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

## 'Can't take terror issues lightly': Default bail in UAPA case irks Supreme Court

● "A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Rajesh Bindal said that the HC wrongly relied upon the apex court's 1994 verdict



**NEW DELHI**

Frowning upon Delhi high court's order granting default bail to an accused facing charges under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act who was allegedly planning to cross the border to Pakistan for weapons training, the Supreme Court quashed the verdict and said such matters should not be taken lightly by courts as they involved terrorist activities. A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Rajesh Bindal said that the HC wrongly relied upon the apex court's 1994 verdict in a TADA case and ignored its 2019 verdict in a UAPA case in which it held

that extension for investigation could be granted up to a maximum period of 180 days in UAPA cases. The accused has been charged under various provisions of Indian Penal Code, UAPA and Arms Act. He was granted default bail by the HC on grounds of delay in completing the probe. "One more aspect to be considered is the nature of offence which involved terrorist activities having not

only pan-India impact but also impact on other enemy states. The matter should not have been taken so lightly," the bench said and directed that the accused be taken into custody forthwith. "Provisions of Section 43D(2)(b) were considered by this court in the case of state of Maharashtra vs Surendra Pundlik Gadling and others. In the said case, the FSL report was awaited and it also required

detention of the accused wherein financial details of the respondent were still being ascertained in view of the huge conspiracy spreading over a number of cities were being investigated. The high court failed to take into consideration the above judgment of 2019 relating to UAPA. It had relied upon a judgment of 1994 relating to provisions of TADA," the bench said.

## ED to issue 4th summons to Kejriwal? CM will leave for Gujarat amid 'arrest' row

**New Delhi**

The Enforcement Directorate is studying Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's reply to the agency rejecting the third summons and may issue a 4th summons, news agency PTI reported citing sources as the Aam Aadmi Party leaders claimed Kejriwal will be arrested on Thursday following ED raids. PTI reported that Kejriwal is likely to leave on a 3-day Gujarat tour on January 6. In Gujarat, Kejriwal is likely to hold public meetings,



meet jailed AAP leader Chaitar Vasava, the report said.

Security personnel outside the residence of Delhi CM Arvind

Kejriwal at Civil Lines on Thursday morning. Security personnel outside the residence of Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal at Civil Lines on Thursday morning. Kejriwal 'arrest drama': Here are top 1 developments

AAP ministers Atishi and Saurabh Bharadwaj on Wednesday night tweeted that the ED might launch an early morning raid at Kejriwal's residence. After the raid, Kejriwal would be arrested, the ministers apprehended.

## Choro ki baraat': BJP slams AAP amid 'ED to arrest Arvind Kejriwal' claim

**New Delhi:** Reacting to AAP's charge that the Bharatiya Janata Party wants to arrest Arvind Kejriwal to prevent him from campaigning in the Lok Sabha elections, BJP on Thursday said the Delhi chief minister has been

behaving like a fugitive. Referring to Kejriwal skipping the ED summons over the liquor policy case, Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva called AAP 'choron ki baraat' (a procession of thieves). "Since morning I have

been watching the 'Choron ki Baraat' (procession of thieves) making noise and mourning for Kejriwal. When you did corruption what happened that time? You (Kejriwal) are running away from the investi-

gation agency. You have been called three times by ED but you did not go there. Now you are mourning that you can be arrested. Delhi CM it's your responsibility to follow the rules but you are not following that," he said.

## Portable desi air defence shield's user trials to begin soon

**NEW DELHI:** India plans to soon begin 'user trials' of its own man-portable air defence missile system, designed to destroy hostile aircraft, drones and helicopters at very short ranges, even as the armed forces are inducting a limited number of similar Russian systems to plug operational gaps in the continuing military confrontation with China in eastern Ladakh. The very short-range air defence system (VSHORADS), developed by DRDO to neutralize low-altitude aerial threats at ranges up to 6-km, "should be offered for user-trials to the armed forces by April-May", a senior defence official told.

"The indigenously-developed 4th generation VSHORADS is technically superior to existing MANPADS (man-portable air defence systems) in the Indian armed forces because it has a state-of-the-art uncooled imaging infrared seeker," he said. "The upper range of the VSHORADS has been proven through a series of developmental tests. A few more tests to prove it at ranges less than 1-km, where manoeuvring and controlling the missile becomes critical, are required," he added. The Rajnath Singh-led defence acquisitions council in January last year had accorded "acceptance of necessity" for procurement of the infrared homing VSHORADS missiles under design and development by DRDO at a cost of Rs 1,920 crore. "Once the VSHORADS successfully completes the user-trials, which will take some time, bulk production can follow," the official said. Parallely, some Indian companies are pursuing the development of "laser-beam riding VSHORADS" under a "Make-II" category project, where prototype development is funded by the industry. The armed forces are keeping their fingers VSHORADS offer a low-cost option that can swiftly be deployed for close air defence protection of crucial

## SC rejects petition by kin of Nikhil indicted by US in Pannun murder plot

**NEW DELHI**

Supreme Court said the government will decide how to go about this sensitive issue. Nikhil Gupta was charged by the US for plotting to kill Pannun in US.

The Supreme Court on Thursday rejected a petition filed by an unidentified family member of Indian national Nikhil Gupta, who is accused in a US court



of plotting an assassination attempt in New York, to grant Gupta consular access and legal aid to challenge his indictment and extradition. The top court

said it is a sensitive matter and the Government of India will decide how to go about it. "Considering the public international law and comity of

courts, we can't intervene," the Supreme Court said. The top court said it should respect the jurisdiction of a foreign court.

Nikhil Gupta, a Delhi-based businessman, was arrested in the Czech Republic in 2023 and the US charged him for plotting to kill Gurbatwant Singh Pannun, a Sikh separatist leader.

## Sharmila joins hands with Congress in Delhi leading to merger of two parties

**NEW DELHI:**

YS Sharmila, the founder of YSR Telangana Party, joined hands with Congress in Delhi on Thursday, leading to the merger of the two parties. AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi were present at the event on Thursday. Sharmila had



announced her support to the Congress during the recent assembly elections held in Telangana, to end the alleged corrupt and anti-people

rule of the BRS led by K Chandrasekhar Rao. The Congress had on Wednesday hinted at the development and announced that a "very eminent personality" will join the party at the AICC headquarters. When Sharmila, who arrived in Delhi, was asked if she was joining the Congress, she said, "Yes, looks like it." After chairing her party meeting on Hyderabad, Sharmila had said she and other leaders would meet the top leadership of the Congress.

## 85-yr-old & former banker get 2-yr RI for duping bank in 2000

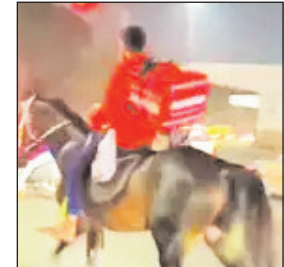
**MUMBAI:** In a trial that took 18 years, a special CBI court recently convicted two persons, the 85-year-old director of a private company and a 77-year-old dismissed State Bank of India chief manager, to two years of rigorous imprisonment for cheating the bank of Rs 57 lakh in 2000. The case was registered in 2002 and trial in the case commenced in 2005. Finding the duo, businessman M P Abraham and former banker V B Mantri, guilty of offences related to cheating and criminal con-

spiracy, special judge D P Shingade said these crimes are more heinous in nature as they intend to destroy the state's economic fabric and financial edifice. "Such offences are occurring in plenty and have resulted in stultifying the overall growth of the nation and also have caused tremendous impairment to the economy of the nation." The judge, though, pointed out to the prolonged trial as well as the age and ailments of the accused while sentencing them. In 2017.

## No fuel, full 'Horsepower': Hilarious Zomato delivery on horse amid fuel shortage

**Hyderabad**

In a hilarious scene from a quirky sitcom in Hyderabad, a Zomato delivery agent unleashed the 'horsepower' - literally, as he was recorded delivering food on a horse. As the fuel stations in Hyderabad went dry following the panic buy induced by the truck protests, the delivery agent decided to take up a rather unconventional mode of transport to fulfil his orders.



He ditched his two-wheeler and jumped on a horse saddle to deliver food in the region. In the video that has taken the internet by a storm, the agent is seen casually sitting on the back of a dark

brown horse, navigating traffic with a Zomato delivery bag strapped to his back. Much to everyone's amusement, a passer-by then asks the food delivery partner the reason behind his unique adventure. The agent then replied that he didn't get petrol for his vehicle despite waiting in a queue for over three hours. Hence, he decided to ditch his motor vehicle and go old-school.

## In Madhya Pradesh, BTEch graduate drowns in bid to save pet, dog swims to safety

**BHOPAL:** A BTEch graduate from Bhopal NIT drowned in a dam reservoir on Wednesday morning when he jumped into the water to save the pet dog of a friend. The dog swam to safety, but the youngster, Saral Nigam, died. The 23-year-old was an only child and was preparing for the UPSC exams after getting his engineering degree from MANIT. Investigation officer ASI Antram Yadav said Saral had gone to Jungle Camp in Kerwa Dam area for a morning walk with two female friends around 7.30am.

One of the girls had taken her pet dog along. The picturesque dam is barely 10km from the city centre, and a frequented zone.

## Sun-powered tilak for Ram Lalla idol in Ayodhya



**ROORKEE:** Scientists at Roorkee's Central Building Research Institute (CBRI) have crafted a unique system for the newly constructed Ram temple in Ayodhya. The system ensures the appearance of a 'tilak' on the forehead of the idol in the sanctum sanctorum using sunlight, mirrors, and lenses. The display is scheduled for Ram Navami on March 29, marking Lord Ram's birth anniversary according to the Hindu lunar calendar. The project - 'Surya

Rashmiyon Ka Tilak' (anointment by sun rays) - is a mechanical system requiring no electricity or battery, exclusively using brass instead of iron or steel. S K Panigrahi, the chief scientist and principal investigator of the project, said, "We used only brass in making our manually operated system." The circular 'tilak', measuring 75 mm, will grace Lord Ram's forehead at noon for three to four minutes on Ram Navami in the Chaitra month, using sunlight redirected by the system.

## CM Shinde vows to 'free' dargah, shrine trust seeks 'urs' security

● "Singh said the present government's approach in tackling any situation that may emerge



**MUMBAI/KALYAN:**

Brandishing his Hindutva credentials, chief minister Eknath Shinde on Tuesday raked up a long-standing dispute over Kalyan's Haji Malang Dargah, saying he was committed to the "liberation" of the centuries-old structure. The dargah trust has for its part requested Thane police for security for its "urs" to be held on February 24.

The site, situated on a hillock south of Kalyan, is claimed by both Hindus and Muslims. While there is a dargah there named after Sufi saint Haji Haji Abdul Rahman Malang, popularly known as Haji Malang Baba and the trust claims it is 800 years old,

right-wing groups and especially the Shiv Sena in Thane district from the 1980s has claimed it as a temple of Hindu saint Shri Macchindra Nath. The dispute has been pending in the courts. Shinde's mentor and late Sena leader Anand Dighe started the practice of visiting the site every year on the occasion of Magh Poonima and performing an aarti, and Shinde, who would earlier go with his mentor, has continued it since Dighe's death in 2001.

In a speech at the Malanggad Harinam Mahotsav, a religious gathering, on Tuesday,

Shinde said acknowledged the sentiments of the community in this regard. "I know your feelings about Malanggad. Anand Dighe began the liberation movement for Malanggad, after which we all started the salutation 'Jay Malang Shri Malang'. I want to tell you that there are some things that can't be said in public. I know that there are beliefs you have inside your heart about the liberation of Malanggad. But I'm saying this, Eknath Shinde won't stay quiet till he fulfills your inner wishes," he said.

In a letter to senior state officials, including Thane police commissioner, Nasir Khan, chairman of the Pir Haji Malang Saheb Trust which manages the dargah, stated that the trust apprehended trouble during the Haji Malang "urs" on February 24 and was requesting for security to ensure the marking of the "urs" and maintenance of law and order as well as communal harmony. The letter is not a response to Shinde's statement but is in the wake of the Malanggad Harinam Mahotsav which takes place every year.

## Cadre row: Telangana HC junks CAT order, tells Centre to decide

**HYDERABAD**

Bringing the curtains down on the nearly decade-old IAS and IPS cadre distribution tussle, the Telangana high court on Wednesday set aside the central administrative tribunal (CAT) orders in favour of 13 IAS and IPS officers and placed all of them at the disposal of the Centre which is their cadre controlling authority.

A bench of Justice Abhinand Kumar Shavili and Justice N a m a v a r a p u Rajeswara Rao directed the 13 officers to put forward their grievance directly to the Centre. While disposing of the petitions filed by the central department of personnel and training (DoPT), the bench also directed the Centre to consider the officers' representations afresh in line with the guidelines of the Pratyush Sinha committee that oversaw cadre distribution during state bifurcation in June 2014. The bench



reminded the advocates representing the officers that a coordinate bench of the HC had already upheld the validity of the guidelines in former Telangana chief secretary Somesh Kumar's case and, hence, it was not going into its correctness. But it asked the Centre to be considerate in deserving cases. "Give them personal hearing, if they seek," the bench said addressing Centre's counsel additional solicitor general B Narasimha Sarma. Sarma's assisting counsel G Rajshekhar Reddy said there will not be any change in the current status of the bureaucrats till the Centre had looked into their representations.

He also allayed fears that the Centre could relieve them from their current states like it happened in the case of Somesh who was relieved from Telangana within hours of HC judgment and told to report to AP. The bench said the only part of the CAT order it had difficulty in accepting was its move to make the allotments on its own, which was the job of the central government. Hence, we are remanding the matter back to the Centre," the bench said. The bench, however, did not dismiss the CAT findings questioning the way the committee and the authorities acted in the case of these 13 officers.

The bench recorded the contentions of three IAS promotee officers - A Vani Prasad, Vakati Karuna and M Prasanthi - who, despite having lived all their lives in Hyderabad, were shown as AP natives only because they were born in a hospital in AP. This change in domicile status altered their positions in the combined list and they were allotted to AP contrary to their choice of Telangana. While C Hari Kiran, the 2019 IAS topper, was shown as an SC candidate and put in reserved category despite a clear law to keep him in general merit category, his counsel S Rahul Reddy said while questioning guideline number 5.1 of Pratyush Sinha panel. Reddy said this guideline also went against the Supreme Court verdict. It was because of this guideline that Hari Kiran was allotted Telangana despite opting for AP, he said.

## Fire breaks out at teaching block of AIIMS-Delhi, doused

**NEW DELHI:** A fire erupted in the teaching block of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in the national capital on Thursday morning.

Seven fire tenders were dispatched to the location, and the fire was successfully extinguished, as reported by Delhi Fire Services. The fire extensively damaged furniture, a refrigerator, and office records located on the second floor of the director's building at AIIMS.

## Over 5,000 streets don't have sign boards in Chennai

**Chennai:** More than 5,000 roads, mostly in interior parts of the city, do not have street name boards, making it tough for commuters and visitors. As per rough estimates by the Greater Chennai Corporation, out of 35,000 roads in the city, 5,000 roads have no street sign boards, or have damaged stickers or rusty boards. Added areas of Ambattur, Madhavaram and Thiruvottiyur are the hardest hit as they had painted name boards which have got damaged.

D Neelakannan of Madhavaram said the street name boards have been damaged for five years but are yet to be replaced.

"In some streets, the stickers have peeled off or the boards have collapsed," he said. According to Tamil Nadu urban local body rules, both sides of the roads must have a blue-printed reflective street name boards carrying details of zone, ward and division numbers. In Sholinganallur, although boards are there, these basic details are missing. Sathish Galley of Sholinganallur said they had set up boards covering all the interior roads but details of wards and zones are yet to be printed.

Councillors said they are using their ward-development funds to fix name boards. Ward 12 councillor Kavi Ganesan said he had got estimates to fix 50 name boards in Thiruvottiyur and Kaladipet areas. "In a month, these 50 streets will get new name boards," he said.

K V Thilagar of ward 92 in Mogappair said more than 30 streets needed name boards. "I have used ward funds to set up boards in a dozen streets.

## 'First glimpse of Ram Lalla idol only on consecration day'

**AYODHYA**

The idol of Ram Lalla to be installed in the sanctum sanctorum of the temple will remain a closely guarded secret till the Ram temple consecration at 12.20pm on January 22, according to people associated with the 'pran pratishtha' ceremony. Nobody would get to witness the face of the idol before the deity is finally enshrined as the lord



of Ayodhya on his original seat after almost 500 years, sources involved in the preparations for the consecration ceremony said. They said that as no photograph or video

closure would only reveal whether white marble or black granite has been used to carve the idol. Sources said that the details of the proposed nagar yatra of January 17 were yet to be worked out. A member of Ram temple trust, Kameshwar Choupal, said, "So far, only an outline of the consecration ceremony has been prepared and details will be finalized soon.

of the three idols out of which one would be placed in the 'girbh griha' would be available, the official announcement on the selected idol would not make much difference as the dis-

## 85-yr-old & former banker get 2-yr RI for duping bank in 2000

**MUMBAI**

In a trial that took 18 years, a special CBI court recently convicted two persons, the 85-year-old director of a private company and a 77-year-old dismissed State Bank of India chief manager, to two years of rigorous imprisonment for cheating the bank of Rs 57 lakh in 2000. The case was registered in 2002 and trial in the case commenced in 2005. Finding the duo, businessman M P

Abraham and former banker V B Mantri, guilty of offences related to cheating and criminal conspiracy, special judge D P Shingade said these crimes are more heinous in nature as they intend to destroy the state's economic fabric and financial edifice. "Such offences are occurring in plenty and have resulted in stultifying the overall growth of the nation and also have caused tremendous impair-

ment to the economy of the nation." The judge, though, pointed out to the prolonged trial as well as the age and ailments of the accused while sentencing them. In 2017, Abraham and Mantri had been found guilty in a similar case and sentenced to five years in jail. Abraham and other directors were also fined Rs 10 crore then. In the 2002 case, Abraham's wife was an accused too.

## CM questions BJP for supporting kar sevak accused in 16 cases

**BENGALURU/ HUBBALLI**

The main opposition BJP staged protests across the state on Wednesday, expressing discontent over the recent arrest of Srikanth Poojari, a self-proclaimed 'kar sevak,' in connection with a 31-year-old case related to the Ram temple agitation.



The protests, marked by fervent BJP functionaries, chants of 'Jai Sri Ram' and 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai,' saw the detention of senior

Bellad. Chief minister Siddaramaiah defended the arrest by highlighting Poojari's extensive criminal record.

He emphasized that Poojari faced charges in a staggering 16 cases, including bootlegging, Matka gambling, and being listed as a rowdy sheeter in two police stations.

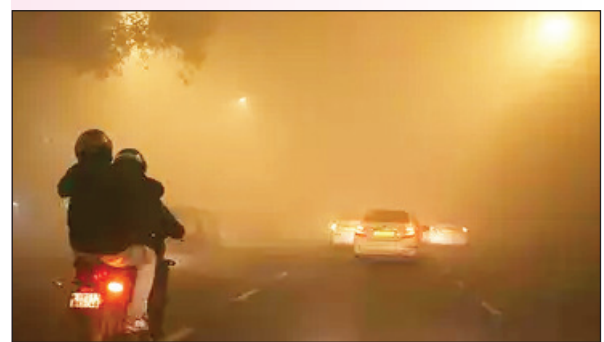
## 6 hours of chaos as leopard strays into Gurgaon village

**GURGAON:** A leopard strayed into a densely populated village in Narsinghpur, just off the Delhi-Jaipur highway, on Wednesday morning, triggering chaos as the big cat ran amok for hours trying to find a way out, till he was confined to a house and tranquilised.

On its way, the adult leopard ran into a 13-year-old boy and attacked him. The boy is being treated for bite wounds and is stable. Several families had a narrow escape as the panicked animal rushed into at least four houses. Locals said they spotted the leopard at 6.30am.

The animal slipped into a ground floor house, from where it jumped into a two-bedroom house, whose occupants managed to rush to their terrace just in time. The leopard that strayed into a densely populated Gurgaon village on Wednesday had been often spotted in the vicinity over the past month.

## Fog causes poor visibility in Delhi-NCR, flights and trains affected



**NEW DELHI**

Parts of Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR) experienced fog on Wednesday morning, causing low visibility in various areas.

The minimum temperature in Delhi was recorded at 9 degrees Celsius, and the maximum temperature is expected to reach around 20 degrees Celsius, according to the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD). The IMD also predicted extreme cold in the coming days, with the minimum temperature dropping to 7 degrees Celsius on January 3.

The Met Department reported poor visibility in several regions: Bikaner, Jaipur, and Ajmer in Rajasthan, Jammu in Jammu Division, Ambala in Haryana, and Sagar in East Madhya Pradesh, all recorded visibility below

200 meters. In Delhi, the visibility was 500 meters at Sardarjung and 600 meters at Palam. The Indira Gandhi International Airport was covered in dense fog, leading to delays in several flights. Indian Railways reported that 26 trains arrived late in the national capital due to foggy conditions. People without homes sought refuge in night shelters across the city. One resident from Bihar, who was staying in a winter shelter tent, praised the facilities provided by the government, including free food and washrooms inside the tent. "All facilities are here. Blankets, food, water, tea, everything is provided," said Raju, a guard at the winter rescue tent. As the temperature dropped, people gathered around bonfires to keep warm.

## 2.6k hope to regain spring in their step at free limb fitment camp

**BENGALURU:** Ten-year-old Manopriya from Shahpur in Yadgir district had to get her left leg amputated after an accident when she was six. The girl managed to get an artificial limb but it is started peeling off at the foot. The girl was in Bengaluru on Wednesday for the 26th Free Limb Fitment camp organized by Rotary Club Peenya and Sri Bhavan Mahaveer Vikalang Sahayathi Samiti, Jaipur, to get a fresh artificial limb.

"I was initially scared about Manopriya's future but after getting an artificial limb, she began doing everything, including walking two-and-

a-half km to school every day on her own. But the artificial limb is peeling off at the foot. I am very happy that she is getting a fresh limb now and will support her in whatever she wants to do in future," her father Hanumanthu, a labourer, told. The seven-day camp took off and aims to provide free fitment of limbs for amputees and calipers for those affected by polio. According to the organizers, about 2,400 people from different parts of Karnataka have applied for artificial legs, which are tailored and customized for every beneficiary with the assistance of

26 technicians from BMVSS, Jaipur. About Rs 18 lakh has been collected from individual donors and philanthropists for the camp. Shakuntala, II PU student from Siruguppa taluk, Ballari district, who lost her left leg in a road accident one-and-a-half years ago, said she hasn't been able to attend classes regularly and only writes exams. "I have come here with the hope of getting back to my normal life and wanting to study like everyone by going to college. I want to become a teacher and will fulfil my goal," she said. Poornima, 33, from

## Yogi government to organize International Kite Festival in Ayodhya

"Yogi government to organize International Kite Festival in Ayodhya"



**Ayodhya**

Ahead of the consecration ceremony scheduled for January 22, the Uttar Pradesh government, under the guidance of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, is formulating a plan to host the International Kite Festival in Ayodhya. In line with CM Yogi's vision, the Ayodhya Development Authority (ADA) has initiated preparations for the festival, which is likely to take place between January 19 and 21, providing renowned kite flyers from both within the country and around the world with an opportunity to showcase their art. The ADA will engage a private agency to give concrete shape to the event.

Inspiration will be drawn from events in India and abroad. The Ayodhya Development Authority (ADA) has invited applications through the Request for Proposal format to appoint an agency for the conceptualisation, designing, execution, and supervision of this event management, as well as the development of temporary structures and related infrastructure for hosting the International Kite Festival in Ayodhya. The agency that will carry out this programme will be chosen based on the applications received

through this process. The entire selection process is scheduled to be completed by January 8, following which a comprehensive plan for organizing the International Kite Festival will be formulated. It is noteworthy that to organize this event on a grand scale, inspiration is being taken from various kite festivals being held in the country and abroad. A visitor area will be made with seating arrangements for 750 people. A lounge with 50 VVIP sofas will be constructed to accommodate the special

invitees at the event. Arrangements for 350 cushioned chairs and 350 other chairs will also be made in the program. Volunteers will be deployed to ensure that the competitors and spectators have a pleasant experience. The food counter will feature dishes made from millet with local flavors. Attendees will have the opportunity to savor Awadhi cuisine. Precautionary measures will be taken to safeguard tents and equipment from monkeys during the event. In addition, high-quality cameras will be installed along with sound arrangements for effective capturing of the event. Given the widespread tradition of kite flying on Makar Sankranti in various parts of the country, including Ayodhya, this event is poised to be a focal point of discussions not only locally but also nationally and internationally.

## Built in traditional Nagara style Shri Ram Janmabhoomi mandir will be 161 feet tall with five mandapas says Temple trust

**NEW DELHI**

Ahead of the grand consecration ceremony of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya on January 22, Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra trust shared the key features of the temple. The Mandir is in the traditional Nagara style and has a length (east-west) of 380 feet, a width of 250 feet, and a height of 161 feet. Nagara architecture is a style of temple architecture originating in North India. The Temples have tall pyramidal towers called Shikharas that have a Kalash at the top. Pillars of the temples are carved with intricate designs and the walls decorated with sculptures and reliefs. According to the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth, The Ram Mandir is three-storied, with each floor being 20 feet tall. It has a total of 392 pillars and 44 doors. The Garbhagriha is the innermost sanctum of the temple, where the deity is enshrined. In the main sanctum sanc-



torum, there is the childhood form of Bhagwan Shri Ram (the idol of Shri Ram Lalla) and on the first floor, there will be a Shri Ram Darbar. The temple consists of five Mandaps (Hall) namely Nriyaya Mandap, Rang Mandap, Sabha Mandap, Prarthna and Kirtan Mandaps. Statues of deities, gods, and goddesses adorn the pillars and walls. Entry for the Mandir is from the east, ascending 32 stairs through the Singh Dwar along with provision of ramps and lifts for the convenience of the differently-abled and elderly. The Parkota (rectangular compound wall) with a length of 732 meters and a width

of 14 feet, surrounds the Mandir. At the four corners of the compound, there are four Mandirs - dedicated to Surya Dev, Devi Bhagwati, Ganesh Bhagwan and Bhagwan Shiv. In the northern arm is a Mandir of Maa Annapurna and in the southern arm is a Mandir of Hanuman ji. Near the Mandir is a historical Well (Sita koop), dating back to the ancient era. In the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Mandir complex, there are proposed mandirs dedicated to Maharshi Valmiki, Maharshi Vishwamitra, Maharshi Agastya, Nishad Raj, Mata Shabri, and the revered consort of the Devi Ahilya. In the

southwestern part of the complex, at Kubera Tila, the ancient Mandir of Bhagwan Shiv has been restored, along with the installation of Jatayu. No iron is used anywhere in the Mandir and for protection against ground moisture, a 21-foot-high plinth has been constructed using granite. The foundation of the Mandir has been constructed with a 14-meter-thick layer of roller-compacted concrete (RCC), giving it the appearance of artificial rock. The Mandir complex has a sewage treatment plant, water treatment plant, water supply for fire safety and an independent power station. Apart from this, a Pilgrims Facility Centre (PFC) with a capacity of 25,000 people is being constructed, which will provide medical facilities & locker facility to the pilgrims. The complex will also have a separate block with bathing area, washrooms, washbasin, open taps, etc.

## India not withdrawing forces will imperil democracy in Maldives, defence ties will continue: President Muizzu

**New Delhi**

Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu said India not withdrawing its forces from the Indian Ocean archipelago will amount to disregarding the "democratic will" of the Maldivian people, and will imperil the future of democracy in the country. However, as he rejected any permanent military presence, the president backed defence cooperation with India, including in the form of efforts to build the operational readiness of the Maldives National Defence Force, saying it's based on mutual respect and trust. He expressed confidence the issue of military presence will be resolved through dialogue. The presence of foreign military personnel in the Maldives, without parliamentary approval, is against the letter and spirit of the Constitution, he said. Asked about his alleged tilt towards China, which he's expected to visit before travelling to India making him the first democratically elected president to do so, Muizzu said he was going to follow only pro-Maldives policy.

**Excerpts:**

Maldives has over the years turned into a hotbed of geopolitical rivalry, given its strategic location in the Indian Ocean, sitting atop crucial shipping routes. In that context, what sort of foreign policy can one expect your government to follow? The centre of gravity in global dynamics is indeed shifting from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean. The majority of the shipping routes goes through the Indian Ocean, specifically in close proximity, or through the Maldives. The geographical location of the Maldives makes it quite attractive for external powers to pull the country into their orbit. We have to be vigilant and make realistic assessments of the geopolitical situation. There is very little margin for error - as one small misstep can result in losing the country's cherished values and its independence and sovereignty. Securing the Sea Lines of Communication is as vital to the Maldives and its stability and prosperity.

## Don't make Gyanvapi report public for 4 more weeks: ASI

**VARANASI**

Ahead of the Varanasi district judge's decision on opening the sealed envelopes containing Archaeological Survey of India's report on the Gyanvapi mosque survey, ASI filed a fresh application, urging the court to postpone the disclosure of the report for four weeks.

In response



to the plea, the court reserved its order on the matter and will decide whether to provide the report to the parties involved in the original Shirngar Gauri suit

(No. 18/2022 Rakhi Singh and others vs. UP state and others). Four women plaintiffs through their advocate requested that the survey report be opened

and a copy be given to them. ASI stated in its application that in compliance with Allahabad HC's order of December 19, 2023, in a different but related case (suit no. 610/1991 Ancient Idol of Swayambhu Lord Vishweshwar vs. Anjuman Intezamia Masjid), ASI must present the same survey report before the civil judge (senior division) of the fast track court.

## Can't summon bureaucrats at drop of a hat: Supreme Court to High Courts

**NEW DELHI**

The Supreme Court framed a procedure to restrain courts from summoning bureaucrats at the drop of a hat and set aside illogical orders of Allahabad high court such as taking into custody UP's finance secretary in contempt proceedings and issuing bailable warrants against the chief secretary for not implementing its orders to provide domestic helps to retired chief justices and judges. The UP government



moved the SC challenging the HC's orders, prompting a bench of Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra to examine the contentious issue keeping

in mind the separation of powers between the executive and the judiciary.

Writing the judgment, CJ Chandrachud said the chief justice of a HC did not have the power under Article 229 of the Constitution to make rules relating to post-retiral benefits for former CJs and judges of the HC. Hence, the Allahabad HC CJ could not have framed rules provisioning domestic helps for retired CJs and judges, the bench said.

## MVA slams govt over handing over of Mahanand Dairy to Gujarat based NDDB

**MUMBAI:** The Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi (MVA) on Wednesday slammed the Shinde-Fadnavis government over the reported handing over of the Mahanand Dairy to the Gujarat based but centre-run National Dairy Development Board (NDDB). Officials said that due to difficulties in milk collection

and distribution, and mounting losses the Mahanand Dairy board passed a resolution and has sent a proposal to the state government to hand over the management of Mahanand to NDDB. Mahanand is a state government undertaking, once known for its profitability and supply of milk

across the state. Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut said Mahanand Dairy was once the glory of the state, but now that the dairy will be taken over by NDDB. Mahanand is a venture of the Maharashtra State Cooperative Milk Federation Limited (MSCMFL) and is one of the top coopera-

tive dairies in the state. Mahanand is similar to Amul in Gujarat or Nandini in Karnataka but has suffered heavy losses in the recent past and hasn't been able to sustain the brand, officials said. "Mahanand, Gokul, Varana, Chitale we have many milk brands in Maharashtra.

## D arrests a builder who took Dawood gang help for his projects

**MUMBAI:**

Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday arrested builder Vijay Machindar of Ornate Spaces in a money laundering case based on a police complaint lodged by an investor accusing the company of selling off seven of the 14 flats booked in Grove Tower in Oshiwara to others. Machindar proposed the Grove Tower on a plot as free sale in the market for developing buildings for UTI employees. He received a commencement certificate from MHADA authority. He took Rs 450 Crores from Punjab National Bank and other bankers for the project. Machindar had also raised around Rs 70 crores by offering allotment letters and selling around 70,000 sq. feet area to 34 purchasers in the sale component. He was in a financial crisis and allegedly took help of Dawood gang.

## Lean travel season kicks in: IndiGo removes fuel surcharge from today citing lower jet fuel price



**NEW DELHI:** As the annual lean travel season (January-March) kicks in, IndiGo has from Thursday withdrawn the fuel surcharge it has introduced last October due to surging aviation turbine fuel (ATF) prices. The airline said it is doing so due to the recent cut in ATF prices. This charge was being levied from October 6, 2023, in the range of Rs 300 to Rs 1,000 (taxes extra) depending on distance. "IndiGo.. announce(s) the removal of fuel charge applicable on its domestic and international routes, effective January 4, 2024. The fuel charge had been introduced in

October 2023, following a surge in ATF prices. With recent reduction in ATF prices, IndiGo is withdrawing the charge, IndiGo said in a statement, adding, "As ATF prices are dynamic, we will continue to adjust our fares and components thereof, to respond to any change in prices or market conditions." The surcharge, now withdrawn, was: Rs 300 (taxes extra) for upto 500-km-long sectors; Rs 400 for 501-1,000 km; Rs 550 for 1,001-1,500 km; Rs 650 for 1,501-2,501 km; Rs 800 for 2,501-3,500 km and Rs 1,000 for 3,501 km and beyond. When it was introduced, other airlines were expected to follow suit.

## Isro's ambitious plans: Uncrewed Gaganyaan mission could take off ahead of abort tests in 2024

**BENGALURU:** Isro, which is gearing up to demonstrate at least one uncrewed mission under Gaganyaan this year - initial target is to achieve it in the first half - could carry out the first one independent of the planned abort tests on the special test vehicle, the first of which was done in October 2023. S Somanath, chairman, Isro, told TOI: "We're working on both - the first uncrewed mission and the second abort test on the test vehicle (TV-D2). Depending on the readi-



ness, we will decide which one is to be launched first," indicating that the first uncrewed mission could even happen before the TV-D2. He said the abort missions are only a prerequisite for the crewed mission and not the uncrewed

ones and added that the first uncrewed mission will not carry the service module while the space agency is targeting to send the half-humanoid, Vyomitra. "We will finalise on whether Vyomitra will go as part of the first one at a later stage.

We'll need to carry out a minimum of two successful uncrewed missions before the final configuration and we should be able to launch at least one this year. The initial target is for the first half of 2024," Somanath said.

## Editorial

### Why Modi's BJP should not take 2024 election victory as foregone

Every time a buoyant BJP under Prime Minister Narendra Modi goes to elections, a reference to the party's 2004 'India Shining' debacle comes up. The comparison is largely banal and fallacious. The BJP of 2004 under Atal Bihari Vajpayee lacked the aggression and electoral determination of the Modi establishment, had failed to grow the organisation in uncharted areas, and was heavily dependent on coalition partners like Chandrababu Naidu who eventually let it down by getting wiped out at the ballot. It lacked the current BJP's might at either booth-level management or social media warfare. The party under Atal and LK Advani achieved remarkable feats, but as a political force, it was still a baby dino coming out of the egg and breaking into a sprint. The BJP under Modi and Shah is a bounding, fearsome beast fully in control of its intent and actions. Now, majestically racing from its three state victories to the forthcoming inauguration of the Bhavya Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, the party looks unassailable. Even mainstream media hostile to it have started declaring that Narendra Modi's third term in office is inevitable. There lies the greatest danger for the BJP and Modi. Although the most dominating victories have never slowed the party down with ego or ennui and only increased its hunger for more success, even a glimmer of complacency before the 2024 general elections may upset its best-laid plans.

#### Here are reasons why.

First, if the BJP becomes over-reliant on the heartland, too self-assured after its past and recent sweeps in the north and west. Although the party sends the highest number of MPs from south India to Parliament, it has a fraction of its heartland influence in the peninsula so far. The Congress and the rest of the Opposition waste no breath to drive in the perception that the BJP is not the party of the south. It will relentlessly play on the so-called north-south divide. In the east, Bihar can be a challenge. Tejaswini Yadav's RJD is a resurgent force. The I.N.D.I. alliance's political play over the OBC census and proportional reservations have failed in the last spate of elections, but might find traction in Bihar where Yadavs are extremely politically influential. While upper caste Bihar voters are vocal and may give the impression of their dominance, certain backward castes can silently upset the equation. Also, this time the BJP is going to fight polls without JDU unlike in 2019, unless Nitish Kumar bowls another googly and joins the NDA at the last moment. In Bengal, the BJP enjoys growing popular support despite the wanton slaughter its supporters faced after the 2021 assembly elections. That is mainly because of the TMC's brazen corruption and appeasement politics. But a large section of its cadre feel the state organisational leadership could be a lot more united and aggressive. They also feel arrests of high-profile TMC leaders are long overdue and could catapult the party to unprecedented success. In Maharashtra, the BJP is in the kitchen with too many cooks, many of whom like Ajit Pawar and Eknath Shinde its cadre and support base do not fully trust. In Punjab, the party is heading for the polls without its traditional ally, the Akalis. Unless, again, things change in the coming days. The south is a blue ocean for the BJP, with slowly growing islands of influence in Tamil Nadu and Telangana. The party recently suffered a rout in its strongest southern bastion, Karnataka. In Kerala, its vote share has been growing despite demographics skewed against its Hindutva politics but seats have been elusive. A socio-political coalition with a section of Christians, who are alarmed at the rise of Islamism in the state, could significantly change the BJP's fortunes.



## Navigating security challenges: India's maritime strategy amid rising proxy threats

Since 16 December last year, Iran-related proxies have made 167 attempts by missiles and drones on shipping passing through the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea. On 23 December, Houthi rebels carried out an armed drone attack against Liberia-flagged chemical tanker MV Chem Pluto with a crew of 20 Indians headed for New Mangalore Port from Saudi Arabia. On 23 December, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said that those who attacked the India-bound ship will be found — after all, India is the net security provider in the Indian Ocean.

Two days later, India deployed Brahmos armed warships — INS Calcutta, INS Kochi, INS Mormugao, INS Chennai and INS Vishakhapatnam — to patrol the Indian Ocean Region to secure shipping lanes. Earlier, on 19 December, the US-led International Red Sea Response Force called Operation Prosperity Guardian, was flagged off by US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin. Consequent to Houthi rebel threats to the Red Sea, international container traffic is taking a longer route via the Cape of Good Hope even as many large

cargo-carrying companies have suspended operations. This has increased oil prices, cost of freight and hiked insurance bonds. Cost escalation is estimated anything between four to 10 per cent. For India, additional costs will include longer duration of cargo via Cape of Good Hope, and double handling of cargo transshipment as no deep sea port is fully operational in India. Vizinjam, is only partially ready and was inaugurated on 15 October, ironically with the docking of a Chinese crane-carrying vessel three years after Galwan. Acquisition of foreign

ports, owning of terminals at foreign ports and use of such ports for logistic facilities and security purposes along India's shipping lanes are essential to ensure safe and uninterrupted movement of trade to and from Indian shores. Also vital are well-developed deep sea ports with modern cargo handling facilities with speed and efficiency which India lacks. India's maritime strategy is inadequate not just because there is no national security strategy but also because the port infrastructure, the merchant ship-building industry and the economic grand pla-

# Why Sonia and Rahul's marmalade may leave some in a pickle

After touching visuals of mother-son bonding over oranges, sugar and a pateela, 30 bottles of marmalade stood on the kitchen counter of the most mysterious home in Lutyens Delhi: 10 Janpath, the residence of Sonia Gandhi and, lately, of her son Rahul again. It is not known when the video aired on 31 December was made but whom those 30 jam jars, bearing the handwritten tag 'With Love from Sonia & Rahul' went to, must have Congress circles in a tizzy. In this Lok Sabha election year, who will be having multigrain sourdough toast spread with the most exclusive narangi murabba of the season? As both jam makers credited the absent Gandhi—Priyanka—with the recipe, she should get at least a couple of jars. That would leave just 28 for the general quota including the extended family and friends, not to mention the 36 non-Gandhi members of the Congress Working Committee and assorted other groupies. However, since the tags said 'Sonia & Rahul' with nary a Ji or G in sight, it seems abundantly clear that no Congress functionary from former PM Manmohan Singh and current party president Mallikarjun Kharge to lesser worthies are on that shortlist. Only those on first-name



terms with those Gandhis are evidently the recipients and there cannot be too many people in that category. So, most hopefuls will have to be content with the vicarious pleasure of the video. To imply proximity, the really desperate Gandhi bhakts could make marmalade on the sly by trying to cadge the recipe off the 10 Janpath kitchen staff seen hovering solicitously in the video. As they are probably the ones who plucked most of the fruit, chopped all the peel and stirred the pulp for ages till it turned jammy, they would know the recipe better than even PriyankaG. But sadly, like all 10 Janpath denizens, they are unknown and unapproachable.

As he lived in UK for a while, Rahul Gandhi probably knows that Paddington Bear, Britain's favourite teddy, offered the famous

marmalade sandwich that he always keeps in his hat to Queen Elizabeth on her Platinum Jubilee—in a video, as it happens. And he was gamely informed by the late monarch that she keeps one in her handbag. That makes marmalade arguably the poshest jam in the world. Maybe that video is what inspired the Gandhis' video jam session.

Most Indians, of course, do not know what marmalade is, much less know how to pronounce it. Some more know about it now thanks to the Gandhi video, but most desis are only familiar with achaars and chutneys. And as oranges are not generally used for either, marmalade sales are not expected to spike suddenly even though India is among the places where oranges originated and its name in many languages are derived from the

Sanskrit word for it, naranga. Curiously, many believe the word 'marmalade' is an English corruption of the French phrase Marie est malade or 'Mary is ill', dating back to when Mary Queen of Scots was prescribed an orange concoction for seasickness. Another myth connects marmalade to a Spanish vessel carrying Seville oranges being supposedly shipwrecked in Dundee, Scotland in the 18th century. The battered fruit was then made into jam, peel and all, by a thrifty Scotsman. The latter tale, however, does not account for the odd name for the chunky orange conserve that became a prime ingredient in the famous Dundee cake. In fact, the word traces its roots to the Portuguese word for quince—marmelo—which was the original fruit made into marmelada or marmalade. Though oranges were not native to the region they soon became cheap and plentiful and eventually replaced quinces as the fruit of choice but the jam's name obviously stuck. Oranges spread westwards from India and China (another place of origin) via Arab and later Portuguese traders. They flourished in Mediterranean regions including Italy which is now Europe's second-largest producer after Spain

although not the Piedmont region where the current prime occupant of 10 Janpath hails from. But ornamental orange trees—like the ones in the Gandhi garden—abound in Italian cities and towns and are also harvested in winter.

As Sonia Gandhi reminisces in the video about her palate slowly getting accustomed to Indian flavours (to the extent that she now craves "arhar dal and chawal" when she returns from foreign climes) the orange trees may offer her a poignant memory and taste of home. Incidentally, Indira Gandhi's breakfast at home always included toast, and marmalade may well have been her preferred bread spread, given the years she spent in Britain as a student. That could also explain why RahulG made a video featuring marmalade despite it being so little known in India. Jam for most desis is the cloyingly sweet, runny, red concoction by Kissan, the staple of school tiffin boxes.

But at least his bright idea provided a glimpse into the life of India's most private public family, though the homely pink plastic shopping basket on SoniaG's kitchen counter may have struck a more responsive chord than her orange marmalade.

## Why Ethiopia-Somaliland Red Sea port deal is bad news for Africa

In Ethiopia, its Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, the Nobel Peace laureate, is causing tensions again. He has just signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Somaliland. Somaliland is a self-governed territory in the Horn of Africa and not a separate country. It is internationally recognised as a part of Somalia. It is a delicate status quo. But on Monday, Abiy Ahmed tore it apart. He agreed to recognise the break-away state in exchange for a long-held desire — access to a Red Sea port. That is what Ethiopia is getting in return — the port of Berbera. "We are very happy, and we thank the Ethiopian Prime Minister as we sign the agreement here. We allow them 20 km (12.4 miles) of our sea and they will also recog-

nise us as an independent state. They will become the first state to recognise Somaliland after the signing of this MoU," said Somaliland President Muse Bihi Abdi. It is an opportunistic move. Ethiopia has long wanted access to the sea; its Prime Minister recently called it an existential question. That is, access to the Red Sea was an existential question for Ethiopia — one that may eventually lead to war. He was criticised for inflaming regional tensions, and on Monday, he made a passing reference to his inflammatory rhetoric. "This will be the starting point for our cooperation with the brotherly people of Somaliland to grow and develop together in cooperation and to ensure our common security. As we

have repeatedly stated previously, we do not wish to use force on anyone, rather, we will use what we have cooperatively. This is the good news we bring to all the people of Ethiopia, Somaliland and all the peace and development loving people on this first day of the new year," said Ethiopian Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed. Now one may think this is an improvement, a move away from war, but one must look at the bigger picture. Somaliland is a disputed territory. It declared independence from Somalia back in 1991 — 33 years ago — but no country has recognised it yet, and neither has the United Nations. This is because both Somalia and Somaliland are home to the same people.

## India's national security strategy in 2023 and the imperative for continuity in 2024

Leaving out internal politics, 2023 proved to be a good year for India, from all angles — economic, geopolitical, foreign policy and even aspirational esteem. Leading the bandwagon of positive developments was the economy which continues to be the fastest-growing in the world, barely two years after the pandemic-ridden downturn. At 7.3 per cent growth and \$3.732 trillion GDP (\$13.119 trillion- PPP 2023), it remains the fifth largest economy of the world. The single-minded focus of the Indian government has correctly been on conflict avoidance, no unnecessary involvement in geopolitical wrangling, yet secure borders and balanced relationships which can sustain crises. This has ensured steady growth without obstacles. It's the model that China's Deng Xiaoping followed from 1978, by toning down rhetoric, establishing stable borders, a distinct lack of aggressiveness, with advancement in capability through technical education and the modernisation of agriculture and technologies. China followed that for several years before adopting its aggressive stance of today. The year 2023 witnessed the repositioning of India after the pandemic, shedding some of the reticence and loss of faith that may have entered in the system due to the set-



backs in the economy and the manufacturing sector in India. There was sufficient confidence for the nation to launch its own Chandrayaan-3 in a moon exploration mission placing India among the few nations with a successful space exploration programme which gave a boost to the confidence of the scientific community. It is that confidence which will continue to hold good as we look at the technological transformation in AI, cyber, quantum and other technologies. It's in the domain of G20 where India scored maximum brownie points in creating a niche position. The ability to steer a draft resolution without any negative references to the war in Ukraine was an achievement in deft diplomacy. The ability to position itself as the voice of the Global South was another achievement. India made strong interventions in strengthening the Global South, including through the African Union becoming a permanent member of the grouping and by trigger-

ing concrete action-oriented, G20 outcomes for the Global South. By introducing the 13th vertical in the agenda through the inclusion of disaster risk reduction India gave a firm direction to concern for disasters, particularly risk financing, infrastructure and early warning. Before dwelling on some key geopolitical aspects which proved challenging it's also important to mention the range of activities from a civilisational angle. The G20 motto of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' sought to internationalise a core idea of Indian humanism. A human-centric global system, the idea of sustainable development, research on climate resilient grains, the Global Initiative for Public Infrastructure (DPI) and One Future Alliance to implement DPI are important too. While 2023 had the vehicle of G20 to position India as a leader in much of this we have to seek similar avenues to maintain a continuum in 2024. In geopolitics.

## Iran blames Israel for blasts, says punishment will be 'regrettable'

The unclaimed attack came amid high Middle East tensions over the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza and the killing of a Hamas senior leader in Lebanon on Tuesday



Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi on Wednesday accused Israel of being behind the twin explosions during a memorial ceremony that killed more than 100 people in Iran. Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi speaks during a commemoration for the late Revolutionary Guard Gen. Qassem Soleimani, who was killed in a US drone attack in 2020. (AP) Two rapid explosions

near the burial site of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani in Kerman resulted in the death of at least 103 people on Wednesday. The blast took place as Iran commemorated the anniversary of Soleimani's killing in a US drone strike in 2020. The incident was labelled as a 'terrorist attack' by the state media and regional

authorities. The unclaimed attack came amid high Middle East tensions over the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza and the killing of a Hamas senior leader in Lebanon on Tuesday. In a televised address, Raisi warned that Israel would "pay a high price".

"I warn the Zionist regime: Do not doubt that you will pay a heavy price for this crime and the crimes you have committed," Raisi said, according to CNN.

The Iranian president also warned that Israel's punishment would be "regrettable and severe". Meanwhile, the Iranian president's political deputy, Mohammad Jamshidi also accused

the United States, along with Israel, of being behind the blasts. "Washington says USA and Israel had no role in the terrorist attack in Kerman, Iran. Really? A fox smells its own lair first," the Iranian president's political deputy, Mohammad Jamshidi wrote on X, formerly Twitter. "Make no mistake. The responsibility for this crime lies with the US and Zionist regimes (Israel) and terrorism is just a tool," he added. On being asked about the blasts, the Israeli military told CNN it had "no comment". Separately, Israeli army spokesman Daniel Hagari said: "We are focused on the combat with Hamas", according to AFP.

## Epstein accuser accuses Prince Andrew of groping

The names of more than 150 people mentioned in a lawsuit by Virginia Giuffre, one of Epstein's most prominent accusers



that otherwise revealed few new details about the extent of Epstein's alleged sex trafficking activities. Prince Andrew could not immediately be reached for comment. Epstein socialized with Wall Street titans, royalty and celebrities before pleading guilty to soliciting prostitution from a minor in 2008. He took his own life in 2019 at age 66 while awaiting trial on federal sex-trafficking charges.

### New York

A woman who has said she was victimized by late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein said Britain's Prince Andrew put his hand on her breast at Epstein's Manhattan townhouse in 2001, according to court documents from a civil lawsuit unsealed.

The incident, which has been previously reported by other media outlets and Andrew has denied, was among the details described in an initial trove of previously redacted documents

names of more than 150 people mentioned in a lawsuit by Virginia Giuffre, one of Epstein's most prominent accusers, were kept under seal for years until a federal judge ruled last month that there was no legal justification to keep them private. In a deposition, Giuffre said she had sex with several politicians and financial leaders.

In her deposition, Giuffre also said she had sex with other prominent figures who have previously denied her allegations, including hedge-fund owner Glenn Dubin, billionaire U.S. businessman Tom Pritzker and the late New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson.

## UK police probe virtual gang rape of girl's 'avatar' in metaverse

UK police are investigating an unprecedented case of alleged gang rape of a girl's avatar in a virtual reality game, according to Daily Mail, marking a notable case within the metaverse. The reported victim, a minor, was using a virtual reality headset in an immersive game when her animated avatar was subjected to virtual assault by the avatars of several men. Despite the absence of physical injuries, authorities acknowledge the potential for

lasting trauma comparable to real-life experiences, the report said citing police sources. "There is an emotional and psychological impact on the victim that is longer-term than any physical injuries," a senior officer familiar with the case told the outlet. Concerns about the feasibility of prosecution under existing laws, which centre on physical touching in a sexual manner without consent, have been raised by UK authorities. This has prompted discussions about the

allocation of police resources, particularly given the substantial backlog of real world rape cases. UK Home Secretary James Cleverly defended the VR rape probe. "I know it is easy to dismiss this as being not real, but the whole point of these virtual environments is they are incredibly immersive," the quoted Cleverly as saying to the LBC platform. "And we are talking about a child here, and a child has gone through sexual trauma," he added.

## Kate Middleton 'is like a younger sister' to this European royal



UK Kate Middleton "is like a younger sister" to the new Danish Queen, a fashion designer had once claimed as the UK royal modelled herself on Crown Princess Mary when she married Prince William. The two even coordinate their matching outfits like during Princess of Wales' visit to Copenhagen in 2022. Then, Crown Princess Mary and Kate both wore black and white tailoring for the occasion which were accessorised with pearl earrings. Karl Lagerfeld, the late German fashion designer, compared the two royal women ahead of the 2011 Prince William-Kate wedding. "Kate is like a younger sister to Mary,

who is both beautiful and elegant," the designer said. It was also noted that the Princess of Wales wore a headband to Prince Louis' christening after being inspired by the Crown Princess. Crown Princess Mary wore an identical-looking headband at her son Prince Christian' christening 12 years before that. Sarah Williams and Heaven LeeMiller, the founders of royal fashion website UFO No More, said, "Crown Princess Mary's signature style is very classic and sophisticated. She often goes for simple lines and streamlined silhouettes. She manages to balance Scandinavian minimalism with Australian bohemianism very well."

## Hezbollah chief's deterrence to Israel: 'Cannot be silent if Gaza war extends'

### Lebanon

The head of Lebanon's Hezbollah said it "cannot be silent" after the killing of Hamas' deputy leader in Beirut and warned that his heavily armed forces would fight to the finish if Israel chose to extend war from Gaza to Lebanon. Israeli forces meanwhile kept up their aerial and ground blitz against Hamas militants in Gaza and told civilians to leave a refugee camp in the north of the Palestinian enclave. Israel, which has laid waste to the Gaza Strip in an onslaught to wipe out its ruling Hamas group, has neither confirmed nor denied that it assassinated Saleh al-Aroui in a drone strike in the Lebanese capital on Tuesday. But its military spokesperson said Israeli forces were in a high state of readiness and prepared for any scenario.

## Japan plane collision: Officials find error in landing-take-off instructions from air control tower

Tokyo Japanese authorities said on Wednesday a passenger jet that collided with a Coast Guard turboprop at a Tokyo airport had been given permission to land, but the smaller plane had not been cleared for take-off, based on control

tower transcripts. All 379 people aboard the Japan Airlines (JAL) Airbus A350 managed to evacuate after it erupted in flames following Tuesday's crash with a De Havilland Dash-8 Coast Guard turboprop shortly after landing at Haneda air-

port. But five died among the six Coast Guard crew who were due to depart on a flight responding to a major earthquake on Japan's west coast, while the captain, who escaped the wreckage, was badly injured.

## Jeffrey Epstein's emails to Ghislaine refute Prof Hawking's 'underage orgy' allegations

### New York

A new batch of documents of 946 pages has been released that reveal the correspondence between Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell, his alleged accomplice in a sex trafficking ring. The documents show that Epstein tried to discredit the accusations of Virginia Giuffre, one of his victims, who claimed that he forced her to have sex in an underage orgy with Professor Stephen Hawking. "You can issue a reward to any of Virginia's friends, acquaintances, family that come forward and help prove her allegations are false," he wrote. He also mentioned two specific events that Giuffre alleged to have taken place: a dinner with former President Bill Clinton and a trip to the Virgin Islands where Hawking was present. "The



strongest is the Clinton dinner, and the new version in the Virgin Islands that Stephen Hawking participated in an underage orgy," he stated. **What is in the documents?** The email was part of a 946-page collection of court documents from Giuffre's 2015 lawsuit against Maxwell, who was accused of recruiting and grooming young girls for

Epstein. The lawsuit was settled in 2017, and Maxwell is now in prison, serving a 20-year sentence for sex trafficking charges. She is the only person who has been convicted in relation to Epstein's crimes. The documents were made public by the Southern District of New York on January 3, after the deadline for appeals expired.

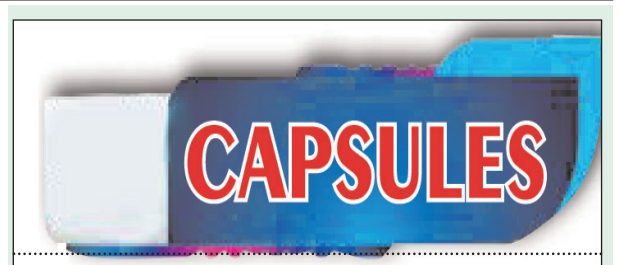
The renowned physicist who made groundbreaking discoveries about black holes and their radiation, as reported by NASA. Hawking was born in 1942, and suffered from motor neuron disease since he was 21 years old. He spent most of his life in a wheelchair, and communicated through a voice synthesizer. He had three children with his first wife, Jane Wilde, whom he married in the 1960s and divorced in the 1970s.

## Vivek criticises government after Epstein docs released: 'Why are we only seeing a partial list?'

### New York

Vivek Ramaswamy reacted to the disclosure of the Jeffrey Epstein documents during a speech at Town Hall in Harrison County. Speaking about the names being released, Ramaswamy criticised the government for sharing a redacted list instead of a complete list. "Why are we only seeing a partial list or a redacted list?" he questioned, as seen in a video posted by Forbes Breaking News. He said, "Just give us the full list, give the full footage of what happened inside and outside the prison," including details about

Epstein's suicide. Ramaswamy went on to say that we "deserve a government that tells people the truth." "Lay out the full information, not the partial list, not the redacted list. Why do you need redaction? List the whole thing. We, the people, deserve the truth." Ramaswamy slammed the government as one that has "systematically lied to us." He went on to say that as US president, he will ensure that the truth is told "not just when it's easy but when it's hard and ugly." "That's how we actually rebuild trust in this country," he added.



## Japan earthquake: Search for survivors enters day 4, toll rises to 73

The earthquakes, including a powerful one with a magnitude of 7.5, jolted the Noto Peninsula in the central prefecture of Ishikawa, causing buildings to collapse and tsunami warnings to be sent as far away as eastern Russia. All the deaths have been reported in Ishikawa prefecture where the hardest hit Noto peninsula is located. More than 33,000 people have evacuated their homes and about 1,00,000 houses have no water supply, Reuters reported, citing local government. More than 300 people have been injured, and at least 25 of them are in serious condition. On Thursday, thousands of rescuers raced against the clock to free many more people still trapped under rubble amid freezing temperatures and heavy rainfall. Weather forecasts have warned of heavy rain in Ishikawa, leading to concerns about landslides and more damage to half-crumbled homes. The full extent of damage and casualties remains unclear even three days after the quake, which is already the deadliest in Japan since at least 2016. Severed roads and the remote location of the hardest-hit areas have complicated relief operations in the island nation. On Wednesday, Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said that the government has opened a sea route to deliver aid and that some larger trucks were now able to reach some of the more remote areas. "More than 40 hours have passed. This is a race against time, and I feel that we are at a critical moment," Kishida told reporters, according to the Associated Press. "We have received reports many people are still waiting for rescue under collapsed buildings." Meanwhile, Ishikawa Governor Hiroshi Hase has encouraged everyone to use masks, anti-septic and soap to guard against the spread of infectious diseases as evacuees shelter together. "Ensuring adequate water supplies and toilets for those who were displaced is a priority," he said, according to AP. Japan experiences hundreds of earthquakes every year and the vast majority cause no damage. The Island nation is haunted by a massive 9.0 magnitude undersea quake off northeastern Japan in 2011 which triggered a tsunami that left around 18,500 people dead or missing.

## Vladimir Putin ally's diktat: 'If criminals are missing, kill their families'

### Moscow

Russian president Vladimir Putin's key ally Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov called for the execution of family members of suspected criminals who cannot be found. The comments were made by the Chechen leader at a meeting of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Chechen Republic where Ramzan Kadyrov told security commanders that relatives are acceptable recipients of punishment for criminal suspects if they are not apprehended.

## Delhi HC disposes Mahua house eviction plea, says seek permission from...

**New Delhi**  
The Delhi high court has disposed of Trinamool leader Mahua Moitra's plea against the notice to vacate her government-allotted house after her expulsion from the Lok Sabha, saying she should approach the Directorate of Estate. Moitra had filed a plea with the high court requesting directions to quash the notice to vacate the house by January 7. The court, while disposing of her plea, said she should approach the body seeking permission to retain her government accommodation beyond January 7. The court directed the government to take steps to



evict her only in accordance with law. The court has also permitted Moitra to withdraw her plea. The Directorate of Estates is a department under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs that administers and man-

ages the estates of the Central government, including accommodations. Justice Subramoniun Prasad said the rules permitted the authorities to permit overstay of a resident for a certain time period.

"Move a representation before the Directorate of Estates and their action will be taken in accordance with the law," the judge said. Mahua Moitra had asked the court to quash the Directorate of Estates'

December 11 order. She had urged the court to give directions to the government body that she could retain the house till the results of 2024 general elections were declared. Mahua was expelled from the Lok Sabha after the ethics panel found her guilty of "unethical conduct". She was accused of accepting gifts from businessman Darshan Hiranandani in return for posting his questions on the Adani Group in the Lok Sabha. Moitra had said she shared her parliamentary login credentials with the businessman to have his staff type out her questions on the official platform.

## Amid kar sevak arrest row, BJP shares video of Siddaramaiah refusing to enter temple

**Bengaluru**  
Amid intense political row over the arrest of Srikanth Poojari who was allegedly involved in the violence after Babri Masjid demolition in 1992, the BJP shared a video of Karnataka chief minister Siddaramaiah refusing to enter a temple. Calling him anti-Ram, the BJP said this is the real face of Siddaramaiah. A major row has begun in Congress-ruled Karnataka ahead of the inauguration of Ram Temple on January 22



as Srikanth Poojari got arrested in old cases. Siddaramaiah said there was no politics and it was mere coincidence that the arrest took place before the inauguration of the Ram Temple. Srikanth has been involved in 16 anti-

social activities including illegal liquor sales, gambling, Siddaramaiah said, "If such individuals are not arrested and are allowed to roam freely, even Lord Rama cannot forgive this," Siddaramaiah said. Siddaramaiah's son Yathindra courted a fresh controversy as he said India will be like Afghanistan and Pakistan if it becomes a Hindu Rashtra. "Pakistan and Afghanistan have been bankrupted by the dictatorship in the name of religion..."

## 'Congress soul is Hindu': Uddhav says they should attend Ayodhya event



**Mumbai**  
Congress leaders Mallikarjun Kharge, Sonia Gandhi and Adhira Ranjan have been invited to the consecration ceremony of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya on January 22. The Shiv Sena (UBT) underlined that the "soul" of the Congress party is Hindu and that the party should attend the Lord Ram temple consecration ceremony in Ayodhya if they have received the special invitation, keeping aside the political difference. The Uddhav Thackeray-led party is an ally of Congress in Maha Vikas Aghadi and also a member of the INDIA bloc of opposition parties. As received any special invitation for the Ram temple consecration ceremony then it (the leaders) should go to Ayodhya. What is wrong with it?" the Shiv Sena

(UBT) asked in an editorial in the party's mouthpiece Saamana, according to PTI. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, parliamentary party chairperson Sonia Gandhi and the party's leader in the Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury have been invited to the consecration ceremony of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya on January 22. However, the Congress has not yet clarified its official stance on whether its top leaders will attend the event. Last week, the party said that it would decide about attending the event at an "appropriate time" Shiv Sena (UBT) also said that it is wrong to say that the BJP is the "beholder of Hindutva" as claimed by that party. It pointed out that the Congress has equally contributed to the growth of Hindu culture, it added, reported PTI.

## Rajasthan's traditional 'tankas' given modern update under

**Barmer (Rajasthan)**  
The Centre has adopted western Rajasthan's traditional rainwater harvesting system 'tankas' by constructing a large number of such storage tanks with reinforced concrete cement near PMAY houses to battle water scarcity in the arid region. Traditional 'tankas' are earthen rainwater storage tanks constructed by the people of Barmer district and other parts of western Rajasthan to collect water received during showers between July and September. "However, the water stored in the traditional 'tankas' gradually becomes contaminated due to its earthen structure and does not last for the entire year. So, the Centre has adopted the method under MGNREGA (Rural) scheme but instead of earthen tankas, is constructing

"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 fail-

water storage spaces made of reinforced concrete cement to provide uncontaminated water to the people for a longer period of time," Barmer Collector Arun Purohit said. A total of 1,84,766 such tanks have been constructed since 2016, with 41,580 built in the current 2023-24 fiscal, he said. Each tank, measuring 13.5 ft by 13.5 ft, has the capacity to store 35,000 litres of water and is constructed at a cost of 3 lakh, Purohit said. The district has 2,971 villages, locally called 'dhanis', and respective gram panchayats are the imple-

menting agencies. He said other measures are also being adopted to ensure water supply to far-flung villages in the district that shares a 228-km-long international border with Pakistan. These include the supply of water from the Indira Gandhi Canal and the Narmada Project along with the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) scheme. "We are targeting to reach out to 4.25 lakh households under the JJM scheme. Of these, we have already covered 1.25 lakh households," the collector said. After the JJM scheme is completely implemented, every household will have tap connection and surface water will be available to all households in the district, he said. Head of Kurla village, Devaram Choudhury, said water scarcity is a major problem in the region and sources are few and far-flung.

## Karnataka man cuts teacher's nose after children pluck few flowers

**Belagavi**  
A man chopped off the nose of an anganwadi teacher in a fit of anger after her school children plucked flowers from his garden in Belagavi district, police, adding that the accused has been arrested. According to police, the incident occurred on Tuesday at Basurte village in Belagavi district. The accused, Kalyani More, picked up a fight with the teacher Sugandha More (50) and chopped off her nose. A profusely bleeding Sugandha was admitted to a private hospital in Belagavi where she received a blood transfusion. The anganwadi centre, operated by the women and child development department for the past 20 years.



## Lord Ram was non-vegetarian, king of Bahujan: Jitendra Awhad's comment sparks row

**Maharashtra** leader Jitendra Awhad's comment that Lord Ram was never a vegetarian as he couldn't live in the jungle for 14 years being a vegetarian has sparked a major controversy in the state at a time the BJP demanded January 22 -- the consecration day of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya -- to be declared as a dry day and a day on which all non-vegetarian food should be banned. The Nationalist Congress Party MLA (Sharad Pawar faction) said Lord Ram was a Bahujan and a non-vegetarian and was a hunter. "We don't read history and forget everything in politics. Ram is ours. Of us Bahujans. Who used to hunt to eat... Ram was never a vegetarian. He was a non-vegetarian. How can a man who lived in the jungle for 14 years remain a vegetarian," Jitendra Awhad said. BJP MLA Ram Kadam said had Balasaheb Thackeray been alive, Shiv Sena's Saamana newspaper would have criticised the 'Ram non-vegetarian' comment. "But today's reality is they (Uddhav Sena) do not care if somebody makes fun of the Hindus. They are indifferent, as cold as ice. But when the election comes, they will talk about Hindutva.." Ram Kadam tweeted on Thursday.



## Plea in Supreme Court alleges caste discrimination in jails

**New Delhi**  
The Supreme Court on Wednesday issued notices to the Centre and 11 states on a petition that said prison manuals across the country perpetuate caste discrimination. The petition also said that prisoners are allocated work depending on their caste, which also determines where they are lodged in the

jail. "The caste realities of the carceral system in India entails a range of discriminatory practices, including the division of labour determined on the basis of caste hierarchy, and caste-based segregation of barracks. A bench headed by CJI Y Chandrachud said the plea "raises an impor-

tant issue," and asked solicitor general Tushar Mehta to assist the court on behalf of the Centre. The petition has made states of UP, Odisha, Jharkhand, Kerala, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Telangana, Punjab and Tamil Nadu as parties in the petition, besides the Centre.

## Assam Police issues guidelines for picnics after 12 killed in road accident

**Assam**  
In the wake of an accident that claimed 12 lives on their way to a picnic, the Assam Police on Wednesday issued a comprehensive Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the regulation of picnic parties. The guidelines for such trips include prohibiting movement in the dark and asking picnickers not to play loud music inside vehicles. "In this atmosphere of pomp and gaiety, sadness struck because of road traffic accidents during the vehicular movement

of these picnic parties. Hence, it is felt imperative that a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) be in place to regulate the movement of these picnic parties," the police said. The Assam Police said, "No loud music on the vehicles to be allowed.. There should not be any movement of picnic parties before sunrise and after sunset." The guidelines prohibit overcrowding in vehicles used for picnic transportation and trading illicit liquor in or around picnic spots.

## NHRC issues notice to Manipur over killing of 13 people last month

**Manipur**  
The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has taken suo motu cognizance of a Hindustan Times report on the killings of 13 people in a single incident in ethnic violence-hit Manipur last month and issued a notice to the state government reminding it of its duty to protect citizens. Police said that village defence volunteers killed the 13 men after they entered a Kuki area on December 4. This was the highest single-day toll in the clashes between Meities and Kukis, which have roiled the state since May 3 and left around 200 people dead and over 50,000 displaced.



In its notice, NHRC called the incident "alarming and disturbing", indicating "a lapse on the part of the law enforcing agencies and the forces deployed there to ensure peace and law and order". It asked the state

police to submit a report on the status of the first information report and the steps taken to prevent such incidents. An officer said that Manipur Police have filed a reply and provided the details. He did not elaborate.

## Dalit man assaulted in Karnataka over loan

**Bengaluru:** A Dalit man and his sister-in-law were assaulted by some upper-caste people in Mulabagilu taluk of Kolar district after he requested for repayment of a loan, police. According to a complaint filed by the Dalit man Hanumantha (28), around 10 people from the village attacked him and his sister-in-law with stones and knives. A complaint has been filed against ten people at Nangali police station. "Police arrested five people on Tuesday, while the remaining five are currently absconding.

## Bengaluru records 10-year high in fatal accidents in 2023

**Bengaluru:** An analysis of fatalities in road accidents revealed that 70% of these incidents involved two-wheelers, with issues such as non-usage or improper use of helmets saw a 10-year high in fatal accidents in 2023, according to the data released by the traffic police department. A total of 909 individuals lost their lives in 880 fatal accidents on the city's roads last year. In comparison, 2022 reported 772 deaths in 752 accidents. The overall number of accidents surged from 3,822 in 2022 to 5,004 in 2023. The data also highlighted an upward trend in fatalities over the last five years, depicting a concerning rise in road safety. In 2018, Bengaluru recorded 663 road fatalities, followed by 746 in 2019, 621 in 2020, 621 in 2021, 752 in 2022, and a staggering 880 in 2023.

Joint Commissioner of Police (Traffic) MN Anucheth however said that even though the number of accidents is high, the average number of fatalities is coming down. "If you look at the accidents per one lakh vehicles in the city, the numbers are declining. The accident fatality rate (deaths in road accidents for every lakh vehicle population) in 2019 was 8.77 and has dipped to 7.5 in 2023," he said.

# How much bounce is too much? There's more to 55 all out and 0 for 6 than just poor technique of batters

## Newlands

It's a difficult thing to do but for a moment, leave aside what the batters must be thinking after the manic Day 1 of the India vs South Africa second Test at Newlands in Cape Town. Think about the fans. Everyone will have a story to tell. It was one of those "where were you when..." days in Test cricket. Where were you when South Africa were bowled out for 55 - their lowest Test score since readmission to international cricket in 1991? Where were you when Mohammed Siraj became the first Indian pacer to complete a five-wicket haul in the first session of a Test match? Where were you when 23 wickets - the most in South Africa - fell on the first day of a Test match? Where were you when India went from 153/4 to 153 all out losing six wickets - the most any team in any format has lost at the same score in international cricket - in 11 balls?



Ravi Shastri felt a "dump" would have been enough to miss the last six wickets of the Indian innings. Sachin Tendulkar was in disbelief seeing South Africa not only bat again on Day 1 but also lose three wickets in the second innings in between his way back home. As entertaining as it may sound -- Be honest, bowlers dominating proceedings is always more exciting. Seeing the stumps fly is always more adrenaline-rushing than the ball being whacked -- the 23 wickets that fell on

Wednesday in Newlands gave rise to two unavoidable questions

1) Where is Test match batting heading?

2) Did the pitch have the right balance between bat and ball?

There should be a third question too. What would have happened if the same thing transpired on an Indian pitch?

Drawing similarities between say an Ahmedabad turner and a Newlands unpredictable strip is not the best way forward to debate on

Test pitches. Both are extremes and both should be looked at with a prism of doubt. The problem arises when turn is looked at with the corner of an eye while pace and steep bounce are considered tough Test match cricket. That's as classist and unfair as it gets. Unpredictable awkward bounce or excessive lateral movement is as dangerous as low bounce or sharp square turn. With the (unimportant) third question settled, now let's come back to the original two questions. Did 23 wickets fall because of the pitch? No. Have modern-day batters forgotten how to bat in Test cricket? No. Then? The answer to this is never straightforward. When two sides get all out on the same day of the Test match and three more wickets tumble in one of their second innings, it cannot be because of the pitch alone, neither can it be due to poor application of the batters.

## Newlands

Mohammed Siraj is what they cutely refer to as a 'roll bowler'. As in, when he gets on a roll, he is impossible to stop. Stop taking wickets, that is. Thrice last year, in One-Day Internationals, Sri Lanka felt the full fury of the 'roll bowler'. In Thiruvananthapuram in January, his opening spell of 7-0-20-4 sent the Islanders plummeting to 73 all out and defeat by 317 runs, their heaviest in the 50-over format. In September in Colombo, in the final of the Asia Cup at a packed and shell-shocked

Premadasa Stadium, his figures at one stage read 5.2-1-7-6 (he finished with six for 21) as the hosts were cleaned up for 50. And at the Wankhede Stadium in November, in the World Cup, he produced a first burst of 4-2-5-3, Sri Lanka shot out for 55 in response



to India's 357 for eight. At Newlands on Wednesday, the 'roll bowler' was at it again, translating his white-ball heroics to the traditional, more celebrated five-day version. Passable but no more in the first Test against South Africa in Centurion the previous week when senior pro Jasprit Bumrah was largely left to fight a solitary battle, Siraj roused himself into action on a blistering day with an unforgiving sun beating down harshly.

The Newlands-familiar assert that they haven't seen a better spell of fast bowling,

just as they insist that they haven't seen a day one strip at the venue with more pace. Dean Elgar, in his farewell Test, would hardly have imagined that he would bat twice - and be dismissed twice - in one day when he opted to bat under clear blue skies. But he certainly hadn't contended with the 'roll bowler', the Hyderabad destroyer who showed skill, smarts, heart and stamina in an extended nine-over burst that sent the Proteas catapulting to 55 all out, their lowest Test score since their international readmission in 1991.

## Australia vs Pak 3rd Test Day 2: Rain forces early stumps, AUS 116/2

### Sydney

Australia opener David Warner was dismissed for 34 in his farewell cricket test against Pakistan at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Thursday before rain and poor light ruined most of the rest of the second day. Play was interrupted in the middle session with Australia at 116-2 in reply to Pakistan's 313. The lights were on at the SCG and the conditions were gloomy, but the decision to take players from the field for bad light was met with boos from the crowd and criticism



from former players. Players stayed off for a further 40 minutes while 25,000 fans remained in attendance, before rain began to fall and the day was officially washed out.

Marnus

Labuschagne will resume on 23 on Friday morning with Steve Smith on 6. On Day 1, Gritty Pakistan hit back from looming disaster to finish with 313 on the back of fighting half-centuries from Mohammad Rizwan,

Agha Salman and Aamer Jamal on the first day of the third Test against Australia on Wednesday. The tourists, staring down a meagre innings total when reduced to 96 for five after winning the toss, went on the counter-attack to frustrate the Australians late in the day at the Sydney Cricket Ground. Rizwan clubbed 88 off 103 balls, number nine Jamal smashed four sixes in a spirited 82 off 97 and Salman hit 53 off 67 to give the tourists renewed hope after a car-crash start to the innings.

## Shaheen hits back after Wasim, Waqar accuse him of 'solely' deciding to rest from Pakistan vs Australia 3rd Test

### Sydney

Pakistan's pace spearhead was rested from the Sydney Test keeping the five-match T20I series against New Zealand in mind. Afridi is supposed to lead Pakistan for the first time as their new T20I captain on the New Zealand tour starting from January 12. The decision was heavily criticised by greats of Pakistan cricket Wasim Akram and Waqar Younis. Wasim went on to state that the decision was Shaheen's alone

and not the team management's. During the third Test, Shaheen, while speaking to the host broadcasters, cleared the air and confirmed that it was the call of the team management. "I played two games, and a lot of overs to be honest. They're just managing my workload, the medical team and team management decided to take a rest for this (Test)," Afridi said in an interaction with the broadcasters during Lunch on Day 1 in Sydney.



## Virat Kohli and India cut short celebrations, run to Dean Elgar after his final Test knock in brilliant gesture

### Cape Town

Day 1 of the second Test between India and South Africa ended up being a nightmare for batters from both sides. South Africa were the first to bear the brunt of the pitch as Mohammed Siraj's career-best figures of 6/15 led the way in India bundling the hosts out for a record-low score of 55. India seemed set to build a giant lead in the early stages of the third session with Virat Kohli three runs away from his half-century and KL Rahul seemingly getting set. This was after a quickfire partnership of 55 off 75 balls between Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill. However, India incredibly went from being 153/4 to 153 all out in the 34th and 35th overs of their innings, thus bringing South Africa back out to bat again. It meant that Dean Elgar, South Africa's stand-in captain who is retiring from international cricket after this Test, came out to bat for his second innings of the match, and the last innings of his international career, on Day 1 itself. The left-hander chopped a Siraj delivery back onto his stumps in the first innings. He ended up being applauded off the field on the first day as well after falling to Mukesh Kumar dismissed him for 12 runs. It was a typical Mukesh Kumar delivery. The key here was the fact that he came around the wicket. His nagging line and length meant Elgar had little option but to play at it. The ball straightened ever so slightly instead of coming in with the angle to find the outside edge of Elgar's bat and Kohli did the rest in the slip cordon.



After taking the catch, Kohli gestured towards the dressing room and bowed down as if to suggest a plan had worked out perfectly for them but quickly realised it was the last time Elgar was walking back to the pavilion in Test cricket.

## Kohli angers Markram by repeating bail-swapping act



### Cape Town

The second and final Test between South Africa and India at Newlands witnessed an extraordinary, back-and-forth first day, concluding with the Proteas standing at 62 for three in their second innings, trailing India by 36 runs. The day saw 23 wickets fall, along with the setting of several records on Wednesday. Aiden Markram, with an unbeaten 36, and David Bedingham, at 7 not out, will aim to build a solid partnership on the second day to set a challenging target for India. Seamer Mohammed Siraj played a pivotal role, achieving a career-best 6-15 as

India bowled out South Africa for a mere 55 in the first innings. Despite India's promising position at 153 for four in reply, a stunning collapse ensued, resulting in the loss of six wickets without adding a run—the first instance of such an occurrence in test cricket. The visitors encountered multiple unwanted milestones, with six batsmen dismissed for ducks, equaling a previous record.

The first two innings, lasting 349 balls, marked the second-fewest deliveries in 147 years of Test cricket. South Africa faced setbacks as well, losing captain Dean Elgar twice in the day.

## Shastri's commentary during India's Record collapse in 2nd Test sends internet into frenzy

### Cape Town

The second Test between India and South Africa raced along on an extraordinary first day in which 23 wickets fell. India bundled South Africa out for 55 and were looking steady at 153/4 in the second session before it was their turn to have some egg on their faces with the bat in hand. India's collapse began with Lungi Ngidi taking three wickets and turning the tables on the visitors in the 34th over. In the very next, Kagiso Rabada dismissed Virat Kohli, who was three



runs away from his half-century, Siraj was run out and Prasadidh Krishna edged one to slips. India thus lost six wickets for no runs in 11 balls leading to stunned reactions from all over the world. Former India head coach Ravi Shastri, who was in the commentary box at that point, summed up the situation in a hilarious man-

ner and the clip has gone viral since then. "Yes 153/4, 153 all out. If someone went around the corner for a dump and has come back, India has been bowled out for 153!" Shastri said on commentary, prompting audible laughter inside the box. "Or a drink, or whatever they have gone for. If they turned

## Tendulkar's 'magic' post for Siraj, Harbhajan Singh can't keep calm as India steamroll South Africa in Cape Town

### Cape Town

Mohammed Siraj led the way as India dismantled the South African batting lineup in the first session of the second Test in Cape Town on Wednesday. The Indian pacers ran through the South African lineup like hot knife through butter and the hosts

were bundled out for a record low score of 55 runs. It is the lowest score for the Proteas in Test cricket since 1932 and they could last just 23.2 overs. Siraj ended with figures of 6/15. It is also the lowest score by any team against India in Test cricket, going past the 62 that New

Zealand were all out for at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai in December 2021. The lowest score by any team at their own home ground against India was 83 by Australia at the Melbourne Cricket Ground in February 1981. Siraj was on the money from his first over itself and

eventually gave India the breakthrough with the wicket of Aiden Markram in the fourth over of the day. Siraj went on to bowl an extended spell in which he took five wickets and then returned to take his sixth. The fast bowler drew a lot of plaudits from all quarters with a number of

former India players praising him on social media, including the Sachin Tendulkar. Siraj is the first Indian to take five wickets in a single session of a Test match since 2011. Since 2016, he is also the second Indian pacer after his teammate Bumrah to take six wickets in a single session. He

## Mark Zuckerberg sold nearly half billion dollars of Meta stock in last two months



New Delhi

Mark Zuckerberg sold nearly half a billion dollars of Meta Platforms Inc. shares in the final two months of 2023 after a two-year hiatus in which the company's stock price hit its lowest in seven years. The Meta chief executive sold shares on every trading day between Nov. 1 and the end of the year, unloading nearly 1.28 million shares for about \$428 million, according to a Tuesday regulatory filing.

Before this period, Zuckerberg had not sold Meta shares since November 2021. The company's share price

● **Marc Benioff, Zuckerberg's peer in the tech world, also sold shares nearly every day in the second half of 2023. The Salesforce Inc. co-founder unloaded more than \$475 million worth of shares during the period**

rebounded 194% last year from a seven-year low near the end of 2022. Meta shares outperformed those of every other major tech giant except Nvidia Corp. last year and is now near its September 2021

record high. Zuckerberg, 39, owns about 13% of Meta and has a net worth of about \$125 billion, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index, making him the seventh-richest person in the world. Meta did not reply to a request for comment.

Marc Benioff, Zuckerberg's peer in the tech world, also sold shares nearly every day in the second half of 2023. The Salesforce Inc. co-founder unloaded more than \$475 million worth of shares during the period, selling about 15,000 shares — about \$3 million — every day.

## Tech Mahindra on boards former Infosys executive Richard as Chief People Officer

New Delhi

Tech Mahindra, one of the biggest IT firms in India, has announced that it has appointed Richard Lobo as the company's global Chief People Officer (CPO). Tech Mahindra announced the same on Wednesday through an X post. Richard Lobo was the executive vice president of rival IT firm Infosys previously, but will now be taking on this global role in Tech Mahindra. The HR veteran is being onboarded as part of the leadership restructuring under new CEO Mohit Joshi, reported. Tech Mahindra wrote on X, "With over 25 years of experience in HR



transformation, employee experience, diversity, and inclusion, Richard is set to lead the #HR charter at @Tech\_Mahindra. Together, we'll continue to scale people processes, drive sustainable growth, and create an unparalleled working environment based on our people-first principles." The IT firm's CEO Mohit Joshi reshared the Twitter post and wrote, "Welcome aboard, Richard. Your people-first

approach to empower organisations in the new world of work and passion for nurturing young leaders will serve as a catalyst in shaping our future. Look forward to taking #TechMahindraOnwards AndUpwards, together." **About new Tech Mahindra CPO Richard Lobo** Richard Lobo, before being roped into the new role at Tech Mahindra, was a part of IT giant Infosys for over two decades. Lobo spent 22 years at Infosys and resigned in August 2023, and took on the role as HR consultant and strategic advisor at edtech firm BYJU'S.

## Bitcoin continues to go strong after breaching \$45,000 mark

New Delhi

For the first time since April 2022, cryptocurrency Bitcoin crossed the \$45,000 mark on Tuesday, touching its 21-month high. Bitcoin, which is the world's largest cryptocurrency, recorded a hike of 6 percent, January 6. Bitcoin was up by a total of

6.43% on , touching its all time high since 2022 at \$45,317.67. A day after breaching the historic mark, Bitcoin continues to go strong, up by a little less than one percent. On January 3, the Bitcoin rates were recorded at \$45,257.70, not close to dipping below its 21-month high. The rates

were 0.70 percent higher than the closing price of the cryptocurrency. This also led to an overall surge in the cryptocurrency market in the first few days of January. With the Bitcoin prices surging above \$45,000 for the first time in months, the rates of the cryptocurrency in India.

## Gold prices down by 270, silver declines by 3 on January 4

● **The prices of gold spiked up on January 4, 2024, with the rate of one gram of 24K and 22K gold fixed at 6397 and 5865 respectively**



New Delhi

A day after showing a significant spike, the gold and silver prices in India are back to the former rate after the rates declined steeply for gold and marginally for silver on Thursday. Before this, gold prices were stable for three days. Gold and silver prices showed a decline of 270 and 3 per 10 gram of metal on Thursday, while it had risen by the same amount yesterday.

Gold and silver prices had remained unchanged from December 30 to January 2, after which they were spiked yesterday.

The prices of gold spiked up on January 4, 2024, with the rate of one gram of 24K and 22K gold fixed at 6397 and 5865 respec-

tively on Monday. Silver prices also showed a marginal hike at 78.90 per gram. For one gram of 24K of the yellow metal, on the other hand, buyers must pay 6397 (one gram), 51,176 (eight gram), 63,970 (10 gram) and 6,39,700 (100 gram). Here are the city-wise rates for gold today.

## SoftBank veteran Nimesh Arora now a billionaire CEO of Palo Alto Networks, has net worth of \$1.5 billion

New Delhi

Nimesh Arora has a track record of securing substantial compensation packages throughout his career. As the current CEO of Palo Alto Networks Inc, a cybersecurity firm, his role has catapulted him into the billionaire ranks. Arora's overall net worth now stands at \$1.5 billion, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index. This remarkable achievement distinguishes him as a rare example of a



non-founder tech CEO who has achieved billionaire status. Arora was granted a significant compensation package, including \$125 million in stock and

options upon joining Palo Alto Networks in 2018. In 2023, Arora leveraged his position and exercised some of his stock options, selling almost \$300 million worth of shares. Despite this substantial divestment, Arora remains well-positioned to continue accumulating wealth at Palo Alto Networks. Arora's 2023 compensation package comprises a potential maximum of 750,000 stock awards, subject to specific performance

criteria. Currently valued at over \$220 million, the company justifies this substantial award by citing Arora's impressive performance in his initial five years, averaging "\$102 million of value each year. Acknowledging Arora's substantial vested ownership and the anticipated vesting of additional amounts in the coming years, the company's Board of Directors deemed it necessary to grant a meaningful equity award.

## LIC faces demand notice of 663.45 crore for short payment of GST

New Delhi

The corporation has received communication/demand order for interest and penalty from Office of the Commissioner of CGST & Central Excise, Chennai North Commissionerate on January 1, LIC said in a regulatory filing. The demand pertains to wrong availment of



Input Tax Credit (ITC) and non-payment on tax on turnover wrongly declared as non-GST supply in GSTR-1 for 2017-18, and 2018-19, it said. The corporation shall file an appeal before the Commissioner (Appeals), Chennai against the said order within the prescribed timelines, it said. There is no material impact on financials, operations or other activities of the corporation, it

added. The company received a demand order for interest and penalty of about ₹116 crore for Telangana state for short payment of GST for 2017-18. The demand for Telangana came a day after LIC on January 1 received a similar notice demanding about ₹806 crore for short payment of GST for 2017-18 along with interest and penalty for Maharashtra.

## Adani family overtakes Ambanis as India's richest after SC ruling spurs stocks rally

● **"The court emphasised that market regulator SEBI was conducting a "comprehensive investigation," and its conduct "inspires confidence." Highlighting the limited power of the court to enter the regulatory domain of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) in framing"**

New Delhi

In what is considered a favourable ruling for the Ahmedabad-based conglomerate, the group's stocks soared by up to 12 per cent on Wednesday, contributing to an overall market capitalisation gain of over ₹15 lakh crore. As a result of these gains, Gautam Adani's family surpassed Mukesh Ambani of Reliance Industries, reclaiming the title of India's wealthiest promoter, Business Standard reported (the news report is behind paywall), the net worth of the Gautam Adani family increased to 9.37 lakh crore, up from 8.98 lakh crore



a day earlier. In comparison, the net worth of the Mukesh Ambani family slightly decreased to 9.28 lakh crore from 9.38 lakh crore during this period. **Supreme Court's judgment into Adani-Hidenburg issue** On Wednesday, the Supreme Court declined to transfer the investigation into allegations of stock price manipulation by the Indian corporate giant to a special investigation team or the CBI. The court emphasised that market regulator SEBI was conducting a "comprehensive investigation," and its conduct "inspires confidence." Highlighting the limited power

of the court to enter the regulatory domain of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) in framing delegated legislation, the apex court directed SEBI to promptly conclude the two pending investigations, preferably within three months. A bench led by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud said that reliance on newspaper articles or reports by third-party organisations like the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) to question a comprehensive investigation by a specialised regulator does not inspire confidence.

## Zomato hikes platform fee to 4 from January 1

New Delhi

Zomato, the publicly listed food delivery platform, has raised its platform fee from 3 to 4 per order in major markets, as per details on its app. This rate adjustment came into effect on January 1, INC24 reported. On New Year's Eve, the platform fees were reported to have been temporarily increased to as much as ₹9 per order in specific markets, as mentioned by sources. On Sunday, December 31, Zomato experienced an unprecedented surge in order volume during New Year's Eve, surpassing all-time highs. Deepinder Goyal, the CEO, shared on X that the order count exceeded the cumulative orders recorded by the food delivery platform for New Year's Eve over the previous six years.

CAPSULES

## PNB hikes FD interest rates: Check fixed deposit return rates for SBI, ICICI, HDFC and

Punjab National Bank has announced that it has hiked its fixed deposit (FD) interest rates on amounts below 2 crore. Now offering better returns on FD, the bank hiked up to 50 basis points (bps) on certain tenures. Meanwhile, PNB has also announced the reduction of FD rates for some buckets. The new rates of the bank will be implemented from January 1, 2024. The bank has hiked interest rates on the tenure of 180 to 270 Days by 50 bps. Through the new FD rates, general citizens will be able to get up to 6 percent returns. Meanwhile, PNB hiked the interest rates by 45 bps from 271 Days to less than 1 year tenure, fetching 7.25 percent returns for general citizens. PNB has hiked rates by 45 bps from 6.80% to 7.25% for the 400 day maturity fixed deposit. Further, the bank has revised the rates from 3.5% to 7.25% to general citizens on deposits maturing in 7 days to ten years.

While the FD rates for majority of the tenures have been raised, PNB has also cut FD rates on 444 days by 45 bps from 7.25% to 6.8%. As per the revisions in rates, Punjab National Bank will be offering an interest rate ranging from 4% to 7.75% on FDs maturing in seven days to ten years for senior citizens, and 4.3% to 8.05% for super seniors.

**Fixed deposit rates of ICICI, HDFC, SBI, BoB**

The State Bank of India (SBI) hiked interest rates on fixed deposits on December 27, 2023. For deposits below ₹2 crore, SBI offers rates ranging from 3.5 to 7% on deposits maturing in seven days to ten years, while senior citizens will get 50 bps extra.