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

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

● "Around 22 minutes after the lift-off from Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, the rocket injected XPoSat."



SRIHARIKOTA: Isro ushered in the New Year with the successful launch of XPoSat (X-ray Polarimeter Satellite), India's first satellite to conduct research on black holes and other celestial objects. Workhorse PSLV placed the satellite on its 60th flight in a 650km orbit. The final stage of PSLV-C58 then turned into an orbital experimental module (POEM) to test the 10 payloads over the next month. Around 22 minutes after the lift-off from Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, the rocket injected XPoSat. The rocket went through at least two coasting phases -- when the engines were not fired -- to place

the satellite with a 6-degree inclination. XPoSat will carry out studies of X-rays emitted by celestial objects like black holes, neutron stars and galactic nuclei. It carries two payloads --- Polix (Polarimeter Instrument in X-rays) by Raman Research Institute and Xspect (X-ray spectroscopy and timing) by Space Astronomy Group of URSC. PM Narendra Modi hailed the launch. "A great start to 2024 thanks to our scientists! This launch is wonderful news for the space sector and will enhance India's prowess in this field. Best wishes to our

scientists at @isro and the entire space fraternity in taking India to unprecedented heights," Modi tweeted. Isro chairman S Somanath described the launch as a "New Year gift to all of us". "The satellite is unique. It complements the scientific objective we have set for various observations of the universe.

It goes with Astrosat and Aditya-L1," Somanath said. A Raman Research Institute release said XPoSat is only the second x-ray polarimetry mission in the world, after Nasa's Imaging X-ray Polarimetry Explorer

(IXPE) launched in 2021. The 10 payloads in the PS4 orbital module include fuel cell power system and Silicon-based high energy cell from Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre, Isro. On missions planned this year, Somanath called 2024 as the year of Gaganyaan readiness and said the agency targets at least 12-14 missions this year. Meanwhile, Aditya-L1, the spacecraft for India's maiden solar mission, would reach its final destination -- the L1 point of the Sun -- on January 6 when a final manoeuvre would be performed, Isro chief S Somanath said.

Isro's PSLV-C58 XPoSat mission successful; satellite set to study X-ray emissions from black holes and other celestial objects

SRIHARIKOTA: The Indian Space Research Organisation ran in the New Year on Monday with the successful launch of PSLV-C58 carrying XPoSat and 10 other payloads. XPoSat is India's first dedicated scientific satellite for carrying out research in space-based polarisation measurements of X-ray emissions from celestial objects, including black holes. ISRO's New Year Mission: XPoSat to Explore the Enigmatic Black Hole Emissions PSLV-C58 lifted off from



the first launch pad at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota at 9.10am.

Around 22 minutes after liftoff, the rocket placed XPoSat in an eastward low inclina-

tion 650km orbit. After injection of XPoSat, the PS4 stage was restarted twice to reduce the orbit into 350km circular orbit to maintain a stabilised mode for orbital platform experiments. The PSLV orbital experimental module-3 (POEM-3) experiment was executed, meeting the objective of 10 identified payloads supplied by Isro and InSpace. The launch was PSLV's 60th flight and fourth flight of PSLV with DL variant.

Packaged items to display price per unit

NEW DELHI: From Monday, all manufacturers and importers of packaged items will have to mention the price of products per unit in addition to the overall MRP on packets, a decision that is being implemented after being pushed back several times. The government has also made it

mandatory for producers and importers to mention the month and year of manufacturing. So far, importers had the option to mention the month and year in which the commodity was manufactured or pre-packed or imported on the package. So far, importers preferred mentioning the date of

import. The new rule, which does away with the provision of mentioning the month and year of 'pre-packed or imported', will ensure consumers know the exact age of the products. According to the new rule, manufacturers and importers now need to mention the unit price per kg or per

litre for items weighing more than a kg or litre. Similarly, for items weighing less than a kg or litre, the unit price has to be mentioned in per gram or millilitre (ml). For pre-packed items with a length of more than one metre, the unit price will be in per metre and for items less than one metre.

Maharashtra now preferred destination for investments from overseas: CM Shinde

THANE: Maharashtra has become a preferred destination for investments from various countries, reflecting the state's conducive business environment, Chief Minister Eknath Shinde has said. Welcoming the New Year by participating in a midnight blood donation camp here, Shinde also spoke about the growing impact of the Swachh Bharat Mission initiated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the positive impact of a deep cleaning drive taken up in Mumbai and its extension across the state. The CM highlighted the successful implementation of 85 per cent of the Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) signed during the Davos meet (in 2023). "Maharashtra has become a preferred destination for investments from various countries," he said. Underlining the commitment to people's welfare, Shinde said the Chief Minister's Relief Fund has provided assistance of over Rs 165 crore to more than 20,000 individuals since his government assumed office, a significant increase from the earlier disbursement of Rs 2 to 3 crore. He also said that the deep cleaning drive, a crucial aspect of the Swachh Bharat campaign, has shown remarkable results in Mumbai, prompting its extension to other regions of the state. More than one lakh people actively participated in the cleanliness drive across 10 different locations in Mumbai on Sunday, he said. CM Shinde expressed his government's commitment towards a clean, green and healthy Mumbai. Terming blood donation as the noblest gift, he lauded the people who came together for the cause.

Government may release new national cooperation policy this month

NEW DELHI: India will have a new national cooperation policy in 2024, replacing the existing one formulated in 2002, to strengthen cooperative movement in the country by deepening its reach up to the grassroots.

Idea behind the new policy, expected to be released either in January or February, would be to promote the cooperative-



based economic development model backed by a legal and institutional framework.

The draft has been prepared by a national level 49-member committee, headed

by former Union minister Suresh Prabhakar and consisting of experts of the cooperative sector, representatives from National/State/District/Primary level cooperative societies and senior officials from Centre and states. "So far, 17 meetings of the expert committee have been held, during which detailed discussions were held with the stakeholders and the new National Cooperation Policy is expected to be ready soon," said the ministry of cooperation in a statement that enlisted its achievements ever since it was established in July, 2021.

PM Modi's third straight term at Centre 'almost an inevitability', declares column in leading UK daily

NEW DELHI: The hat-trick of victories in three state assemblies, combined with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's immense popularity and emotive issues such as the Ram Temple inauguration in Ayodhya, has made a third, straight term for the BJP at the Centre 'almost an inevitability', read a column in the UK-based daily, The Guardian.



The column, by Hannah Ellis-

Peterson, pointed to the saffron sweep in the three heartland states of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan have added more strength and momentum to the BJP going into the crucial Lok Sabha elections next year. After assembly wins in three states, PM Modi himself didn't

hold back from predicting that "this hat-trick has guaranteed the 2024 victory", the column noted. In India's current political landscape, the consensus among political analysts is that a win for Modi and the BJP is the "most plausible outcome", Ellis-Peterson added in her piece.

Ajit Pawar, Prakash Ambedkar pay tributes at Koregaon Bhima war memorial

PUNE: Maharashtra deputy minister Ajit Pawar and other leaders on Monday paid tributes at the 'Jay Stambh' (victory pillar) near here on the 206th anniversary of the Koregaon Bhima battle. Every year, lakhs of people congregate at the 'Jay Stambh' to offer tributes on the anniversary of the battle, which was fought on January 1, 1818, between the British East India Company and the Peshwa faction of the Maratha Confederacy. Speaking to reporters, Pawar,

while citing the BJP's victory in the recent assembly polls in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, said there is no alternative to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the country. "Under him (PM Modi), the country's name, fame and pride is increasing," he said. Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi leader Prakash Ambedkar, NCP MP from Shirur (in Pune district) Amol Kolhe were also among those who paid tributes at the victory pillar.

'91 batch IAS officer, Sudhansh Pant named Rajasthan chief secretary

NEW DELHI: Sudhansh Pant, an IAS officer of the 1991 batch, was appointed chief secretary of Rajasthan on Sunday, barely hours after he was suddenly repatriated to his home cadre. This came a day after 1984 batch IAS officer D S Mishra got a six-month extension as Uttar Pradesh chief secretary. There is speculation over the Centre sending another top IAS officer from Delhi to MP to become the new chief secretary.



Currently, Veera Rana, a 1998 batch IAS officer, is holding additional charge of chief secretary in the state where BJP came back to office with more seats in the recently held assembly elections. Rana, the sec-

ond woman chief secretary of MP, is due for retirement in March 2024. Meanwhile, Pant's repatriation and appointment has stumped many, considering he was seventh in the order of seniority among IAS officers of the Rajasthan cadre. For Pant, it is the third successive appointment in a year. He was brought to the Centre in October 2022 as OSD in the shipping ministry and was later made secretary.

India reports 636 new Covid cases, 3 deaths in 24 hours

NEW DELHI: India recorded a spike of 636 coronavirus infections in 24-hour period, according to Union health ministry data released on Monday. India's active Covid-19 caseload rose gradually, reaching 4,394. With three more deaths reported in 24-hour period, the total death toll was recorded at 5,33,364. The number of current Covid-19 cases increased in several states, according to ministry data updated at 8 am on Monday. As per the website, total number of 4,44,76,150 people have recovered from the illness so far, meaning that the country's recovery rate is 98.81 percent. The current fatality rate is 1.18 percent. The country has administered 220.67 crore doses of the Covid vaccines so far.

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



AHMEDABAD: Amidst the unfolding saga of the "donkey flight" grounded in France, one passenger stands out -- a two-year-old boy from Gujarat who was onboard as an unaccompanied minor. However, he is now untraceable. Gujarat police have launched an investigation to locate the child, identify his parents or guardians, and unravel whether he was part of a complex plan orchestrated by human smugglers, possibly facing a

fate similar to the many children abandoned on the US-Canada border. A Gujarat police CID officer said: "We have been trying to locate the child and his parents or guardians as many families have left their homes in north Gujarat." The flight to Nicaragua, carrying 303 passengers, including 96 from Gujarat, was grounded by French authorities in Vetry on December 21 over suspicions of human smuggling.

'Donkey flights'? India has nearly 3k illegal agencies; 680+ cases since 2020

BENGALURU

As Gujarat police pursue kingpins behind the recent 'donkey flight' that was intercepted in France, data from the ministry of external affairs (MEA) show India has nearly 3,000 such agencies known to have duped aspirants seeking employment abroad. Of the 2,925 agencies, 56 are in Gujarat and 80 in Karnataka. The states with most illegal agencies are AP, UP, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Delhi, which together have 1,832 of them. While a complete picture on the number of illegal Indian immigrants in other countries is not available since not all foreign governments generally share such data, some



nations deport illegal immigrants directly without contacting Indian missions, according to MEA. MEA's latest circular on the matter was issued a fortnight ago. "These unregistered/illegal agents operate without obtaining licence from the ministry, which is mandatory for any recruitment for work abroad. It is reported that many illegal agents

operate through Facebook, WhatsApp, text message and other such mediums," it reads. The ministry received 682 complaints between January 2020 and November 2023. These agencies provide little or no details of their whereabouts and contacts.

They usually communicate only through WhatsApp, making it difficult to

ascertain the location and identity of the caller & genuineness of the job offer. "Such agents also lure workers to work in difficult and life-threatening conditions. Such cases are being reported for recruitment to work in several East European Countries, some of the Gulf countries, Central Asian countries, Israel, Canada, Myanmar and Lao People's Democratic Republic," MEA added. According to the ministry, regular advisories are issued against such job rackets across media platforms and Indian missions. When complaints are received about illegal migration and human trafficking, they are forwarded to state police

for investigation and prosecution. Between January 2020 and November 2023, at least 682 such complaints have been received, of which 679 have been referred to various state governments. The process of seeking sanction of prosecution and the subsequent legal action is going on. "The Emigration Act 1983 makes it mandatory for all recruitment agencies to be registered to reduce fraud and worker exploitation. Authorities scrutinise applications for agent licences and overseas employer accreditation," according to MEA. However, loopholes still allow shady operators to take job aspirants for a ride.

Ensure more security for Palghar bridge area: HC

MUMBAI: Observing that only two police personnel are manning the security of a bridge in Palghar district, the Bombay high court said, "Obviously more is needed to be done" and directed that the commissioner of police concerned will deploy additional hands for ensuring the safety of the area under the bridge and protection from illegal sand excavation in Julie Island.

The HC was hearing a PIL that concerns the large-scale illegal excavation of sand around the Julie Island near Vaitrana Creek within the limits of Vasai taluka, District- Palghar. "Apart from the damage to the ecology, concern is also expressed, not only by the petitioners but also by the Western Railway, regarding the safety of the railway bridge, on which more than 20 lakh passengers travel every day," said the HC division bench of Justices Nitin Jamdar



and Manjusha Deshpande in a recent order. "The genesis of these proceedings is the order passed by this court on 3 April 2018 on a public interest litigation (PIL) of 2014, giving various directions." Since the directions were not complied with, an interim application is taken out in the PIL filed by Awaaz Foundation, which is now being heard. Julie Kharbhumi Labharthi Sekhari Sanstha Maryadit had made a plea before the HC as did the Awaaz Foundation.

The HC said, "Considering the seriousness of the issue," it had called on the officers to inform about

steps taken to comply and the collector gave statistics, but unfortunately, their efforts have fallen short. Superintendent of Police of Mira Bhayander cited paucity of staff as reasons why surveillance was not ramped up. The superintendent of police at Palghar assured the HC that he does not face paucity of staff for the purpose of surveillance. The Railways suggested there be a beat chowki for a bridge that falls within the Mira Bhayandar municipality and said the illegally excavated sand is landed at a point near bridge number 88, for further transport.

Delhi: This December most polluted in 5 years

NEW DELHI: This year was more polluted than the one before, recording an average daily PM2.5 concentration of 100 micrograms per cubic metre against 98 in 2022. With an average AQI of 348, December 2023 was the most polluted in the past five years. In December 2018, a higher AQI of 360 was recorded. Though the first half of the year was cleaner than earlier years, winter in 2023 saw higher pollution levels. The PM2.5 concentration in 2023 was 2.5 times higher than the annual national



ambient air quality standards (NAAQS) and 20 times higher than the annual WHO safe limit. This year saw the average daily PM10 level of 205 micrograms per cubic metre, making it the second lowest concentration since 2018 after the Covid year of 2020.

However, PM10 levels in 2023 were still 3.41 times higher than

the annual NAAQS and 13.66 times higher than WHO's annual safe limit. This December saw three severe days with AQI in the very poor category on most days.

November was the worst polluted ever. The penultimate month of 2023 witnessed 17 days when the AQI was 390 or above.

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Dept: Don't make kids clean toilets

Bengaluru: Contrary to recommendation by educationists to incorporate cleanliness of school precincts in activities, the education department has said students had to be kept away from cleaning toilets. This directive comes following reports of students being asked to clean soak pits and toilets in three different parts of the state. On Thursday, commissioner for school education BB Cauvery said it is the duty of teachers and other personnel to ensure students are kept away from such works. In instances where teachers, head teachers and personnel of the school are found using children for cleaning toilets, the education department will execute disciplinary action, and an FIR will also be lodged. SDMCs are given the responsibility to ensure no child is engaged in cleaning toilets.



Boy (13) booked for sodomising, killing 6-year-old in Prayagraj

PRAYAGRAJ: A 13-year-old boy was taken into custody by a joint team of special operation group (SOG) of TransYamuna and Industrial Area police on Sunday on charges of killing a six-year-old boy whose body was found inside a dilapidated structure at Haldi Kalan Mugari village under the limits of Industrial Area police station on December 27. Police have also recovered a brick with blood stains and clothes of the accused from the site. Station Officer (Industrial Area) Mahesh Mishra told TOI, "A six-year-old boy was found murdered inside an old and abandoned construction at Haldi Kalan Mugari village on Thursday morning. The little boy had gone missing under mysterious circumstances while playing outside his house on Wednesday and his father had lodged an FIR under sections 366 (kidnapping), 302 (murder), 201 (disappearance of evidence) and 377 (sodomy) of IPC and sections 5 M and 6 of the POCSSO Act. Mishra added, "After investigation, a joint team of SOG and Industrial Area police on Sunday took the accused into custody and he confessed that he had taken the six year-old boy inside the building on the pretext of giving him a toy but he had the intention to sodomize him. The accused also told police that when the little boy started shouting and threatened to tell his parents, the accused allegedly hit the boy with a piece of a brick on the head and left him bleeding profusely." Police said both boys were friends and playmates. Police added the accused frequented the boy's house. The accused was sent to juvenile home.

CM: Let there be Diwali on Jan 22

With the opening of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya on January 22, CM Eknath Shinde appealed to citizens to celebrate the occasion like Diwali and light lamps and illuminate their homes. He said he has also asked the BMC to illuminate buildings on the occasion.

Man held for raping daughter

MUMBAI: A Bhayander man has been arrested for allegedly raping his 14-year-old daughter in their house. The accused threatened his daughter and sexually abused her when she was alone with him. The matter came to light when she confessed to her sister. The sister confronted the father but he threatened her too. The siblings then filed a complaint with the Navghar police station. The accused has been remanded to 14 days of judicial custody. (The victims' identity has not been revealed to protect her identity as per Supreme Court's directives on cases related to sexual assault)

Delhi govt's EV policy to be extended till March

NEW DELHI: The Delhi government has decided to extend its electric vehicles (EV) policy for another three months, senior officials of the transport department said. Transport minister Kailash Gahlot too confirmed the same. The policy will be extended until the end of March 2024 and cabinet approval for the same would be given

soon, they said. According to the EV policy, two-wheelers are eligible for a Rs 5,000 subsidy per kWh of battery capacity; three-wheelers are eligible for a Rs 30,000 subsidy regardless of the overall cost or battery capacity; and the subsidy for four-wheelers - Rs 10,000 per kWh of battery capacity - is available only for the first

1,000 EVs registered under the scheme. The EV policy, which had expired on August 8, 2023, has been given repeated extensions as a fresh policy has not been readied yet. The transport department had earlier said that the policy was stuck after termination of the services of advisors, consultants and fellows in the department.

Delhi: Grisly murders, phone seizures kept Tihar in news

NEW DELHI: On a hot morning in May, Delhiites woke up to the visuals of a horrific murder unfolding before them as the CCTV footage of an inmate being stabbed with icepicks and improvised knives by a group of rival inmates inside the maximum-security prison, Tihar, went viral. Gangster Sunil Maan alias Tillu Tajpuria was stabbed over 100 times during a ten-minute-long dance of death. Tajpuria's was not an isolated case. Just a month earlier, another gangster Prince Teotia was killed during a gangwar that

broke out in Tihar's jail number 3. The fierce clash also left several inmates injured. The year began with Tihar officials complaining that their former prison minister, then lodged in Tihar, had been threatening them to seek favours. Just a few days before that, an unprecedented action was taken by the government to suspend a serving director general of Tihar. In January, Tihar officials started searching the barracks to fish out banned substances. To their shock, they found 115 mobile phones besides pen drives.

NEW DELHI: This could be Delhi's own 'mini-Telgi scam'. Delhi Police is learnt to have busted a massive racket involving designing, printing and supplying of fake stamp papers in a clandestine operation, which lasted six months and led to the arrest of 13 people in raids across six states. Fake stamps worth crores of rupees were recovered, sources said. The cops not only caught the sellers who dealt with customers, but also the masterminds and dismantled their facility. They recovered metal plates, high-end computers, machines, software and printers, sources added. A probe

How this gang in Delhi left its stamp behind: Designed, printed & sold fake papers



was initiated after a lawyer filed an FIR in May this year alleging that he had been duped. The government printing facility in Nashik confirmed that the stamps sold to him were not genuine. "During the course of the investigation, an accused named Pradeep Kumar, who sold the counterfeit share transfer stamps to the complainant, was arrested on May 23 and

2,700 counterfeit share transfer stamps were recovered from his possession," said an official. During questioning, the accused disclosed that these stamps were sold to him by a man named Akbar and his brother, Asgar. Thereafter, cops conducted raids and arrested the siblings. More counterfeit share transfer stamps were recovered from them. Thereafter, some other

accused were arrested in the case who used to sell these forged stamps to people. The cops remained tight-lipped on the names. During detailed interrogation of some of the accused, it emerged that two men named Rakesh Kumar Jaiswal and Ranjeet Kumar were the masterminds who would supply these stamps to many of the arrested accused. Thereafter, both these suspects were arrested in the case and, at their instance, the machine used to print the counterfeit share transfer stamps, along with metal plates and other equipment, was recovered from their facility.

Political parties join protest to shut down fertilizer factory at Ennore

"The country's defence exports has gone up from Rs 1,521 crore in 2016-17 to Rs 15,920 crore in 2022-23, which is an almost tenfold increase"



Chennai: The chorus to shut down the fertilizers factory in Ennore, which is linked to the recent ammonia gas leak, grew in intensity on Sunday, with political parties joining the protest by residents of the area. On day five of the protest, around 150 residents sat in front of Coromandel International Limited in Periyakuppam, Ennore, urging the government to seal the factory. Naam Tamilar Katchi leader Seeman and Communist Party of India (Marxist) state secretary K Balakrishnan joined them. Standing by the demands of the protesters, Seeman said, "The livelihood of the

locals has been destroyed. The air has become hazardous to breathe, slowly killing people." He spoke about how Ennore residents had been suffering from pollution for ages. "All the pollutants have been dumped in Ennore's air and water bodies, killing fish and other organisms. If I go in my car near the thermal power station here, there is a sheet of dark fly ash. If people dry their clothes, there will be black spots due to the ash in the air," he said. CPI(M) leader Balakrishnan, who also demanded that Coromandel be perma-

nently shut down said, "Which is more important? Human life or the fertiliser factory? You can shift a factory and replace it elsewhere, but you cannot replace a human life... If situations like gas leaks are frequent, there is a possibility of a Bhopal gas tragedy-like disaster in Ennore." People left all their belongings to escape Periyakuppam and Chinnakuppam during the gas leak, which happened when ammonia was transferred during the pre-cooling process. If there was a pipeline breach during the actual transmission

process, the damage would have been severe, he said. The Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) issued a notice to Coromandel on December 27 to shut the premises for a week and resume operations after getting clearance from the Indian Maritime Board and Register of Shipping. On Monday, at 10am, the Ennore Makkal Padhukappu Kuzhu, the committee consisting of all the 34 fishing village leaders, organised a public hearing and panel discussion with lawyers and professors from Indian Institute of Technology, Madras.

Nirmala's 'money in temple hundial' comments show her ideology: Min

Chennai: Minister for Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments P K Sekarbabu on Sunday criticised Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman for her comments on money in temple hundials, saying, "whatever she said was her ideology." The Union minister during a recent inspection at a Tuticorin district temple, asked a devotee not to deposit money in the hundial, a comment widely criticised on social media. Sekarbabu on Sunday said, "She [Nirmala Sitharaman] spoke what was in her heart.



Whatever she said was her ideology." Defending the system, he said, "When money is deposited in the hundials there will be transparency as money is counted in front of CCTV cameras and is immediately deposited in banks." To the complaint from Nirmala Sitharaman dur-

ing her inspection that the path along which the main deity was taken in a procession was not clean due to water stagnation, Sekarbabu said, "If there are genuine complaints the state government headed by chief minister M K Stalin will take immediate action and this particular path was

cleaned in two days." Later, after launching a full day 'annadanam' (free food) scheme in five temples, Sekarbabu said the HR & CE department would initiate legal action against the Dikshitaras of Chidambaram Natarajar temple. "The Madras high court had dismissed the petition filed by Dikshitaras to stop devotees from worshipping on top of Kanagasabai but they cited Arudra Darisanam and had once again prevented the devotees from worshipping on top of Kanaga Sabai.

Cong likely to nominate local leaders as candidates for Rajya Sabha elections

Hyderabad: The Congress high command, in consultation with Telangana chief minister A Revanth Reddy, will soon finalise candidates for RRajya Sabha polls. Unlike earlier, when the party high command used to nomi-

nate prominent national level leaders to Rajya Sabha from other states too, now there is a clear demand from Telangana to send local leaders to the Upper House. There are numerous Congress leaders from Telangana who have

been waiting for 10 years to make it to Rajya Sabha. Rajya Sabha Chairman declines request for Raghav Chadha as interim party leader in Rajya Sabha; corrections sought; not in conformity to legal regime; Sanjay Singh

put under judicial custody; Singh's term ends on January 27. After assembly poll win, Telangana CM Revanth Reddy eyes Lok Sabha TPCC president A Reddy targets winning 10 to 16 of 17 Lok Sabha seats in Telangana.

Two steal 9 phones in a day to pay fees to their lawyer, nabbed after gunfight in Noida

NOIDA: Two bikers were arrested after a brief gunbattle for stealing nine mobile phones from people walking on roads in a day. Police said Ghaziabad resident Aniket Kumar (24) and Anshu Yadav (26) of Noida had targeted around 20 people in the past few days to pay the fee of their lawyer who had got them released in a robbery case earlier this month. The duo were most active around Botanical Garden and in sectors 39, 24 and 57. A video widely circulated on social media showed one of the accused pleading before a policeman with folded hands that he would never commit robberies in the future. Bursting into tears, he tells the cop he has stolen nine phones in a day to arrange for money. Police said that after stealing the phones, Aniket and Anshu would destroy the SIM cards and sell the handsets to people saying they needed money urgently for a family emergency. Amit Kumar, the SHO of Sector 58 police station, said they received a tip-off about the two phone snatchers on Saturday evening. "So, we deployed police teams at various junctions to look for the two youths on a bike. Around 9pm, we spotted two suspected snatchers and asked them to stop near a signal in Sector 57. But they tried to flee. When cops gave them a chase, they fired at them. Police retaliated, and the accused were hit in their leg. They screamed to a halt and were arrested," the SHO said. The nine stolen phones, two country-made pistols and a bike without a registration number were recovered from them. While checking their criminal history, police found eight cases, including one for attempt to murder, registered against Aniket and Anshu each. The cops are trying to find out if they have cases registered in other states as well. "Six of the phones recovered from them did not have any SIM card. They admitted that they would target people and snatch mainly phones from them to raise money and pay fees of a lawyer who got them released in a robbery case," Kumar said.

Tagore's ode is state song, Poila Baisakh marked as Bangla Divas

KOLKATA: The Bengal government on Saturday notified Tagore's 1905 ode to Bengal, 'Banglar Mati, Banglar Jal', as a 'state song' and Poila Baisakh, the first day of the Bengali calendar, as 'Bangla Divas'. A two-page notification issued by state chief secretary H K Dwivedi said the one-minute-59-second song had to be "played compulsorily at the start of any ceremo-



ny/function" and the national anthem at the conclusion of the event. The notification also says that like the national anthem, the state song has to be played with "due respect", with people in a "standing posi-

tion", and that its mass singing should be encouraged. The notification also says that Bangla Divas shall be celebrated with "dignity and respect" every year. These steps were necessitated "considering the

rich glory, culture and heritage" of Bengal, it adds. The Bengal assembly, on September 7, had passed a resolution to this effect. It was passed by a 167-62 majority, with BJP MLAs opposing it. The assembly resolution to mark the Bengali New Year as Bangla Divas was to oppose the Centre's proposal to observe June 20 as the state foundation day.

LVPEI secures 20-year patent for corneal repair stem cell therapy

Hyderabad: The L V Prasad Eye Institute (LVPEI) has secured a 20-year patent from the Union government for an innovative cell therapy designed to mend damaged corneas caused by various corneal diseases. Developed by Dr Sayan Basu and Dr Vivek Singh, the therapy combines stem cells sourced from

An international team of researchers has created a full-cell atlas of the mouse brain, describing over 32 million cells, their kind, location.

the eye's surface with two clotting factors in a unique composition. Corneal scarring, a leading cause of blindness, often necessitates

cells to repopulate the cornea with healthy, transparent cells. Dr Basu, a corneal surgeon, emphasized the therapy's potential to revolutionise corneal pathology treatment. An international team of researchers has created a full-cell atlas of the mouse brain, describing over 32 million cells, their kind, location.

Man, 20, arrested for raping 65-year-old in Andhra Pradesh

VIJAYAWADA: A 65-year-old woman was raped by a 20-year-old near Markapuram in Prakasam district on Saturday night. Police arrested the accused, Devandla Kamalnath (20). The victim's daughter who visited the home on Sunday morning noticed the victim and rushed her to a government hospital. According to police, the victim has been living alone in her house. As her daughter got married, she is staying at her in-laws' house in Rayavaram. The woman is getting pension from government. Devandla Kamalnath (20), a youth from railway station area,

drank alcohol with his friends on Saturday night. His friends left for their homes after 11 pm. On his way home, Kamalnath reached near the victim's house. He noticed that the woman was alone in the house. He went inside the house and tied her legs and hands and stuffed clothes in her mouth and committed rape on her. The woman told her daughter, who visited her on Sunday morning, about the incident. Police reached the village and inspected the spot. The victim was shifted to a government hospital and is undergoing treatment. A

case has been registered and an investigation is on. (The victim's identity has not been revealed to protect her privacy as per Supreme court directives on cases related to sexual assault.) The mysterious incident in Bengaluru involving a 78-year-old woman being assaulted and robbed of her gold bangles is still under investigation. The prime suspect is believed to be one of her tenants from Kolar Gold Fields, who wears a black thread on her ankle. The incident has left the elderly woman with multiple injuries, including a fracture in her right hand.

Girl finds cockroach in beverage at Tambaram

Chennai: A private restaurant at Selaiyur in Tambaram has come under the state food safety department's scanner after a girl found a dead cockroach in a beverage (a tetra pack of flavoured milk) served there. The girl had bought a pack of flavoured milk and her parents had filed an online complaint regarding this incident. When contacted the food safety officer of Tambaram Senthil Arumugam said that a



team will inspect the eatery on evaluate potential violations and collect samples for testing. In December, there were at least 12 violations in Tambaram and surrounding areas. This

incident has only underscored the urgency of addressing concerns of Tambaram residents regarding substandard food served by eateries here. Responding to this, Arumugam said that there will be a series of inspections in the coming weeks to assess violations based on complaints by residents. Owners will be instructed to uphold licences and adhere to hygiene standards.

Six killed in midnight fire in glove-making unit in Waluj

Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar. CHHATRAPATI SAMBAHAJINAGAR: Six workers died in a major fire that broke out at Sunshine Enterprises, a Waluj industrial area-based glove and safety equipment manufacturing unit, near Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar, early on Sunday morning. The fire broke out sometime after 1am, and at the time, 17 people were sleeping on the premises of the family-owned factory. Eleven of them managed to make it out on time. Chief minister Eknath Shinde, expressing grief, has announced an ex gratia of Rs 5 lakh for the family members of the deceased workers and free treatment for people injured at the state-run hospital. Fire brigade officials in Waluj said they received the distress call at 1.20am, and they immediately sent their fire tenders to the factory.

Hyderabad: BTech grad arrested with drugs worth Rs 10 lakh for sale on New Year Eve



HYDERABAD: An unemployed BTech graduate from a well-known private university in Punjab and his friend were arrested by the task force police from outside a popular wine store in Jubilee Hills on New Year's Eve for allegedly selling MDMA, cocaine and brown sugar to revellers. The engineer had drugs worth about Rs 10 lakh with him and had even raised funds through loan apps to buy them. Police seized 100 grams of MDMA, 29 grams of brown sugar and two grams of cocaine from their possession. The duo, S Leela Naveen Sai and B Sai Teja, both aged 25, was booked for violation of the NDPS Act. Naveen is from Guntur, while Sai Teja, who is into car rental busi-

ness, is from Ongole. "Naveen had completed his BTech in mechanical engineering from the university in Punjab in 2019. It was while studying there that he got addicted to drugs," said a task force cop said. **BTech graduate took loans to fund his drug addiction: Cops** To fund his addiction, Naveen allegedly took loans through various apps such as Money View, Just Money, Dhani, True Balance, PayTM post paid, Creditbe, M-Pocket Branch etc., cops said. "After he returned to his hometown Guntur in 2019, he was hounded by the private financiers. That's when he and Sai Teja decided to move to Puppalguda in the city.

Editorial

Cricket 2023: Thank you Team India for etching a place in a billion hearts

I remember watching the 1983 final at Lords on my grandparents' black and white EC TV in Bombay. I was only seven then, so the match is a bit of a blur. What I do remember is that the television screen was very blue. Back then the prevailing belief was that the television set emitted harmful rays, the dangers of which could be mitigated by affixing a blue protective screen on top of the original one. For my generation, the first major win we remember is the World Championship of Cricket in Australia in 1985. It was labelled the mini world cup, although the same teams participated as they would in the official version. Famously, Ravi Shastri was presented with an Audi car, a big deal in India in those days. As Sunil Gavaskar recalls in One Day Wonders, "Unknown to Ravi we all had sneaked into the car...soon we had players on the bonnet, on top and behind the car. It was my job by virtue of being in the front seat to inform Ravi about what was happening in front because the players on the bonnet were blocking his view. He almost knocked down Adrian Murrell and Patrick Elgar, the photographers. Fortunately, the ride ended without any damage except to the seats in the car, where some champagne had been spilt. The Australian crowd loved it, because although a car had been presented every year for the last few years, none of the winners had done anything more than pose with the keys in front of the car." When an Indian journalist tartly asked in the post-match presser if the victory was a fluke, Gavaskar recalls replying tongue firmly in cheek, "Since this is the age of sequels to hit movies like Jaws I, Jaws II, Rocky II, this win could be termed as Fluke II." (Talking of pressers, I couldn't fathom why good-natured Rohit Sharma spent the better part of the evening before the final in a long press conference, patiently answering annoyingly repetitive questions about tomorrow's plans. The night before the big exam one ought to be swimming relaxing laps in the hotel pool.) Then followed a long drought, which ended in the Dhoni years: The 2007 T20 World Cup victory and the ODI World Cup in 2011, when a happy tear rolled down my face in real-time. The country was so enthused it segued seamlessly into Anna's anti-corruption movement. The T20 win came out of the blue—the format was still new and the senior players had skipped the tournament. The famous last over was bowled by Joginder Sharma, who had an unexpected moment of glory. In 2003, India lost to Australia in the final in Johannesburg, after which we experienced the same sense of national anti-climax, that we did last month. Just last month! For some reason, it seems longer than that. Reference 2003, everyone was puzzled by Dinesh Mongia holding his place in the side while doing nothing at all until the captain, Sourav Ganguly, put speculation to rest by dubbing Mongia the lucky mascot. For most of World Cup 2023, one had the feeling that it was too good to be true. To win ten games on the trot is no mean feat. While we had a couple of close games, this tournament was exceptional because of India's sheer dominance with bat and ball. It was a team possessed. KL Rahul, coming after a long injury lay-off, was plain sublime, a much-improved wicket-keeper, while also becoming the team's reliable go-to for DRS referrals; Rohit played selflessly for the team, giving India blazing starts; Kohli came good when it mattered, digging in and executing gritty sheet anchor knocks, albeit there were times when he was a touch selfish. Mohammad Shami, not in the original eleven, grabbed his chances after the injury to Hardik Pandya, who was sorely missed in the finals. Every time Shami had the ball in his hands, one expected a wicket to fall.

India's growth trajectory and economic outlook for 2024



For economic data, such as GDP and its growth, we follow a fiscal year system, from April 1 to March 31 of the succeeding year. Many countries follow a calendar year system. That fiscal year is a legacy. With the Union Budget having moved to February 1, there is a case for recalibrating our statistical systems to the calendar year. That will make international comparisons easier too. Adjusting for calendar year versus fiscal year, real growth in 2023 will be of the order of 7 per cent or thereabouts. Implicit in this is an assumption about growth being slower in the second half of 2023-24, compared to the first. But let's remember, growth in the first half was better than what many had expected it to be. As we end 2023 and look forward towards 2024, the same point about possible underestimation extends to 2024 too. Most forecasts for 2024-25 are in the range of 6.5 to 7.0 per cent. For calendar year 2024, we shouldn't be surprised if growth exceeds 7 per cent, even if marginally. The external environment isn't kind. Protectionism and geopolitical tensions continue, though the Russia-Ukraine War seems to be settling down, unlike Israel-Hamas. The limited point is there is no reason to presume oil prices will shoot up to unmanageable levels, or supply chains

disrupted to exert a toll on growth. India is of course not insulated from global phenomena. This includes the real sector, not merely volatility in capital and foreign exchange markets. Had the external world been kinder, we might have aspired for 9 per cent real growth, with net exports a major driver. Unfortunately, that's not the case. But there is slack within the system and growth drivers in government expenditure (especially read capital expenditure), private investments and consumption. We can debate the extent to which private consumption has recovered, whether growth in manufacturing and construction will last and whether private capital expenditure will take off. Notwithstanding those debates, 6.5 to 7 per cent in 2024-25 is a given, as is

7 per cent for 2024 (witness buoyancy in tax revenues, both direct and indirect). A few months ago, there was some premature celebration on social media about India having touched an aggregate GDP of 4 trillion US dollars. While that was premature, with a base of 3.73 trillion now, 4 trillion in the course of 2024 is a certainty, even with conservative estimates about growth and inflation. That sets the tone for 5 trillion somewhere around 2026 or 27 and the aspirational goal for a "developed" India in 2047. Let's accept, there are critics caught in a time warp. They refuse to accept India has broken out of a 5 to 5.5 per cent growth band. From the electoral angle, 2024 is an important year, not just for India, since several countries are heading towards elec-

tions. In principle, election outcomes are fraught with uncertainty. However, in India's case, there is consensus that the Narendra Modi government will be back in May 2024 (all speculation is about exact numbers). Hence, a question is often asked — what will be the economic focus of the third Narendra Modi government? This is a misleading question since it implicitly suggests there was something wrong with the policies of the first two Modi governments, which will therefore have to be changed, as opposed to being tweaked. **Since May 2014, the building blocks have been:** Provision of public goods or basic necessities (physical and social infrastructure, financial products, digital inclusion) Targeted subsidies for those who deserve them. NFHS-5 was conducted in the middle of Covid and resultant data has been used both by UNDP and NITI Aayog to highlight declines in multi-dimensional poverty and improvements in social sector indicators. Covid was an exogenous shock, not just for India, but for the entire world. Consequently, those three building blocks were tweaked. Unlike many other countries, India stuck to the goal of fiscal consolidation and increased capital expenditure, not revenue expenditure (this is one reason why inflation didn't

spin out of control). There was an additional emphasis on social sector expenditure and portability of benefits. Digital public infrastructure received a push (Aadhaar is only one element of India Stack). These were policies that continued to be pursued in 2023 and they bore not only economic dividends but political ones too, the recent state assembly elections being a case in point. This new interpretation of inclusion (without doles), empowerment and welfare, is one reason why the return of a Narendra Modi government in 2024 is a given. As one looks forward to 2024, the new government will continue with policies that set the trajectory for Amrit Kaal in 2047. With the full Budget, there will be an emphasis on tax reform. GST is still a work in progress and the structure needs to be made simpler, with fewer rates. On direct taxes, there is a need to incentivise more personal income and corporate taxpayers to move to the exemption-less system. From 2026, recommendations of the 16th Finance Commission will kick in. In anticipation, the Union government will need to work out a medium-term fiscal consolidation and debt reduction strategy, with a rationalisation and streamlining of public expenditure (some centrally sponsored schemes have legislative backing).

Uttarakhand: Where have coins minted by 'Raja of Harsil' Frederick Wilson gone?

During British time, naturalist, explorer, hunter and writer Frederick Edward Wilson enjoyed a king like status in Harsil (Uttarakhand). He was so powerful and economically influential that he even minted coins in his own name and was even called as 'King of Harsil'. The coins were used for various economic activities, including for trade and paid as salary to workers. But, most of the Wilson coins have disappeared from the Bhagirathi valley. It is very hard to find the coins in Uttarkashi and other places associated with Wilson.

Only a few are surviving. Information about just three Wilson coins are publically available — one is with

a villager in Harsil and two with a famous Mussoorie based writer. Where have all the copper coins with a hole in the middle vanished? An ex-British army bombardier Frederick Wilson, who was famous as Pahadi Wilson, made Harsil his home in the 1840s. He adopted hunting for his livelihood and by selling animal and bird skins he made a decent living. From a hunter, Wilson's career took a new turn when he began working as a forest department contractor.

By cutting deodar trees and floating down the sleepers from the hills to plains, Frederick became one of the richest men in this part of the world. The sleepers were used for railway

projects. Though he was living and doing business in Tehri Garhwal native state, he minted parallel currency for use as he was heading a force of over 1200 workers.

He was possibly the first individual European to mint his coin. Anyone keen on watching the Wilson one rupee coin, physically, needs to go to Balam Dass' residence in Harsil. He is the only known person who has the rare coin in his collection in the entire Bhagirathi valley. Another is famous writer Ganesh Sali who resides in Mussoorie. There is a possibility of others having the Wilson coin in their individual collection, but the information is not available in public.

Not Harappan Civilisation but Vedic Saraswati Civilisation

It is time to remove the term 'Harappan' from designating the ancient civilisation of India, as it is inaccurate and ignores the nature and continuity of India's civilisation as a whole. Harappan is an artificial and incidental term deriving from the archaeological site of Harappa in Pakistan along with Mohenjo-Daro, which were the major ancient urban sites in greater India discovered in the early twentieth century before the partition of the country. Western archaeologists arbitrarily chose it to designate an entire urban civilisation going back to 3500 BCE, which they viewed more as a lost civilisation than connected to the later history of India. The term Harappa does not suggest any continuity in India's history since the ancient period or give the Vedas any place in it. Those who proposed the name were proponents of the Aryan Invasion theory like Mortimer Wheeler, and such a non-Vedic term was useful in perpetuating that theory. Wheeler also promoted the false theory of the massacre at Mohenjo-Daro by invading Aryans which has been archaeologically disproved. Today the site of Rakhigarhi in Haryana, located in the Saraswati River region of Kurukshetra, and traditionally regarded

as the home of the Vedas, has been proven to be larger and older than Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro which were on the Indus. As Rakhigarhi is the largest Harappan site, it would be more accurate to associate this ancient Indian civilisation with Rakhigarhi rather than Harappa. It better reveals the geographical connections of these sites to later India and its prime historical regions. The Harappan civilisation has also been called the Indus Valley Civilisation (IVC) as the Indus River (Sindhu in Indian languages) was the main location of the initial sites discovered. However, further excavations have revealed the majority of the so-called Harappan or Indus sites were located by the Saraswati River, famous in Vedic texts, which dried up around 4000 years ago, showing its antiquity.

An Ancient Maritime Civilisation
In addition, Harappan sites have been found in Gujarat by the ocean in what was then the delta region of the Saraswati River, indicating it was a maritime culture from the Saraswati to the sea. Vedic civilisation was also maritime, with 150 references to the ocean in the oldest Rig Veda alone, including noting the Saraswati River as flowing from the mountains to the sea. Using nondescript

terms like 'Harappan' fits in with the terminology of the Aryan Invasion theory that separates the Vedas from the origins of India's civilisation, which colonial scholars also maintained. Harappans are often called pre-Vedic or non-Vedic which the Rakhigarhi finds also disprove. The rivers of Northwest India on which so-called Harappan sites have been found have ancient Vedic names including Sindhu, Saraswati, Vitasta, Parushni (Ravi), Vipas (Beas), Shutudri (Sutlej), Yamuna and Ganga. Vedic texts show a similar culture, artefacts and geography to what has been called Harappan, extending from fire altars to Shiva lingas. We see a continuity of civilisation in India from sites as old as 8000 years ago like Rakhigarhi or Bhirrana, another such ancient site in the Kurukshetra region in Haryana.

Saraswati-Sindhu Vedic Civilisation
In place of 'Harappan', the civilisation should be better called "Vedic Saraswati Civilisation", or "Saraswati-Sindhu-Civilisation".

Using the term 'Harappan' is misleading for the study of India's history as it does not suggest the actual centre of the civilisation on the Saraswati River, along with its Vedic and Bharatiya connections.

Space is the new frontier: Time for India to increase strategic focus

Space is already emerging as the next great frontier, where geostrategic play is unfolding at an accelerating pace. Led by scientific prowess and human quest and endeavour, it today impacts all activities on planet earth. More importantly, all major powers are not only building capabilities to harness the great potential of space but evolving means to secure assets and dominate the domain. This would mean enhancing military deterrence. China has put space under especially created Strategic Support Force (SSF). India is a significant player. The

country currently accounts for 2 per cent of the global space economy, a fraction of its capabilities, which it has amply demonstrated. Its recent Chandrayaan-3 landing on the moon has ignited a global lunar race that was somewhat on back-burner. India's Aditya L1 will reach destination on 6 January, said ISRO chairman S Somnath. Clearly USA and China are racing ahead in space exploration and capability building. India has all building blocks in place but needs to invest more to become a significant space power. Beyond

capabilities, partnerships too are evolving.

India's current capabilities in space

India's space programme has for long been driven by the state controlled Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). The broad capabilities including putting Indian designed and built satellites in Low Earth Orbit (LEO), Medium Earth Orbit (MEO) and Geo Stationary or Transfer Orbits (GTO) are in place. India is one of the six countries in the world that possesses full launch capabilities, can deploy cryogenic engines,

can launch extra-terrestrial missions and operate a large fleet of artificial satellites. It is one of the four to have soft landing capabilities on the moon. India has launched over 424 satellites originating from 34 different countries.

India's most powerful Launch Vehicle Mark-3 (LV3), can carry 10-tonne payload to LEO, and 4 tonnes to GTO, and is being human rated for Gaganyaan project. The other three major space powers, including China, have launch vehicles that can put excess of 25 tonnes, or even much more.

Terrorism-linked fatalities in Pak hit unprecedented levels in 2023

It marked the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces as the main centres of violence, leading to 90 per cent of all fatalities and 84 per cent of attacks



KARACHI: Pakistan recorded an unprecedented spike in terrorism-related violence in 2023, with the total violence-related fatalities reaching a record six-year high, especially in the restive provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, according to two think tank reports. According

to the annual security report prepared by the Islamabad-based Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS), at least 1,524 violence-related casualties and 1,463 injuries from 789 terror attacks and counter-terror operations were recorded in Pakistan in 2023. Those killed included

nearly 1,000 civilians and security forces personnel. The total fatalities number marks a record six-year high, exceeding the 2018 level and the highest since 2017, the report said on Sunday. The CRSS said there has been a surge in violence and terror attacks in the country every year since

2021. It marked the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces as the main centres of violence, leading to 90 per cent of all fatalities and 84 per cent of attacks, including incidents of terrorism and security forces operations, recorded during this period. In contrast, the Punjab

and Sindh provinces jointly witnessed only 8 per cent fatalities in 2023.

The report said that in 2023, the county recorded an alarming surge in violence of about 56 per cent -- an unprecedented escalation in the last 10 years -- with the overall number of fatalities increasing from 980 in 2022 to 1,524 in 2023. This includes a staggering 57 per cent uptick in the Balochistan province and 55 per cent in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Punjab saw a 96 per cent rise in violence, though the number of fatalities was very low, followed by Sindh, where the fatalities increased by 26 per cent.

US sinks 3 ships, kills 10 after Houthi Red Sea attack

NEW DELHI: US helicopters successfully thwarted an attack by Iran-aligned Houthi rebels on a Maersk container ship in the Red Sea, resulting in the sinking of three rebel ships and the death of 10 militants, as confirmed by American, Maersk, and Houthi representatives. The maritime clash took place at approximately 0330 GMT on Sunday when the Houthis attempted to board the Singapore-flagged Maersk Hangzhou. In response to a distress call, helicopters from the USS



Eisenhower and USS Gravelly, along with the vessel's security team, repulsed the attackers, as reported by Maersk and the US Central Command (CENTCOM). Following the incident, Maersk announced a 48-hour suspension of its Red Sea operations. A Houthi spokesperson acknowledged their

involvement in the attack, citing the ship's crew's disregard for their warnings. He reported that 10 Houthi naval members were either killed or missing following the US counteraction in the Red Sea. This naval engagement highlights the potential for regional conflict escalation, particularly in the context of Israel's ongoing airstrikes in response to a surprise attack by Hamas on Israeli towns on October 7, which resulted in 1,200 deaths and 240 hostages.

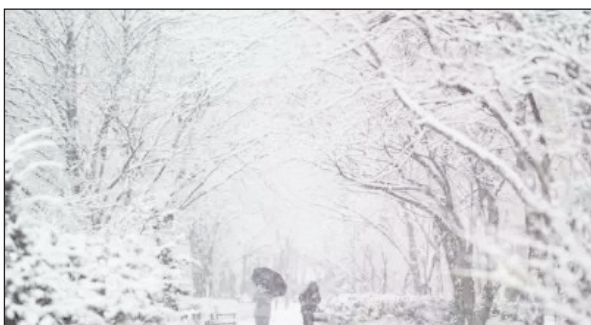
China's Xi Jinping, US President Biden exchange congratulations on 45th year of diplomatic ties

BEIJING: China's President Xi Jinping exchanged congratulations with US President Joe Biden on the 45th anniversary of diplomatic ties between the two countries, the official Xinhua news agency said on Monday. Xi also exchanged New Year's messages with North Korea leader Kim Jong Un, and both announced 2024 to be a "friendship year" for

both countries, launching a series of activities for that, Xinhua said separately. On New Year's Eve, the Chinese leader exchanged New Year's greetings with Russian President Vladimir Putin as well. This year is the 75th anniversary of China and Russia establishing diplomatic relations. Xi said China and Russia should "continuously consolidate" and develop ties "featuring

permanent good-neighbourly friendship", along with comprehensive strategic coordination and mutually beneficial cooperation that would serve both countries' interests. This year marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China by Mao Zedong, who defeated Republic of China forces led by Chiang Kai-shek in a bloody civil war.

S. Korea's capital records heaviest single-day snowfall in December for 40 years



SEOUL: The South Korean capital, Seoul, received the biggest single-day snowfall recorded in December for more than 40 years on Saturday but there have been no reports of any weather-related deaths or injuries. The country's weather agency said Sunday that 12.2 centimeters (4.8 inches) of snow fell

on Seoul the previous day, the heaviest since 1981.

The Korea Meteorological Administration said a heavy snow advisory was issued for Seoul's entire area on Saturday before it was lifted later in the day. It said other parts of South Korea also received snow or rain.

Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus faces jail in Bangladesh court ruling

DHAKA: Bangladeshi Nobel peace laureate Muhammad Yunus was facing six months in jail with a court set to rule on Monday on a labour law case decreed by his supporters as politically motivated. Yunus, 83, is credited with lifting millions out of poverty with his pioneering microfinance bank but has earned the enmity of longtime Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who has accused him of "sucking blood" from the poor.

Hasina has made a series of scathing verbal attacks against the internationally respected 2006 Nobel Peace Prize winner, who was once seen as a political rival. She is all but certain to win a fifth term in national elections next week after an opposition boycott. Economist Yunus and three colleagues from Grameen Telecom, one of the firms he founded, are



accused of violating labour laws when they failed to create a workers' welfare fund in the company. All four deny the charges. A labour court in the capital Dhaka has fixed the verdict for Monday afternoon, lawyers said. "We proved that Professor Muhammad Yunus and others have violated the mandatory requirements of the labour laws," Khurshid Alam Khan, the lead prosecutor, told AFP ahead of the verdict. He said Yunus could be

sentenced to up to six months in prison if convicted. "We hope the court will hand down the highest punishment," he said. Yunus is facing more than 100 other charges over labour law violations and alleged graft. Yunus told reporters after one of the hearings last month that he had not profited from any of the more than 50 social business firms he had set up in Bangladesh. "They were not for my personal benefit," Yunus said. One of his lawyers, Khaja Tanvir, told AFP the case was "meritless, false and ill-motivated". "The sole aim of the case is to harass and humiliate him in front of the world," he said. In August, 160 global figures, including former US president Barack Obama and ex-UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon, published a joint letter denouncing "continuous judicial harassment" of Yunus.

Taiwan's President urges China to seek 'peaceful coexistence'

Tsai was also asked to comment on Chinese President Xi Jinping's New Year's Eve speech, in which he said Taiwan "will surely be reunified" with China.



TAIPEI: Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen expressed hopes on Monday for Taipei and Beijing to seek "long-term peaceful coexistence" and said future relations should be decided by Taiwan's "democratic procedures". Taiwan is less than two weeks from an election, closely watched from Beijing to Washington as it determines the future of the self-ruled island's relations with an increasingly belligerent China.

Beijing claims Taiwan as part of its territory to be seized one day. It has halted high-level communications with Tsai's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government since her 2016 election, and ramped up military, diplomatic and economic pressure on the island. In her last New Year speech before leaving office in May, Tsai expressed hopes to restart communications with Beijing. "We hope that the two sides (of the Taiwan Strait) will resume

healthy and sustainable exchanges as soon as possible," she said.

"We also hope that the two sides will jointly seek a long-term and stable way of peaceful coexistence under peace, parity, democracy and dialogue."

But Tsai -- whom Beijing hates as she has refused to acknowledge China's territorial claims -- also stood firm on Taiwan's need to defend its democracy. "Facing the renewed conflict between democracy, freedom and authoritarianism around the world, Taiwan's only choice in the future is still to continue to uphold democracy and protect peace."

Tsai was also asked to comment on Chinese President Xi Jinping's New Year's Eve speech, in which he said Taiwan "will surely be reunified" with China.

'S Korea conducts 'decapitation drills' targeting North Korea's Kim Jong Un'

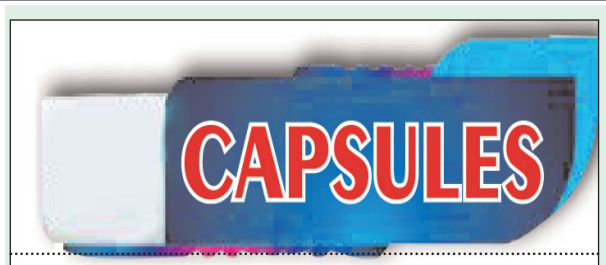


NEW DELHI: South Korea's military is actively engaged in "decapitation drills" aimed at the potential assassination of North Korea's leader, Kim Jong Un. This revelation, a rare admission from Seoul's leaders, comes amid heightened tensions on the Korean peninsula. Defense Minister Shin Won-sik of South Korea confirmed during an MBN television interview that these drills are considered an option. He said, "While it is difficult to openly discuss decapitation, the ROK-US special operation forces are... conducting training." The training focuses on aerial maneuvers, raids on key facilities, and indoor mop-up operations. US forces have also participated in these drills. The primary

target of these drills is North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. The exercises, conducted in collaboration with US Army Special Forces, were held earlier in December, as confirmed by South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff, the New York post reported quoting NK News. The concept of a "decapitation unit" to eliminate North Korean leaders was last openly discussed in 2017 by former South Korean Defense Minister Song Young-moo. The unit would involve helicopters and planes designed to infiltrate North Korea and carry out assassinations. While North Korea is open about its weapons of mass destruction, South Korea does not maintain a nuclear stockpile.

California law banning guns in public takes effect today

LOS ANGELES: A California law that bans people from carrying firearms in most public places will take effect on New Year's Day, even as a court case continues to challenge the law. A US district judge issued a ruling on December 20 to block the law from taking effect, saying it violates the Second Amendment of the US Constitution and deprives people of their ability to defend themselves and their loved ones. But on a federal appeals court put a temporary hold on the district judge's ruling. The appeals court decision allows the law to go into effect as the legal fight continues. Attorneys are scheduled to file arguments to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in January and in February. The law, signed by Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom, prohibits people.



Xi Jinping says willing to work with US for stable relationship

BEIJING: China's president Xi Jinping said Monday he was willing to work with the United States to promote stable bilateral ties, exchanging congratulations with his US counterpart on the anniversary of diplomatic relations, state media said. Xi and US president Joe Biden met in San Francisco in November, vowing to improve communication in an effort to stop competition from spilling over into conflict. And in an exchange of messages to mark the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, Xi said both sides should "take practical actions to promote the stable, healthy and sustainable development of China-US relations".

"Xi Jinping emphasised, I am willing to work with President Biden to continue to navigate China-US relations, benefit both China and the United States and their people, and promote world peace and development," state broadcaster CCTV said. Xi added that "adhering to mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and win-win cooperation is the correct way for China and the United States to interact", CCTV said.

NASA's solar dynamics observatory captures spectacular X5.0 Solar flare on New Year's Eve

NASA's Solar Dynamics Observatory (SDO) has once again captured a stunning glimpse into the dynamic activity of our Sun, capturing a powerful X5.0 solar flare on the last day of 2023. The image, released by NASA on its blog page, showcases the intense burst of energy in extreme ultraviolet light, vividly colored in yellow and orange.

Solar flares are potent releases of energy from the Sun's surface, capable of impacting various aspects of modern technology. The bright flash on the far left of the image represents the eruption, emphasizing the extremely hot material involved in flares. The X-class classification assigned to this solar flare designates it as one of the most intense types, with the number 5.0 providing additional information about its strength. The implications of such flares extend beyond their visual appeal; they can influence radio communications, disrupt electric power grids, interfere with navigation signals, and pose potential risks to both spacecraft and astronauts. As part of the nation's space weather efforts, NASA operates as a crucial research arm, tirelessly monitoring the Sun and our space environment. The agency employs a fleet of spacecraft dedicated to studying various aspects, from the Sun's activity and solar atmosphere to the particles and magnetic fields in the space surrounding Earth.

Smriti Irani on period leaves: 'Why should employer know women's menstrual cycle'

Delhi : Minister of Women and Child Development Smriti Irani defended her "menstruation not handicap" remark, asking, "Why should a woman's menstrual cycle be known to her employer". Irani said that by making menstrual leave a mandate, she does not want women to face discrimination and harassment at the workplace over it. She said, "For you to mandate (menstrual leave across all segments) and make it lawfully implemented, people have to report implementation. Imagine a scenario in the private sector. When somebody has to implement it, your HR guy has to know, your



accounts guy has to know...why should a woman's menstrual cycle be known to the employer. Imagine if it's a single woman...who chooses not to take those leaves that she is supposed to be granted. Can you imagine the harassment that women will have to

face...Imagine a floor with 20,000 women...we are creating new barriers for discriminating against women," Smriti Irani said. Irani, however, noted that such leaves are "part of the law, but it is only under the context of medical leaves". She said,

"Under the Occupational safety and health standard rules of 2020, a medical leave is already provided for". Irani went on to respond to the critics who said some women have to suffer severe pain during the menstrual cycle. She said, "If you look at

challenge with regard to severe pain, it's an indication of hormonal and chemical imbalance or (it has) a genetic inclination to it...which means you need a doctor immediately...you can't self-medicate, specially when you are above the age of 25. "The minister had said, "As a menstruating woman, menstruation and the menstruation cycle is not a handicap, it's a natural part of women's life journey...We should not propose issues where women are denied equal opportunities just because somebody who does not menstruate has a particular viewpoint towards menstruation".

Cash-strapped Himachal's debt rises to Rs 81,045 crore

Delhi : Cash-strapped the Congress government in Himachal Pradesh has raised a loan of Rs 12,912 crore to meet its development needs in 2022-23. The total debt burden on the state has been Rs 81,045 crore till March 31, 2023, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) said. The CAG report tabled by Chief Minister Sukhvinder Sukhu on the last day of the Assembly session said that on April 1, 2022 -- the total debt was Rs



68,133.72 crore. It said that the state government has not constituted a sinking fund for loans raised by it in the open market. Loans out of the collection in the "small savings scheme" and "public provident fund" in the post offices are being shared between the Central

governments in the ratio of 3:1. A separate fund vis-a-vis national small savings fund was created in 1999-2000 for the purpose of releasing loans out of small savings collections.

During 2022-23, repayment of Rs 569.10 crore was made.

The balance outstanding at the end of the year was Rs 3,820.66 crore which was 6.83 percent of the total internal debt of the state as on March 31, 2023.

Delhi Congress launches crowdfunding drive



Delhi : The Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee inaugurated the Congress' crowdfunding initiative. It was marked by a contribution of Rs 1,38,000 from All-India Congress Committee (AICC) treasurer and former Union Minister Ajay Maken. The campaign has been launched to coincide with the 138th year of the Congress' formation.

The online initiative was deemed 'historic' by DPCC president Arvinder Singh Lovely who emphasised its dual purpose of fundraising and fostering direct connection between Congress workers and citizens at the grassroots level. Lovely stressed the transparent nature of the campaign, emphasising that contributions were voluntary and aimed at linking the party with the senti-

ments of the common man. He pledged Rs 1,38,000 as his personal contribution. In his address, Maken lauded Delhi's support for party programmes and expressed confidence that the crowd-funding initiative would set new records. Congress workers would embark on a door-to-door campaign across the capital to formally launch the initiative. Party leader Mukesh Sharma rallied Congress workers, asserting their collective responsibility to popularise the campaign. He said a formidable workforce of 1,37,600, comprising block presidents, former MLAs, district presidents and Congress leaders would successfully implement the campaign. Sharma emphasised the campaign's pivotal role in shaping the narrative for Mission 2024.

Prashant Kishor to TDP's aid, meets Chandrababu Naidu

Pawan Kalyan, who is part of the BJP-led NDA, is still hopeful that BJP will also join the alliance to take on YSRCP



Delhi : Top electoral strategist and founder of the Indian Political Action Committee (I-PAC) Prashant Kishor arrived and met Telugu Desam Party (TDP) supremo N. Chandrababu Naidu amid reports that he will be helping the party for the coming elections for Andhra Pradesh Assembly. PK, as the political strategist is popularly known, arrived at Gannavaram Airport, Vijayawada along with TDP General Secretary Nara Lokesh in the same flight from Hyderabad. The duo later drove to Naidu's residence at Undavalli in

Amaravati where Prashant Kishor held talks with Naidu. In 2019, PK worked with YSR Congress Party (YSRCP). The party led by Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy had wrested power from TDP with a landslide majority. YSRCP had bagged 151 seats in the 175-member Assembly and also won 22 out of 25 Lok Sabha seats. Assembly elections in Andhra Pradesh are due to be held along with the Lok Sabha polls in April-May next year. There have been speculations for the last few months that PK will help devise a strategy for TDP this time. The I-PAC founder was reportedly persuaded by Trinamool Congress

(TMC) chief and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to help Chandrababu Naidu. The talks reportedly started in June 2021, after TMC's massive win in the West Bengal Assembly elections. Naidu's meeting with PK comes a couple of days after the massive public meeting in Vizianagaram district, where he shared dais with Jana Sena Party (JSP) leader and actor Pawan Kalyan. TDP and JSP have announced that they will have an alliance for the coming elections. Pawan Kalyan, who is part of the BJP-led NDA, is still hopeful that BJP will also join the alliance to take on YSRCP.

Karnataka Congress govt reverses BJP regime's hijab 'curbs'

Delhi : Nearly two years after the then BJP government issued an order barring students from deviating from the dress code prescribed by managements of schools and colleges, and effectively proscribed wearing of hijab on campuses, Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah on Friday said he has directed authorities to reverse that directive. Making this announcement while addressing a gathering at Muslim-dominated Kavalande in Mysuru, the CM said choice of dress and food is personal and no one should interfere with it. His statement comes less than six months before the crucial Lok Sabha elections.

When the audience specifically asked him about restrictions on hijab in educational institutions, Siddaramaiah said, "There are no restrictions on wearing hijab."

Defeats disappointing, says Sonia Gandhi, but tries to rally Congress

Delhi : Congress leader Sonia Gandhi termed the defeat in the recent assembly elections in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan beyond disappointing, reminding the organization that the party is faced with "enormous challenges" and its task cut out for the Lok Sabha elections. However, she sought to infuse optimism by saying that the party should never forget the "insurmountable odds" that Congress leaders overcame to win the freedom for the country. We must channel our disappointment into a positive drive for the coming general elections," she said.

Gujarat Congress MP slams alcohol ban exemption order

Delhi : Congress MP from Gujarat, Shaktisinh Gohil has slammed the state government after it issued an order exempting employees, officials, and visitors in Gift City from the alcohol ban. In a video message posted on his official X account, Gohil said the order will have a negative impact on the state of Gujarat. "In Gandhinagar's Gift City,



the alcohol ban is being lifted, and it's been decided to remove the prohibition. Now people will consume it, and it will impact Gujarat in a negative way," the

Congress MP said. "No idea what kind of profit the Gujarat government is seeing in this," Gohil could be heard saying in the video. The Gujarat government allowed the consumption of alcohol at hotels, restaurants and clubs offering "wine and dine" service in Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT City) in the Gandhinagar district.

Special Amrit Bharat Express trip from Ayodhya to Sitamarhi to be flagged off on December 30

Delhi : The brand new Amrit Bharat Express, which has been designed primarily to cater to the needs of migrant workers, is set for its debut one-time special run between Ayodhya, the birth place of Lord Ram, and Darbhanga via Sitamarhi (Sita's birthplace) in Bihar. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to flag off the train on December 30 when he is scheduled to launch a Vande Bharat express between Ayodhya and Delhi, and inaugurate a host of projects in the holy city. Though the regular service of the first Amrit Bharat Express will be between Delhi and

Darbhanga, the special run between Ayodhya and Darbhanga is significant considering that the train has been designed for people who travel long distance in search of work, amplifying the government's thrust to make the life of poor better. The railways will decide the route for operating the second such train soon. Sources said the PM is also scheduled to flag off five more Vande Bharat trains virtually across the country, including on Delhi-Amritsar, Delhi-Katra, Jalna-Mumbai routes. Considering high demand of passengers, Delhi-Katra is getting a second,

No mention of Ladli Behna scheme in Madhya Pradesh governor's address

Delhi : Madhya Pradesh governor Mangubhai Patel listed the government's welfare and development schemes in his address to the 16th assembly, but one scheme was glaring in its absence—the Ladli Behna Yojana. The women-oriented scheme, launched by former chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, is believed to have played a crucial role in BJP's massive victory in the 2023 assembly polls, propelling a 2% surge in women voting. This makes its apparent exclusion from the governor's address quite surprising. The scheme not only gives

Rs 1,250 each to over 1.3 crore women every month but it was expanded close to the polls to include housing and LPG benefits too. Senior Congress MLAs Ram Niwas Rawat and Bala Bachchan interrupted the governor's speech more than once on Wednesday to point out that Ladli Behna Yojana was missing from his address. CM Mohan Yadav, however, clarified outside the House later in the day that "schemes for women empowerment will not be affected or stopped".

Chouhan, who was on his way to Amarkantak, said that the Ladli Behna

scheme would continue. "There's misinformation afoot that it will be stopped," he said at Bareilly in Raisen. In his first press meet after being sworn in, chief minister Mohan Yadav had not responded to repeated queries on Ladli Behna Yojana. The Ladli Behna scheme costs Rs 19,000 crore a year at Rs 1,250 per month per beneficiary—a burden on the cash-strapped government. In the run-up to the elections, the then CM Chouhan had promised to gradually increase it to Rs 3,000 a month. If it happens, it would cost upwards of Rs 45,000 crore.



Himachal BJP MLAs drop plea against appointment of Dy CM days after party names 6 deputies in 3 states



Delhi: After appointing half a dozen deputy Chief Ministers in Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has withdrawn its petition challenging the appointment of a deputy CM in Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu-led Congress government in Himachal Pradesh. The BJP had questioned the deputy CM's appointment on the grounds that his oath violated constitutional provisions. The petitioners had also challenged the appointment of chief parliamentary secretaries. BJP MLAs, however, informed the court that they would not want to press the application against the appointment of deputy CM Mukesh Agnihotri, a five-term MLA from Haroli in Una district. Later, the petitioners withdrew the application.

The petitioners include former BJP state president and Una MLA Satpal Singh Satti, former speaker HP Vidhan Sabha and Sulah MLA Vipin Singh Parmar, Shri Naina Devi MLA Randhir Sharma, Churah MLA and former deputy speaker Hansraj. The move comes over a week after BJP appointed two deputy CMs each in Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. One of the petitioners' advocates, Virbahadur Verma, said, "Our clients instructed us not to press the matter against deputy CM forward. As far as CPS is concerned, we have recorded."

Development projects worth Rs 19,150 crore unveiled for Kashi's holistic infrastructure transformation

Delhi : Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated and laid the foundation stone for multiple development projects in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, valued at over Rs 19,150 crores. Key initiatives include the launch of the New Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay Nagar-New Bhaupur Dedicated Freight Corridor Project, Varanasi-New Delhi Vande Bharat Express train, and various railway projects. The Prime Minister flagged off the 10,000th locomotive produced by Banaras Locomotive Works and inaugurated the Shivpur-Phulwaria-Lahartara road and two Railway Over Bridges (ROBs).

2023: A year of what could have been for Indian cricket

Despite numerous statistical highs, including being ranked No.1 in all formats, the big prize in men's cricket eluded the Indian team

How would you sum up 2023 if you were an Indian cricket fan? Two words would do justice. "What if?." 2023 was a year where the Indian men's cricket team had two cracks at ending a 10-year wait for an ICC Trophy, but it came up short on both occasions in the WTC final at The Oval and the ODI World Cup final at Ahmedabad. What if India had picked Ashwin at the Oval in the WTC final? What if India had tried to bounce out Travis Head earlier? What if Head had nicked one of the many balls he played and missed in the first ten overs of that chase in Ahmedabad?

The loss on November 19 in Motera would scar the souls and puncture the spirits of those in the changing room more because India had played a flawless tournament till the semifinal, crushing opponents systematically, but cruelly had an off day in the game that mattered on a curiously prepared pitch that was



slow and dry to start with and then changed dramatically when Australia started their chase of 240. But to not celebrate the performances of the team, especially in the white-ball format, would be ungrateful. The men's team played fifty-eight white-ball games (35 ODIs and 23 T20Is) this year and ended up winning forty-two out of them (27 in ODIs and fifteen in T20Is). ODIs, a format that is losing relevance, was given a lifeline by the men in blue, especially during a feverish World Cup campaign where captain Rohit

Sharma's thrilling assault on bowlers in the powerplay, captivating fans as it was both effective and selfless. The skipper was unfairly criticized for his stroke in the final off Glenn Maxwell, which was pounced miraculously by Travis Head, but his 47 (31 balls) was exactly how he had batted right through the tournament, in fact right through the year.

With the heartbreak of the T20 World Cup semifinal vs England in Adelaide still fresh in his mind, the skipper had made up his mind that he was

willing to buy the idea of India getting outclassed, but would not buy it if India ended up second best for want of intent. And he took it upon himself to not just stat pad but focus on giving the middle-order a cushion of runs so that they can bat deep without feeling the pressure of accelerating. It was a template that worked perfectly in the marquee tournament. Virat Kohli played the ideal foil for Rohit's daredevilry, anchoring chases or giving the strokeplayers around him like KL Rahul and Shreyas Iyer the freedom to go big without the worries of the team suffering a blowout.

He logged six ODI hundreds in 2023 with three of them coming in the World Cup, none more important than the one he scored in the semifinal at the Wankhede Stadium against perennial nemesis New Zealand which made him the lone man to get to 50 ODI tons and surpass the record held by the great Sachin Tendulkar. It was a pity that his 765 runs in 11 matches did not result in a trophy more significant than the player of the tournament prize.

Irfan Pathan wants India captain to go for this player in place of Ashwin in second Test



NEW DELHI: India faced a tough defeat in the first Test of the two-match series, succumbing by an innings and 32 runs within three days at Centurion's SuperSport Park. This massive win, South Africa secured an unassailable 1-0 lead in the two-match series, dashing India's hopes of claiming a Test series victory in the Rainbow Nation for the first time in 31 years. Despite posting 245 runs in their first innings, the Indian batsmen faltered, managing only 131 runs across 34.1

overs in the second innings. This was in reply to South Africa's commanding total of 408 in their first innings. India have struggled in bilateral Test series in South Africa, having attempted eight times without a win, suffering seven losses and managing only one draw. The only chance for redemption now lies in a 1-1 draw if India can level the series in Cape Town. Looking ahead to the second and final Test at Cape Town's Newlands stadium starting on January 3,

former India all-rounder Irfan Pathan said captain Rohit Sharma should consider bringing in star all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja in place of Ravichandran Ashwin. Ashwin, who bowled 19 overs in the first Test, conceding 41 runs and taking just one wicket.

"Ravindra Jadeja, if fit, should come back in the team. Ashwin did bowl well from what was expected out of him on that pitch but we missed Jadeja's control while batting at number 7 in Centurion," said Pathan.

Afridi wants Mohammad Rizwan, not Shaheen Afridi, to lead Pakistan

NEW DELHI: After Babar Azam's departure from captaincy in all three formats in November, Pakistan named Shaheen Shah Afridi as their new T20I captain and Shan Masood as their Test captain. Former Pakistan skipper and dynamic batsman Shahid Afridi expressed his inclination towards wicketkeeper-batter Rizwan over left-arm fast bowler Shaheen for the T20I leadership. Afridi praised Rizwan as a resilient individual, advocating him as the ideal candidate to steer Pakistan in the quick-paced format of the game.

"I admire Rizwan's hardwork and focus level. His best quality, which I like most, is only focusing on his game and paying no heed to who doing what and



what not. He is really a fighter!" Afridi said. "I want to see him [Rizwan] as the T20 captain but mistakenly, Shaheen became the skipper," Afridi was quoted as saying by GeoTV. IPL auction: Pakistan are currently playing Test series in Australia.

Australia lead the three-match series 2-0, and Pakistan have lost 16 successive Tests in Australia.

The third and final Test of the series will be played at the Sydney Cricket Ground from January 3.

Backed for a top-order job, Richa produces a special fighting knock

MUMBAI: Even though India lost the second ODI by three runs on Saturday at the Wankhede Stadium to lose yet another home ODI series to Australia, they would be happy with the way young wicketkeeper bat Richa Ghosh batted in the top order, scoring a fighting, career-best 96 off 117 balls, in a knock which included 13 fours, despite battling severe cramps. In a much-talked about move, India promoted the talented batter, who has been used mostly as a finisher in the past, to the pivotal No 3 spot. Ghosh responded by producing a scintillating knock to almost take India to the 269-run target. Talking to the reporters post the second ODI, India's head coach Amol Muzumdar made it clear that the team management was looking to groom Richa at one down. "We believe Richa can be a good top-order player. We believe in her talent and you've seen the kind of shots she can play. I think that's the best spot for her," he said. In the past, several talented Indian batters - Rohit Sharma's elevation to the opening slot in early 2013 comes to the mind - have seen their careers turn after they were moved from No 5 or No 6 to the top three "So, the batting order has been Richa at number three.



Amandeep Khare to captain Chhattisgarh Ranji team in upcoming season

RAIPUR:

Amandeep Khare, a 26-year-old right-hand batter and right-arm bowler, will lead the Chhattisgarh Ranji team in the upcoming season. Khare, the sole crick-



eter from Chhattisgarh to have played for India in the U-19 World Cup in Bangladesh, takes on the captaincy for the first time in the Ranji Trophy. The Chhattisgarh State Cricket Sangh (CSCS), through its official press release, has announced the commencement of the Ranji Trophy matches from January 5, 2024, and consequently revealed a 17-member squad for this significant tournament.

Alongside Khare, the team comprises all-rounder Ajay Mandal, Anuj Tiwari, Ashish Singh Chouhan, Ashutosh Singh, Eknath Kelkar (wicketkeeper), Gagandeep Singh, Jivesh Butte, M Ravi Kiran, Rishabh Tiwari, Sanjeet Desai, Shashank Chandrakar (wicketkeeper), Shashank Singh (vice-captain), Shubham Singh, Sourabh Majumdar, Sumit Ruikar, and Vasudev Bareth. Chhattisgarh, placed in Group-B, will embark on their tournament journey with a match against Assam at their home ground in Naya Raipur from January 5 to 8. The state team is scheduled to play four matches at home and three away in the round-robin league.

Harpreet Singh Bhatia, one of the key batters of the state team and the former team leader, was unavailable for selection this year, as confirmed by CSCS.

David Warner retires from one-day cricket ahead of Test farewell



NEW DELHI: Dynamic Australian opener David Warner has decided to conclude his one-day international cricket career before his farewell Test against Pakistan this week. However, he hasn't ruled out the possibility of participating in the 2025 Champions Trophy if the need arises.

In his 112th and final Test match, taking place in his hometown of Sydney on Wednesday, the 37-year-old will step onto the field. Throughout his Test career, he has amassed an impressive 8,695 runs at an average of 44.58, showcasing his talent with 26 centuries and 36 half-centuries. During a press conference held at the Sydney Cricket Ground, Warner also confirmed his

retirement from ODIs. Since his debut in 2009, he has been a consistent presence in the ODI squad, contributing significantly to the team's World Cup victories in 2015 and 2023. "I've got to give back to the family and also on the back of that I'm definitely retiring from one-day cricket as well," he said.

"That was something that I had said through the (2023) World Cup, get through that, and winning it in India, I think that's a massive achievement. "So I'll make that decision today, to retire from those forms, which does allow me to go and play some other (Twenty20) leagues around the world and sort of get the one-day team moving forward a little bit.

Siraj wishes Happy New Year as Team India arrives in Cape Town for 2nd Test

NEW DELHI: The Indian cricket team landed in Cape Town ahead of the second Test starting from Wednesday at Newlands. The BCCI shared a video of the team's arrival on X:

India lost the first of the two Test matches at SuperSport Park in Centurion on Thursday by an innings and 32 runs, exhibiting a complete and utter capitulation in the span of three days. With the series consisting of only two



matches India can at best earn a share of the honours if they win the second Test.

India had no answer to South Africa's pace

attack as they crashed to 131 all out in their second innings, after conceding a 163-run first innings lead. Virat Kohli hit an

aggressive 76 for India before he was last man out but the rest of the batting collapsed against South Africa's fast bowlers on a lively pitch.

Dean Elgar was named man of the match in his final Test on his home ground. He has announced he will retire from international cricket after the second Test.

Former captain Elgar, who led the team on the field after Bavuma's injury, will captain the team in Cape Town.

Atharva Ankolekar gets maiden Mumbai Ranji Trophy call-up

MUMBAI: Left-arm spinning all-rounder Atharva Ankolekar received his maiden Mumbai Ranji call-up as the selectors on Sunday named a 15-man squad for the opening Ranji Trophy match, from January 5 against Bihar at Patna. The 23-year-old, who played for India in the Under-19 World Cup in South Africa in January 2020 (he took four



wickets and scored 61 runs), wickets@31.50, 31 has played eight List A (8 runs@10.33) and 12 T20

matches@35.83). Ankolekar was picked for the Ranji Trophy after he took a fiver and scored 74 and took five for 40 for the Victory Cricket Club against New Hind Sporting Club in the Police Shield final at the Police Gymkhana, which ended on Sunday. India's seam all-rounder Shardul Thakur will join the Mumbai team from January 8, a source

informed. TOI had reported on December 22 that opener Prithvi Shaw, who has been out for the last four months due to a bad knee injury he suffered while playing county cricket for Northamptonshire, will miss Mumbai's first two Ranji Trophy matches. "Atharva has been performing outstandingly in the local tournaments.

'Managed to rein in inflation without losing growth focus'



NEW DELHI: RBI governor Shaktikanta Das has said that the central bank managed to moderate inflation without compromising on its growth focus. In his new year message to the central bank's staff, Das said that the RBI has navigated multiple challenges faced by the economy and exhorted the staff to improve the quality and efficacy of service delivery. While pointing to the challenges posed by macroeconomic and geo-political shocks, the governor also highlighted the threat of climate change. "As Team RBI, we have been able to effectively navigate

● While pointing to the challenges posed by macroeconomic and geo-political shocks, the governor also highlighted the threat of climate change.

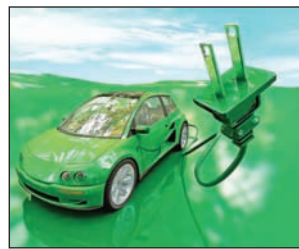
through the multiple challenges faced by us. We continued our journey with a proactive, pragmatic and prudent approach," Das said in his year-end message to RBI staff. "On the monetary policy front, we

have managed to moderate inflation, without losing focus on growth. Our actions were timely and decisive. We have also scaled new heights in maintaining macroeconomic and financial stability. Our regulatory and supervisory policies continued to be fine-tuned to ensure a robust financial system," the governor wrote in a two-page note. Since May 2022, the monetary policy committee has raised key policy rates by 2.5 percentage points and, factoring in the impact of its decision, decided to pause amid moderating inflation.

EVs to fuel car market growth in New Year

NEW DELHI: The broader car market may be headed for a breather in the New Year, but electrics will fuel industry growth - driven by new launches and rising adoption, top executives at companies such as Tata Motors, MG Motor, Mercedes-Benz, and Kia have said. Albeit growing rapidly on a low base, the rise of electrics nevertheless is being seen as an encouraging sign by the industry as concerns around charging infrastructure and lack of sufficient choice in models still remain a concern.

Around 48,000 electric cars were sold in India in 2022, which



have nearly doubled to over 90,000 units this year as demand remained robust and adoption continued to pick up. Shailesh Chandra, MD of Tata Motors' Passenger Vehicles and Electric Mobility Divisions, told TOI that the company will not slow down the pace of new model introductions in EVs. The company - that currently has electric versions of the Nexon, the Tigor,

and the Tiago - will drive in three new greens in 2024, in the Punch mini SUV, the Harrier premium off-roader, and the Curvv coupe. "We are growing rapidly in electrics, and against around 42,000 greens that we retailed in 2022, the sales this year are expected at 65,000-70,000 units, registering a growth between 60% and 70%," Chandra said, adding that the company also plans to introduce vehicles with higher range of 600km on a single charge. Gaurav Gupta, deputy MD at MG Motor India, said EVs are likely to see a 100% growth in the new year.

PSU companies market capitalisation jumps 45% to Rs 51 lakh crore in 2023

MUMBAI: Investor wealth, as measured by BSE market capitalisation, surged by about Rs 85 lakh crore in 2023, of which Rs 16 lakh crore - or nearly a fifth of the overall gain - came from state-owned companies. The combined market of 65 odd public sector undertakings jumped by 45% in 2023 in line with

the upsurge in the broader market. The market value of these PSUs, where the President (on behalf of the government) is either the majority owner or owns a substantial stake, increased by Rs 15.8 lakh crore to Rs 50.5 lakh crore, data from Refinitiv showed.

In comparison, among large private sector business houses, Aditya Birla Group's market value increased by 38%, Tata Group's by nearly 32%, Bajaj Group's 23%, Reliance Industries' by a marginal 1.6%, while Adani Group, thanks to the Hindenburg Research report, saw 29% wealth erosion.

CAPSULES

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L'Oreal heir 1st woman with \$100 billion wealth

Francoise Bettencourt Meyers became the first woman to amass a \$100 billion fortune, marking another milestone for the heiress and for France's expanding fashion and cosmetics industries. Her wealth jumped to \$100.1 billion. The milestone came as shares of L'Oreal - the beauty products empire founded by her grandfather - rose to a record high, with the stock set for its best year since 1998. Meyers is the 12th-richest person in the world, just behind Mexico's Carlos Slim.

Budget: Finmin seeks expenditure proposals from other ministries

● The second batch of supplementary demands for grants for 2023-24 is proposed to be placed before Parliament



NEW DELHI: The finance ministry has sought expenditure proposals for the second and final batch of supplementary demands for grants from various ministries and departments ahead of the Budget session likely to commence in the last week of January. This would be the last session of the 17th Lok Sabha before the general elections and the government would seek expenditure approvals of

Parliament for four months till July 2024 through a vote on account. The second batch of supplementary demands for grants for 2023-24 is proposed to be placed before Parliament in the ensuing Budget session, the finance ministry said in an office memorandum. The cases that would be eligible to be incorpo-

rated under such demands include those where advances from the contingency fund have been granted. Besides, payments against court decree would be included as well as cases where the finance ministry has specifically advised moving the supplementary demand in the winter session, it said.

Niti Aayog's 1st Vice chairman Panagariya to head 16th Finance Commission

NEW DELHI: Columbia University professor and the first vice chairman of Niti Aayog Arvind Panagariya has been appointed the chairman of the 16th Finance Commission. The government is, however, yet to name the other members of the panel, which has an open mandate unlike finance commissions in recent years, where the Centre provided a large set of terms of reference. For many, Panagariya's appointment came as a surprise since the last



four commissions were headed by those who had long stints either in the finance ministry or RBI. mBarring the two-and-a-half years that he spent at Niti Aayog, the former Asian Development Bank chief economist has focused on academics. He is currently the

Jagdish Bhagwati professor of Indian political economy & professor of economics and director of Raj Center on Indian Economic Policies.

The 16th Finance Commission, which has less than two years to finalise its recommendations for five years, starting April 2025, will have the flexibility to decide the areas that it intends to focus on apart from the Constitutionally-mandated task of devising the formula to divide

the tax revenue between the Centre and the states along with the grants in aid from the Consolidated Fund of India. Besides, it has to recommend on transfer of resources to panchayats and municipal bodies and ways to finance disaster management. This time, the government has also refrained from providing a base year for the Commission, which uses population as a key parameter for working out the devolution formula.

Air India Express seeks final NCLT nod for AIX merger

NEW DELHI: The Tata Group is on track to consolidate its four airlines in the New Year. Air India Express has filed the "second motion" for final hearing stage in NCLT for merging AIX Connect (erstwhile AirAsia India) into it. The group expects the nod by March when the two airlines will operate on



a single air operator certificate or licence. The timing of the other big merger - Vistara into Air India - will depend on the latter "reaching an appropriate level," AI MD & CEO Campbell Wilson had told TOI last September. While there's no formal word on that merger's exact timing, people in the know expect that too in 2024. AIX will focus more on thinner markets and tier II & III cities while AI will - apart from medium to ultra long haul - be on routes with a larger share of premium traf-

fic. It will also provide the feed to AI hubs in Delhi and Mumbai to fill up the latter's growing number of wide bodies flying across the world. AIX CEO Alok Singh said: "We have 62 aircraft as of now (the combined fleet of the two LCCs). In the next 12 months we will induct 50 new Boeing 737 MAX. After phasing out some planes, AIX will have about 98 aircraft in its fleet by next December." Tatas' record order for 470 aircraft placed last February includes 190 B737 MAX for its LCC.

Hospitals see 15x surge in PE-VC funds in 4 years

● "Covid 19 exposed the massive demand-supply gap in India's healthcare delivery ecosystem and scarcity in motion on all fronts"

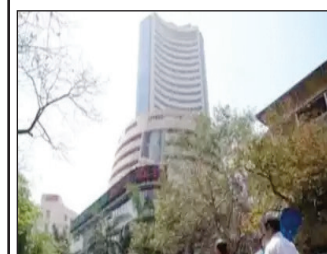
New Delhi: Investor interest in hospitals peaked this year with investments by private equity (PE) and venture capital (VC) firms rising by over 15 times to cross Rs 30,000 crore over a 4-year period from Rs 1,921 crore in pre-Covid 2019. This comes even as there is a slowdown in overall funding globally, with PE and VC investments declining 38% in India in 2023, the latest data from research firm Venture Intelligence showed. The hospital sector was red hot this year, with large hospital chains such as Manipal and Max attracting bulge-bracket investment firms as demand for private healthcare surged post the pandemic.



Other growth drivers include a growing ageing population, an increase in lifestyle ailments and rising incomes, which whetted investor appetite with PE firms snapping up established hospital groups and even single specialty hospitals. "Covid 19 exposed the massive demand-supply gap in India's healthcare delivery ecosystem and scarcity in motion on all fronts. All formats of healthcare delivery chains, whether multi-speciality, single speciality, day care specialities, have shown tremendous appetite to grow and scale either through the organic or consolidation route. These potential industry tailwinds, growth of health insurance as a payor and the evolu-

tion of tier 2 cities as future growth markets have created a strong private equity interest in the sector which has also been matched by the strong demand for hospital stocks in public markets. As one of the fastest growing sectors in one of the fastest growing economies of the globe, we will continue to see phenomenal interest by private equity players in India's healthcare ecosystem," Vishal Bali, executive chairman of PE fund, Asia Healthcare Holdings, told. The year witnessed 13 deals, marked by the \$2.4-billion Manipal-Temasek mega deal, with Singapore's sovereign wealth fund increasing its stake in Manipal Hospitals, one of the largest multispecialty chains.

Most IPOs in 2023 gain more than sensx



MUMBAI: In a year when key equity benchmarks scaled new highs and rallied nearly 20% making investors richer by about Rs 85 lakh crore, 55 of the 59 issues gave IPO investors handsome returns of 45% on average. In fact, 2023 turned out to be an outlier for primary market investors when 59 companies hit the street, raising Rs 54,000 crore, and returned over 45% more than the issue prices on average, according to exchange data. This means that more than two-thirds of companies outperformed benchmark indices which rallied close to 20% in the year. The average listing gain for all the 59 IPOs is 26.3% and their average gain as of December 29 is 45%.