Gujarat who was onboard as an unaccompanied minor. However, he is now untraceable. Gujarat police have launched an investigation to locate the child, identify his parents or

guardians, and unravel whether he was part of a complex plan orchestrated by human smugglers, possibly facing a fate similar to the many children abandoned on the US-Canada border. A Gujarat police CID officer said: "We have been trying to locate the child and his parents or guardians as many families have left their homes in north

Gujarat." The flight to Nicaragua, carrying 303 passengers, including 96 from Gujarat, was grounded by French authorities in Vatry on December 21 over suspicions of human smuggling. A subsequent court order on December 24 released passengers, with only 276, including 72 from Gujarat, landing in Mumbai.

## Sky beckons: DGCA issues maximum pilot licences in 2023

**NEW DELHI:** India issued the highest ever number of commercial pilot licences (CPL) — 1,622 — last year, almost 40% more than 1,165 in 2022. Last year, 292 women got CPLs (18% of total issued) — 22% more than 2022, said an official of Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA). While the number of CPLs issued by DGCA in the last decade has almost doubled — from 783 in 2013-14 to 1,622 last year, share of those going to women has nearly tripled — from 116 to

293 — in the same period.

India already has the highest proportion of women pilots globally. "It is estimated 14% of workforce employed with scheduled airlines consists of women pilots. This is the second consecutive year where the number of licenses issued has witnessed a decade-high," a senior DGCA official said. Durba Banerjee had become the first Indian woman commercial pilot in 1956 when she joined erstwhile Indian Airlines.

**AHMEDABAD:** Gujarat high court on Monday indicated that looking at the record of social activist Teesta Setalvad, it was not inclined to grant her any relief in the Pandarwada mass grave digging case. Setalvad had filed a petition in court in 2017 after her name was included in an FIR in 2011 in connection with digging graves and exhuming 28 bodies from a mass burial site near Pandarwada in Panchmahal district in December 2005.

The bodies were of those killed during the post-Godhra violence. In 2006, Gujarat police had

lodged the FIR for creating false evidence, destruction of evidence, trespassing on a burial place and outraging religious feelings. When the case came up for hearing on Monday, Justice Sandeep Bhatt told Setalvad's advocate Yogesh Ravani, "After going through the record, I am not inclined. You have to satisfy (the court)."

The lawyer submitted, "It is the prerogative of the lordship. We will try to convince the court because no offence is made out. Ultimately, it is political victimisation." To this, the judge replied,

"It is a very broad word used nowadays (sic)." The hearing was adjourned till January 9. Lunawada municipality had filed a complaint against seven persons, including Rais Khan, ex-coordinator at Setalvad's NGO Citizen for Justice & Peace. HC ordered a CBI probe following allegations by riot survivors that their kin were buried without proper procedure of autopsy being followed. On the other hand, the state government asserted that the burial had taken place after properly notifying the place as a burial ground.

## High Court 'not inclined' to give Teesta relief in grave digging case

## Covid cases rise 22% in a week, Kerala numbers fall

**New Delhi**

India recorded a 22% rise in Covid cases this week as compared to the last, with the tally in the past 24 hours crossing 800 for the first time in seven months. While the overall numbers remain very low and the rise has been gradual — possibly because of sparse testing and a large number of cases remaining mild — data shows that the JN.1-driven surge is spreading across the country and that infections may already have peaked in Kerala, the state logging the highest counts in the current phase.

## Pakistan terrorists smuggling gold via Goa airports: DRI

**PANAJI:** Pakistani terrorists based in the Middle East are involved in gold smuggling through the airports in touristy Goa and funds generated from these illicit operations are allegedly used to finance anti-national activities in India, reports Murari Shetye. This was revealed during recent investigations by the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) in Goa. Over the past three months, DRI has seized 3kg of gold worth Rs 10 crore, with smugglers reportedly utilising both the airport at Mopa and the older airport at Dabolim for smuggling. Mounting cases prompted the agency to heighten its vigilance and activate sources to catch the smugglers. DRI suspects that gold is being smuggled through Mopa every day.

## Visit Ayodhya...it will make you recollect Tretayuga: Yogi



**MATHURA:** Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath on Monday appealed to the people to visit Ayodhya after the consecration ceremony of the Ram temple and asserted that it will make them recollect the 'Tretayuga'. "During the 'Shri Ram Janmabhoomi' movement in Ayodhya, VHP was leading it under the guidance of priests and RSS. We used to say that the day when Indians will be able to chant 'Jai Shri Ram' together in one voice, the issue of Ram temple would be resolved," Yogi said while addressing the Shashthipurti Mahotsav of Sadhvi Ritambhara in Mathura. "You should visit Ayodhya after

January 22, it will make you think of the 'Tretayuga'. Now that the airport has been opened in Ayodhya, Lord Ram will land here through 'Pushpak Viman'." Yogi also said, "The PM came to Ayodhya on December 30. Now look at the infrastructure here. Ayodhya is now connected via roads and airlines. The process is underway to connect it via waterlines too." "We all have one pledge, that is 'Viksit Bharat' (developed India). We are witnessing a new India. People who hesitated in taking Ayodhya's name, are now awaiting the invitation for the consecration ceremony," he added.

## Hard landing in Dubai: AI derosters pilot & orders probe

"Depending on the age of the aircraft and metal fatigue, a young plane may withstand that particular landing but for subsequent landings the structural integrity can fail leading to structural failure"



**NEW DELHI:** An Air India flight made a very heavy landing in Dubai on December 20. Luckily for everyone onboard the relatively young 5.5-year-old Airbus A320neo (VT CIQ) did not suffer structural damage when it made the heavy landing (3.5 G) and came to a stop safely. The pilot has been removed from flying duties pending investigation. The plane remained grounded in Dubai for extensive checks for a week before being allowed to fly back to Air India's engineering base in Mumbai. Flight tracking sites show the plane operated to Mumbai on

December 27 with its cruising altitude below 10,000 feet, indicating an unpressurised ferry. This means it came home for repairs after being allowed one landing which aircraft-makers allow after studying the digital flight data recorder (DFDR) to the airline's engineering base as a "substandard ferry (without passengers) flight." An Air India spokesperson said: "An investigation has already been initiated, as per DGCA norms. The pilot was appropriately trained and licensed to fly the aircraft. He has been off-rostered till the process of inquiry is on as per norms." The heavy landing happened when the aircraft

operated as AI 933 from Kochi to Dubai. Flight tracking websites show that the next flight was to Mumbai on December 27. It has not flown since, as per flight tracking sites. Senior pilots who have operated the A320 for decades say: "This aircraft made a landing into Dubai exceeding the manufacturer's landing gear structural limitation. It can cause extensive damage to the landing gear structure. Depending on the age of the aircraft and metal fatigue, a young plane may withstand that particular landing but for subsequent landings the structural integrity can fail leading to structural failure."



## Earthquake of magnitude 3.9 hits Jammu-Kashmir

**SRINAGAR:** An earthquake of magnitude 3.9 on the Richter Scale jolted Jammu and Kashmir on Tuesday, the National Centre for Seismology (NCS) said. National Centre for Seismology said that the earthquake occurred at 11:33 am at a depth of 5 km. "Earthquake of Magnitude: 3.9, Occurred on 02-01-2024, 11:33:32 IST, Lat: 32.76 and Long: 74.57, Depth: 5 Km, Location: Jammu and Kashmir," the National Centre for Seismology (NCS) posted on X.

## After US, India second country to send dedicated satellite to study black holes

**SRIHARIKOTA:** Isro ushered in the New Year with the successful launch of XPoSat (X-ray Polarimeter Satellite), India's first satellite to conduct research on black holes and other celestial objects. Workhorse PSLV placed the satellite on its 60th flight in a 650km orbit. The final stage of PSLV-C58 then turned into an orbital experimental module (POEM) to test the 10 payloads over the next month. Around 22 minutes after the lift-off from Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, the rocket injected XPoSat. The rocket went through at least two coasting phases — when the engines were not fired — to place the satellite with a 6-degree inclination. XPoSat will carry out studies of X-rays emitted by celestial objects like black holes, neutron stars and galactic nuclei. It carries two payloads — Polix (Polarimeter Instrument in X-rays) by Raman Research Institute and Xspect (X-ray spectroscopy and timing) by Space Astronomy Group of URSC. PM Narendra Modi hailed the launch. "A great start to 2024 thanks to our scientists! This launch is wonderful news for the space sector and will enhance India's prowess in this field. Best wishes to our scientists at @isro and the entire space fraternity in taking India to unprecedented heights," Modi tweeted. Isro chairman S Somanath described the launch as a "New Year gift to all of us." "The satellite is unique. It complements the scientific objective we have set for various observations of the universe. It goes with Astrosat and Aditya-L1," Somanath said. A Raman Research Institute release said XPoSat is only the second x-ray polarimetry mission in the world, after Nasa's Imaging X-ray Polarimetry Explorer (IXPE) launched in 2021. The 10 payloads in the P54 orbital module include fuel cell power system and Silicon-based high energy cell from Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre, Isro. On missions planned this year, Somanath called 2024 as the year of Gaganyaan readiness and said the agency targets at least 12-14 missions this year. Meanwhile, Aditya-L1, the spacecraft for India's maiden solar mission, would reach its final destination — the L1 point of the Sun — on January 6 when a final manoeuvre would be performed, Isro chief S Somanath said.

## Pak rested Shaheen Afridi, Imam for third Test against Australia

**NEW DELHI:** Pakistan have opted to rest star pacer Shaheen Shah Afridi and opener Imam-ul-Haq for the third and final Test against Australia.

The decision was announced on Tuesday as Pakistan revealed their playing XI for the New Year's Test, set to commence on Wednesday.

Pakistan's strategic adjustments

The inclusion of 21-year-old Saim Ayub and 30-year-old Sajid Khan highlights the team's strategic adjustments. Saim Ayub, making his Test debut, arrives on the back of strong List A performances for Karachi, showcasing his potential after debuting in T20 international cricket in March of the previous year.

Despite limited Test experience, Saim brings a fresh perspective to the playing XI. In his eight T20I matches, he has accumulated 123 runs at an average of 17.57.

Sajid Khan, returning to the Test team after an almost two-year hiatus, last competed against Australia during their March 2022 tour of



Pakistan. With 22 wickets in seven Test matches, Sajid boasts a respectable record, providing Pakistan with a seasoned spin option.

Unchanged XI for Australia Australia, on the other hand, have decided to maintain an unchanged playing XI for the

third Test, as confirmed by skipper Pat Cummins on Tuesday.

Despite speculations about resting one of their primary quicks, Cummins asserted that all three have recovered well and are ready for the final match.

Warner's farewell Test:

The spotlight will be on veteran opener David Warner, bidding farewell to Test cricket in front of his home fans at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

With Australia holding an unassailable 2-0 lead in the series and currently ranked third in the ICC World Test Championship, the Sydney Test promises to be a significant encounter.

The match is scheduled to take place from January 3 to January 7, with anticipation building for Warner's farewell and Pakistan's strategic adjustments to challenge the hosts.

Third Test Squads: Pakistan Playing XI: Saim Ayub, Abdullah Shafique, Shan Masood (c), Babar Azam, Saud Shakeel, Mohammad Rizwan (wk), Salman Ali Agha, Sajid Khan, Hasan Ali, Mir Hamza and Aamer Jamal.

Australia Playing XI: Pat Cummins (c) David Warner, Usman Khawaja, Marnus Labuschagne, Steve Smith, Travis Head, Mitch Marsh, Alex Carey, Mitchell Starc, Nathan Lyon and Josh Hazlewood.

## How a Delhi Capitals' IPL Auction goof-up led to embarrassment all around



**NEW DELHI:** Jharkhand's wicket-keeper-batsman Sumit Kumar was away for some work when the IPL 2023 Players Auction was live on television. His family members, just like every cricketer's family, were glued to the television screen to watch the auction. They were hoping their son Sumit, who honed his skills under the wings of the legendary Mahendra Singh Dhoni, gets an IPL contract. As Sumit's name was announced by the auctioneer Mallika Sagar at the

glittering event held in Dubai, his mother folded her hands in prayer. Sumit's name and photo were flashed on the television screen and the promising young wicketkeeper-batsman sparked the interest of multiple bidders. From the base price of Rs. 20 lakh, the bidding soared to Rs 1 crore before Delhi Capitals pocketed the cricketer. A teary-eyed mother picked up her phone and dialed Sumit to congratulate him while he too was moved hearing the news. Delhi Capitals,

after sealing the deal, also posted a photo of Sumit, tagged him, and welcomed him into their 'family'. There was a buzz at Sumit's residence in Jharkhand. Several local and national media persons gathered and started collecting Sumit's family's bytes. Relatives and neighbours also started coming to Sumit's house with their congratulatory messages. But Sumit and his family were unaware that their happiness was short-lived, as the entire situation suddenly flipped.

## Warner appeals for return of stolen baggy green cap ahead of farewell Test

**NEW DELHI:** In a heartfelt plea, Australian cricket stalwart David Warner has appealed for the return of his baggy green cap, which went missing on a flight from Melbourne to Sydney ahead of his final Test match against Pakistan this week.

The 37-year-old opener, set to conclude his illustrious 12-year Test career in the upcoming third Test against Pakistan at the Sydney Cricket Ground, took to Instagram to share his distress about the missing bag. Warner expressed the sentimental value of the



bag, particularly containing his cherished Baggy Green cap, which is traditionally presented to Australian internationals on the morning of their Test debut. The Baggy Green holds immense significance for players, symbolizing

pride and dedication throughout their Test careers.

View this post on Instagram A post shared by David Warner (@davidwarner31) "This is my last resort, but my backpack, which contained

my Baggy Green, has been taken from my luggage, which was transported to Melbourne airport and flown... to Sydney a few days ago," Warner revealed in his Instagram post. Appealing to the individual responsible, Warner added, "It's something that I would love to have back, in my hands, walking out there come this week. If it's the backpack that you really wanted, I have a spare one here. You won't get into trouble, just get in touch with Cricket Australia or me.

## 'Dejected' Kohli's unseen video after ODI World Cup final defeat goes viral

**NEW DELHI:** The Indian team remained undefeated throughout the ICC ODI World Cup until they reached the final, where they faced the formidable Australia at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad, and lost the title clash to the Pat Cummins-led side. India, who were playing at home and were top favourites on paper, defeated Australia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, New Zealand, England, Sri Lanka, South Africa, and the Netherlands to enter the semifinals. In the semifinals, India, riding on magnificent centuries from Virat Kohli and Shreyas Iyer, posted a mammoth 397 and then skittled New Zealand for 327 to enter the title clash. But things didn't go as planned for India. India, who defeated Australia in the group stage, suffered a six-wicket defeat in the grand finale. In an unseen video, which went viral on social media, Virat appeared disheartened after the World Cup final concluded. As the Australian players celebrated their win on the field, Kohli silently walked towards the stumps and disturbed bails with his cap. In 11 matches, Kohli scored 765 runs at an astonishing average of 95.62. He now has the most runs in a single World Cup edition.



## Australia stick to winning formula for Warner's farewell Test; Pakistan aim to spoil the party

**NEW DELHI:** As Australia seek to clinch a series sweep against Pakistan in the third and final Test, captain Pat Cummins confirmed that the same winning team from the first two matches would take the field at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

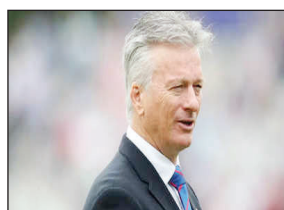
The decision aims to bid farewell to veteran opener David Warner on a high note in his 112th and final Test, following convincing victories in Perth and Melbourne. Cummins, addressing the media on Tuesday, praised Warner as Australia's "greatest three-form player" and emphasized the veteran's significant contributions across formats. "Every time he walks out there, he's competitive, ready to go, so just a champion of Australian sport and hopefully he gets a good send-off this week," Cummins remarked. Warner, who announced his retirement from one-day internationals on Monday, leaves a notable void in the top order for Australia. Cummins did not reveal who would fill the opening position in the upcoming series against West Indies in January but cited Warner's current partner, Usman Khawaja, as an example of a non-specialist who earned his place in the team. On the other side, Pakistan captain Shan Masood faces the challenge of motivating his team after consecutive defeats. Masood acknowledged Australia's dominance but highlighted the positive aspects of Pakistan's performance in Melbourne.

"We have to make sure that we're not making a lot of mistakes to close out games," Masood noted. Masood refrained from naming the playing XI on Tuesday due to some "fitness issues," but spinner Abrar Ahmed is in contention to play his first test of the tour, especially considering the possibility of a turning wicket in Sydney."



## Obviously they don't care': Steve Waugh expresses concerns over Test cricket's future

**NEW DELHI:** Former Australia captain Steve Waugh has voiced concerns over the future of Test cricket, expressing dismay at Cricket South Africa's (CSA) decision to send a shadow side to New Zealand for a Test tour while their top players participate in a domestic T20 tournament. CSA has named seven uncapped players, including skipper Neil Brand, for the two-Test tour of New Zealand, which coincides with the second edition of the SA20 T20 tournament starting on January 10. Waugh, speaking to the Sydney Morning Herald, urged the International Cricket Council (ICC) and other administrators to intervene and safeguard the longest format of the game.



because you're not testing yourself against the best players," Waugh remarked. The proliferation of franchise cricket and domestic T20 leagues has posed challenges to bilateral tours and weakened the availability of top players for Test matches. The ICC, with limited authority over bilateral scheduling, faces difficulties in addressing these issues.

Australia captain Pat Cummins expressed hope that South Africa's decision was just a phase and not indicative of a broader trend away from Test cricket. "I know the South African team aren't sending their strongest side; I'm hoping it's just a phase," Cummins commented.

## S Africa aim for Dean Elgar's Test farewell victory against India in series decider

**NEW DELHI:** South Africa are gearing up for the second and final Test against India at Newlands, with Dean Elgar set to bid farewell to his Test career as the captain. The 36-year-old, standing in for the injured Temba Bavuma, is in prime form after a stellar 185-run performance in the first Test, and the hosts are determined to secure a victory in his honor.

**Bowling changes on the card for India** India, on the other hand, are expected to make changes to their bowling attack after a



comprehensive defeat in the opening Test. Left-arm spin bowling all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja is likely to return, bringing depth to India's batting lineup, which struggled in Centurion. The Indian bowling lineup may see at least one more change, with Avesh

Khan or Mukesh Kumar in contention. Both Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj showed reasonable control in Centurion but lacked support from other bowlers. India's batting order faced challenges against South Africa's pace attack, with captain

Rohit Sharma continuing to struggle in South African conditions. Young batsmen Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill, and Shreyas Iyer also looked vulnerable against the fast bowlers. Less support for pacers: Newlands is expected to offer different conditions from Centurion, with less support for fast bowling but still providing assistance to bowlers.

The pitch, adorned with a covering of green grass, is likely to be mowed before the match.

## Bhaichung Bhutia Football Schools Residential Academy to hold selection trials in Jaipur on January 7

**JAIPUR:** Bhaichung Bhutia Football Schools (BBFS), powered by enJogo, will conduct selection trials for its residential academy programme at the University of Rajasthan ground, here on January 7. After completing India's largest trials initiative in 2022-23, BBFS Residential

Academy is launching the second season in Jaipur. In the first edition, more than eighteen thousand football players aged between 9 and 23 registered for the trials from 120 cities across the country. Bhaichung Bhutia, co-founder of BBFS and football legend, weighed in on

the significance of the initiative, stating, "for young players to get the right opportunities and become professional footballers, they must enter a well-structured sporting curriculum from an early age. BBFS Residential Academy trials are a great opportunity for talented players to join our

programme and train to achieve their best potential." Players born between January 1, 2007, and December 31, 2014, are eligible to participate in the trials. The reporting time is 9 am. Footballers must carry their kits and valid ID proof. A registration fee of Rs 100 is appli-

cable for all attendees. With the motto of 'building future champions', the upcoming edition of the BBFS Residential Academy trials will once again cover all parts of the country. Selecting BBFS scouts will travel to different cities and engage a larger pool of talents.

## Ahead of RBI curbs, loans to NBFCs grow 22% in year



**MUMBAI:** Bank loans to NBFCs touched nearly Rs 15 lakh crore in November - a growth of about 22% over the previous year - at a time when RBI placed curbs on bank loans to this segment. NBFCs cornered close to 10% of non-food bank credit, RBI data showed. RBI, in its financial stability report, said that stress in the NBFC sector has been assessed to be higher than the March 2023 position. "Contagion risk may warrant monitoring on account of increased interbank exposure," it noted. According to the data, home loans with banks touched Rs

● The highest growth in bank credit was recorded by personal loans, which grew just over 30% year-on-year, bolstered by the merger of HDFC with HDFC Bank in July 2023.

25.9 lakh crore in November. This is the largest segment of bank credit and accounts for nearly 31% of all bank loans. The highest growth in bank credit was recorded by personal loans, which grew just

over 30% year-on-year, bolstered by the merger of HDFC with HDFC Bank in July 2023. Excluding this, the growth in personal loans would have been 18.6%. The growth in loans to NBFCs came despite the merger of HDFC with HDFC Bank, which resulted in bank loans to NBFCs being recategorised as inter-bank loans. Credit cards outstanding touched Rs 2.5 lakh crore in November - nearly 1.5% of overall bank credit. Credit to the manufacturing industry continued to grow at 6.6% year-on-year, with loans to large industry growing by 4.1%.

## Vedanta faces investor reckoning over \$3.2 billion of bonds

**New Delhi** Vedanta Resources seeks approval for a proposal to revise the terms of its dollar bonds to cut its debt load. The miner is offering to pay \$779 million for notes due this year and 2025, and plans to extend the maturity on the remaining principal. S&P Global cut Vedanta's rating to CC and expects good earnings and strong cash flows. Bondholders are recommended to give their consent for the amendments, but S&P Global is skeptical about the lack of adequate compensation for the extension of maturities. Vedanta's ability to honor its \$1 billion bond



due January 21 is in question. Vedanta Resources Ltd faces a moment of reckoning this week as Indian billionaire Anil Agarwal's miner seeks approval for a proposal that could help it buy more time to honor its debt liabilities. Bondholders have until Jan. 2 to give an early consent on a plan to push out due dates on \$3.2 billion in bond repayments, a move that prompted S&P Global

Ratings in December to cut the company's rating deeper into junk. Vedanta needs a green light from at least two-thirds of the bondholders in each of the three securities to proceed with the plan.

A holder meeting will be held on January 4. The bid to revise the terms of its dollar bonds marks the latest attempt by Agarwal's group to bolster its balance sheet, having already sold a stake in its Mumbai-listed subsidiary and secured a \$1.25 billion private loan. But the fact Vedanta borrowed money at 18% to refinance debt underscores concerns about its finances.

## Maharashtra labour department sends notice to TCS over transfers

**BENGALURU:** The Maharashtra government's labour department has served a notice to TCS over its recent transfer policy. The complaint filed by labour union Nites alleged that TCS transferred over 2,000 employees without giving them enough lead time to relocate to a

different city nor provided them an opportunity for consultation, thus causing hardship to employees. "The company had threatened employees that failure to comply with the transfer directions will result in disciplinary actions," its president Harpreet Singh Saluja said in a letter to

the department. TCS 's email to some employees asking them to relocate to Mumbai said, "... This is with reference to your transfer order to TCS Mumbai followed by a transfer email directing you to report to said branch within 14 days and complete the transfer process.

## Services of audit cos under lens of NFRA

**NEW DELHI:** The audit and non-services offered by the Big Four network and other firms to their clients are under the lens of the National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA), the regulator for listed and large unlisted companies in the country. The issue has been flagged in several of the inspection reports that have been released by the agency and also in at least half-a-dozen disciplinary actions initiated by it as the regulatory body sees a conflict of interest or independence issues in the work undertaken by the firms. While NFRA does



not have its own guidelines, it goes by the provisions of the Companies Act and the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India's audit standards and guidelines, including the Code of Ethics, which lists out possible threats, including those related to self-interest, self-review, advocacy, familiarity and intermediation. In some of the cases that the regulatory body has dealt with

and taken disciplinary action, there were multiple violations. For instance, in some of the cases the firm had breached the prescribed ceiling for revenue from non-audit services.

Then there have been instances of a breach in the cap on revenue from one client. In one case the partner of a firm and related entities had a large shareholding in

one of the companies that was audited, which NFRA believes is a conflict of interest. While these instances have been found in several of the smaller firms, the role of some of the network affiliates of the Big Four is also under the scanner.

For instance, in an inspection report released last week, NFRA has concluded that Walker Chandio & Co, Grant Thornton Bharat, Grant Thornton Advisory and Grant Thornton International are "directly or indirectly related" entities, although the firms denied any relationship.

## Fuel, power demand down in December as festive buzz fades

● The drop was sharper at nearly 5% from November as demand waned towards the end of festive and holiday



**NEW DELHI:** India's energy demand caught the winter chill in December, with consumption of diesel, petrol and electricity falling as festive demand evaporated to reduce movement of people and materials. Government data shows power consumption dropping 2.3% to 119 billion units (BU) from a year ago, clocking the first decline since April 2023 when demand had dropped 1.5% to 130 BU.

Since then, however, demand had clocked a healthy pace of growth, which spiked to 22% in October. Industry data shows consumption of diesel, a key indicator of economic activities, falling 7.8% from a year ago, marking the second consecutive month of sharp decline. On monthly basis, however, sales

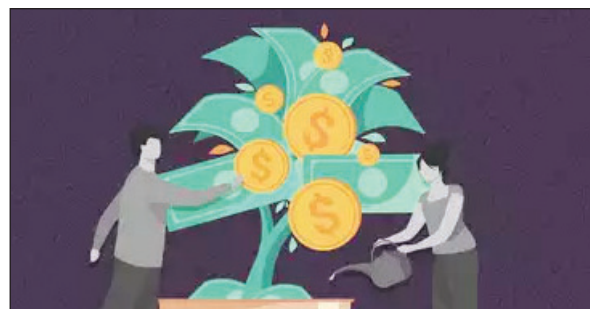
fell less than 1% from November. Petrol sales dropped 1.4% from December 2022, marking the first annual decline in at least eight months.

Sequentially, the drop was sharper at nearly 5% from November as demand waned towards the end of festive and holiday season.

## Startups face tough times, fund flow may not be easy

**NEW DELHI** 2023 proved to be a tough year for startups as investors stayed selective in allocating capital into companies and term sheets were signed only after weighing the ability of firms to deliver profitability.

With scarce funding and difficult investor questions



being posed around the viability of business models, startups laid off employees, shut cash guzzling verticals, made pivots, while a few players like Dunzo and Koo are struggling to stay afloat.

The New Year is not expected to be widely different for startups - analysts see investor sentiment improving in another six to eight months but the bar for investments will continue to be high. "What is not going to change in 2024 is the investor caution. Investors will still ask tough

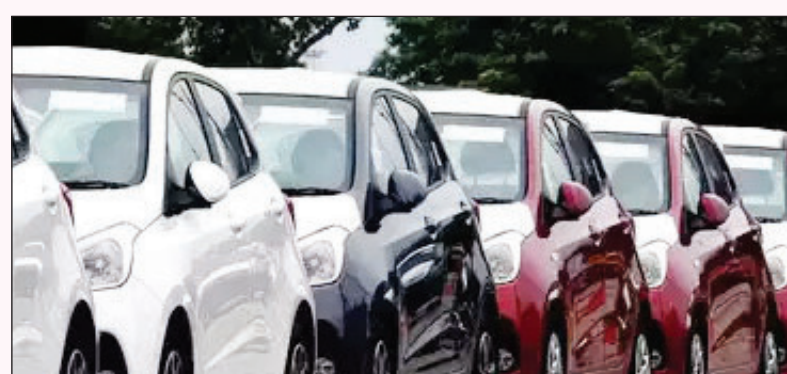
before writing cheques. Indiscriminate funding is not going to happen anymore," said Dipanjan Basu, co-founder and partner at Fireside Ventures.

In a year where startups like Byju's, GoMechanic and Mojocare unravelled due to poor corporate governance, investors are taking a closer look at various business metrics before betting on firms. While a company's path to profitability will be key, governance is also going to be a big driver of funding in the years to come.

## In a 1st, car sales top 4 million mark in 2023

● Maruti sold a record 20-lakh units in 2023, which included 2.7 lakh units through exports. Hyundai, the second-biggest car company, also had a strong 2023 as its domestic sales crossed 6 lakh units for the first time, growing by 9%.

**NEW DELHI:** Powered by SUVs, the car industry crossed the psychological 4-million mark for the first time in 2023, growing by 8% during the year. Companies, however, expect "flat to moderate" growth curve in the new year as concerns around interest rates and the end of pent-up demand are likely to slow down new purchases. The industry, which was under pressure after Covid-induced lockdowns were announced around March of 2020, had experienced a massive turnaround when markets opened up again. The pandemic also gave a boost to personal mobility. While shortage of



semiconductors had dampened production for most parts of the Covid period - leading to huge waiting periods across many models from companies such as Mahindra & Mahindra, Maruti, Hyundai, Kia and Tata Motors - the gradual improvement in supplies has now seen most of the backlog getting cleared.

The industry, however, feels that going in the new year may not be as strong as in the previous years as the sales-base is now bigger, and backlogs are gone. "Going by the current analysis, it looks like growth would be muted and in single digits," Shashank Srivastava, senior executive officer (sales & marketing) at Maruti Suzuki,

said. The good part for the industry is that the average selling price for vehicles has gone up to around Rs 11.5 lakh in 2023, against Rs 10.6 lakh last year, and Rs 8.2 lakh at the end of fiscal 2019-20. Talking about the reasons for the surge, Srivastava listed out the growing desire of buyers to opt for feature-rich vehicles, the rising share of SUVs, and the spike in retail prices.

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## UPI payments rise 42% to 18L cr in December



**MUMBAI:** UPI transaction value went up 42% year-on-year to Rs 18 lakh crore in December, while volume rose 54% to 1,202 crore. The growth in UPI transaction volume stood at 7% when compared to the previous month. Average daily transactions under UPI touched 40 crore against the targeted 100 crore in three years by NPCI earlier this year. The volume of Fastag transactions touched 34.8 crore in December, up 13% year-on-year. The value of the transactions rose 19% to Rs 5,861 crore over the same period, and 10% higher than the Rs 5,539 crore recorded in November 2023 as Indians took to the road in record numbers during the Christmas vacation.