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

Congress, Left parties neglected demands for women's reservation: PM Modi

"PM Modi said he believes that 'Nari Shakti' is the biggest guarantee for a developed India"



NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday accused the Congress and the Left parties of neglecting demand for women's reservation and said his government had fulfilled promises made to empower women in the country. "Regrettably, after independence, the Leftist Congress government undermined the strength of our women. The Congress and other parties delayed the reservation bill in the Lok Sabha. However, the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam has now become law. Modi has fulfilled his commit-

ment," the Prime Minister said at the Bharatiya Janata Party's Mahila Conference in Kerala. "Muslim sisters were suffering because of triple talaq till the Congress and Left alliance govt were there in the country, but Modi gave the guarantee to give freedom from it and fulfilled it sincerely," he added.

PM Modi said he believes that 'Nari Shakti' is the biggest

guarantee for a developed India. Asserting that the progress of the poor, women, youth and farmers will ensure national growth, the Prime Minister said there was a buzz around "Modi's guarantee", apparently referring to the Centre's developmental initiatives.

Earlier today, the Prime Minister held a roadshow in Thrissur. The Prime Minister who landed at

Nedumbassery by a special flight from Agatti in Lakshadweep took a helicopter to Thrissur's Kuttanallor where his motorcade was welcomed by a cheerful crowd.

BJP state president K Surendran and actor-turned-politician Suresh Gopi accompanied the Prime Minister in his motorcade. People showered flower petals on the PM who waved to the crowd as he walked to the venue.

Adani row: Supreme Court upholds Sebi's probe

New Delhi

The Supreme Court of India reinforces the ongoing investigation into the Adani-Hindenburg controversy by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi). The court dismisses the need for further probes and emphasizes the adequacy of Sebi's efforts in addressing allegations of accounting fraud and stock manipulation. The ruling is a setback for the petitioners who challenged the adequacy and impartiality of the Sebi



probe. The court's decision highlights Sebi's role in safeguarding market integrity and investor interests, rejecting additional

investigations by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) or a special investigation team.

SC says no ground to transfer the probe from SEBI to SIT or CBI into Adani-Hindenburg row

In a significant development, the Supreme Court of India has reinforced the Securities and Exchange Board of India's (Sebi) ongoing investigation into the Adani-Hindenburg controversy. The apex court dismissed the need for further

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

New Delhi

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

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

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

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

More than 100 killed, scores injured in 'terrorist attacks' near slain general Soleimani's grave

NEW DELHI: Over 100 people were killed and 170 injured in twin explosions near assassinated commander Qassem Soleimani's cemetery in the southern city of Iran's Kerman, reported Iranian state media.

The explosions occurred during the ceremony held to mark the killing of Iran's top commander in a US drone attack at Baghdad airport in 2020. The diplomatic relationship between Washington and Tehran had touched a new low after Soleimani's killing.

The semi-official Nournews claimed, "several gas canisters exploded on the road leading to the cemetery".

"The blasts were caused by terrorist attacks," state media quoted a local official in the Kerman province as saying.

According to news agency Reuters, state TV showed Red Crescent rescuers attending to wounded people at the ceremony, where hundreds of Iranians had gathered to mark Soleimani's death anniversary.

BREAKING NEWS: Iran says at least 73 killed in Terror Attack near Qassem Soleimani's Grave | News

"Our rapid response teams are evacuating the injured... But there are waves of crowds blocking roads," Reza Fallah, head of the Kerman province Red Crescent told state TV. Tehran has declared Thursday a day of mourning following blasts.

"Following the terrorist incident in Kerman, the government declared tomorrow (Thursday) a day for public mourning across the country," state television announced on Wednesday. The United States assassinated Soleimani in 2020 on former president Donald Trump's orders.

No problem paying for Russian oil, it's all about price: Puri

NEW DELHI: There is no problem in making payment for Russian oil and any drop in imports is because of pricing as well as market conditions as Indian refiners look for best deals, oil minister Hardeep Singh Puri said on Wednesday.

"It is a pure function of the price at which our refineries will buy... India's leadership has only one



requirement that the Indian consumer gets the energy at the most economical price, without disruption," the minister said. Puri pointed out that India buys 1.5

million barrels per day of Russian oil on an average. Not How can so much Russian oil flow into India if there was payment problem. For good measure, Puri added

that new oil producers in other regions are willing to offer better discounts than Russia but declined to elaborate or identify the suppliers. "If they (Russia) don't offer us (good) discount why would we buy from them?" Puri's statement comes days after western media reports said five ships carrying Sokol, a light sweet oil produced in Russia's Far East.

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

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



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

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

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

B K warns of 'Godhra-like incident' in Karnataka; BJP demands arrest of Congress leader

NEW DELHI: Congress leader BK Hariprasad on Wednesday stoked a controversy as he claimed that there is a possibility of 'Godhra-like incident' in Karnataka in the run up to the consecration ceremony of Ram temple in Ayodhya on January 22. Hariprasad's remarks evoked strong reactions from the BJP, which demanded his immediate arrest.

"The Karnataka government should be on alert because in Gujarat during the same

occasion, the Kar Sevaks were set on fire at Godhra," the Congress MLC said. "A similar (Godhra-like) situation can be created here also. So, no room should be given for any untoward incident to happen in Karnataka. All the arrangements should be made for those willing to go to Ayodhya so that we should not see another Godhra happening in Karnataka," he added. "There is absolute possibility (for such incident). I can even give information.

Elon Musk's Starlink launches six satellites that will connect to mobile

SpaceX launches satellites for satellite-based internet, enabling mobile phone connectivity anywhere on Earth. The technology, called Starlink, works with existing LTE phones and requires no hardware changes. Starlink aims to partner with mobile network operators (MNOs) to integrate their services into existing cellular networks. However, concerns exist about congestion and interference with existing



satellite communication systems.

In addition to mobile connectivity, Starlink's satellites will also improve broadband services for homes, businesses, and industries. SpaceX, Elon Musk's space explo-

ration company has taken a significant leap forward in providing satellite-based internet. The company has launched six satellites equipped for direct-to-mobile phone connectivity.

Musk in a post on X said that "this will allow for mobile phone connectivity anywhere on Earth."

However, he made it clear that this won't rival — at least not with these satellites — existing cellular networks.

Worm in sandwich: FSSAI notice to IndiGo over 'unsafe for human consumption' food

NEW DELHI: The food safety regulator has issued a notice to IndiGo after a passenger was sold a sandwich that allegedly had a worm wriggling in it. The alleged lapse happened on December 29, 2023, when the person was flying from Delhi to Mumbai.

"As per... Food Safety and Standards (FSS) Act, 2006, 'unsafe food' means an article of food whose nature, substance or quality is so affected as to render it injurious to health... by the article having been infested or infested with worms, weevils, or insects. Hence, the food item served on December 29, 2023, to the passenger on IndiGo flight from Delhi to Mumbai.

Sometimes one waits for coronation but ends up in exile ...': Ex-MP CM Shivraj Chouhan



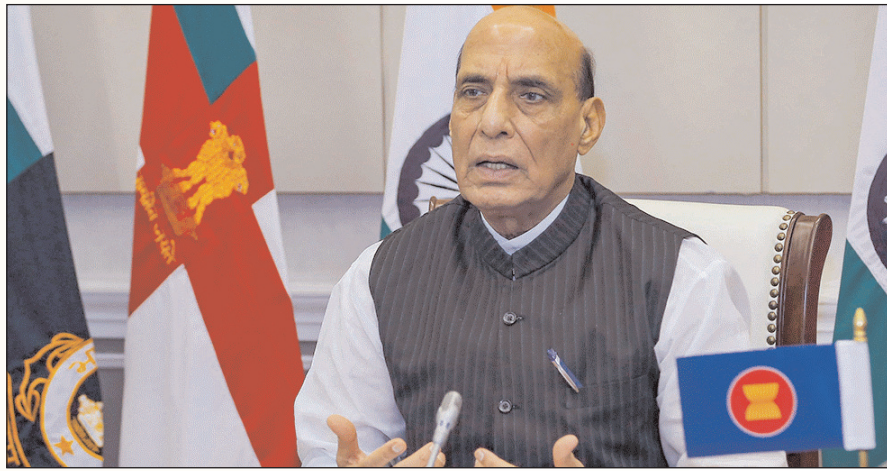
NEW DELHI: Former chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan turned emotional while addressing his supporters on Tuesday, saying that sometimes one waits for "rajtilak" (coronation) but ends up in "vanvas" (exile). Chouhan, who was addressing a gathering in Shahganj town under his Budhni assembly seat on January 2, promised that he will continue to be among the people, especially his sisters. The four-time chief minister, who was instrumental in BJP's landslide victory in the recent Madhya Pradesh elec-

tions, had to make way for Mohan Yadav last month after the party decided to go for a new line of leadership in the state.

In an emotional address to his supporters, Chouhan said that he will not go anywhere and "live and die in the state" when a couple of women sitting in the audience shouted "bhaiyya (brother), don't go anywhere leaving us alone." Chouhan, affectionately called "mamaaji," spearheaded the "Ladli Behna" scheme in Madhya Pradesh ahead of the elections, a programme.

Keeping in mind the aspirations and capabilities of a New India

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



New Delhi: Defence minister Rajnath Singh on said keeping in mind the aspirations and capabilities of a New India, the country needs strategic autonomy and the government is developing a strong base of domestic defence industrial ecosystem to achieve that. He was speaking at the 21st convocation of Tezpur University (TU), a central varsity located near the Assam - Arunachal Pradesh border in northern Assam. Tezpur is an important Army base and the headquarters of the 4 Corps, which is responsible for the security of India's northern boundary with China in the Tawang sector. The defence minister asked

TU to put forth before the Centre its request to set up a centre for defence studies, proposed to be named after Ahom general Lachit Borphukan, on its premises in Tezpur. The central university started teaching soldiers, deployed along the LAC, to read and write Mandarin, including military terminologies, from 2023. Stating that the country's domestic defence production has touched Rs 1.08 lakh crore for the first time, Singh said India's defence sector is scaling new heights after the present government

under PM Narendra Modi set a mammoth target to make India self-reliant or 'atma nirbhar' in the defence sector. "We are the first such government, which has put restrictions on ourselves so far as import of arms and weapons is concerned," Singh said, reminding the gathering of the fifth positive indigenisation list under which 509 defence equipment will be produced in India by the people of the country. "In addition, we have also issued the fourth positive indigenisation list of defence PSUs, in which 4,666 items have

been identified, which will now be manufactured in our country," he said. The defence minister further highlighted that the total value of 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. Singh said the present government's approach in tackling any situation that may emerge in the country has replaced the crisis of credibility with a culture of confidence. "India is no longer tolerant of the 'let-it-be' approach

UK, US: arrested 625 accused in '23: National Investigation Agency

NEW DELHI: As many as 43 suspects were identified in cases related to vandalism on Indian high commissions in UK, US and Canada, thanks to the National Investigation Agency's (NIA) efforts at crowd-sourcing of information. Also, as part of its stepped up investigations into these cases in recent months, the agency carried out more than 50 raids and searches and examined 80 people in India for alleged links to the conspiracy behind the attacks. Sharing this update as part of a year-end review, the NIA said it has scored an overall conviction rate of 94.7%, arrested 625 accused and ensured the attachment of 240 assets, including 156 bank accounts, all worth around Rs 56 crore, in 2023 as part of an intensified and focused fight against terrorists, gangsters, drug smugglers, human traffickers and other criminals work-

ing against national interests. The NIA said its scaled-up operations across India in 2023 saw a 28% rise in arrests from 490 in 2022 to 625 this year. While 65 accused were arrested this year in ISIS cases, 114 were arrested for jihadi terror cases, 45 in human trafficking cases, 28 for terrorist and organised criminal activity and 76 in Left-wing Extremism-related (LWE) cases. The agency registered 68 cases in 2023, including 18 related to jihadi terror across multiple states, three related to J&K, 12 related to LWE, seven involving terrorist and organised crimes in Punjab, five cases concerning the north-east region and two related to fake Indian currency notes. The number of people chargesheeted and convicted in NIA cases stood at 513 and 74 respectively, as against 459 and 79 in

2022. The NIA managed to track down and arrest 47 accused in 2023, 14 more than last year. Also, arrests were made upon deportation and extradition - those in the net include Amritpal Singh alias Ammy, Amrik Singh, Manpreet Singh alias Peeta and Mandeep Singh deported from the Philippines. Vikram Brar was arrested upon deportation from the UAE. The number of searches and raids by the agency also recorded a significant increase, going up from 957 in 2022 to 1,040 in 2023. NIA attached properties and assets worth Rs 56 crore, up from Rs 10.5 crore in 2022. The 12 properties, worth Rs 1.5 crore, attached in 2023 belonged to six listed 'individual terrorists'. Dismantling of the terrorist-gangster nexus by the NIA saw the registration of two cases, chargesheeting of 55

people, 253 raids, 27 arrests and attachment of 18 properties in 2023. Crackdown on cadres and sympathisers of the banned CPI (Maoist) and People's Liberation Front of India (PLFI) brought about the arrest of Dinesh Gope, supremo of PLFI that is a splinter group of CPI (Maoist), in May. Six individuals, Mohammed Amin Khubaib, Arbaz Ahmad Mir, Dr Asif Maqbool Dar, Arshdeep Singh Gill, Harwinder Singh Sandhu and Lakhbir Singh Landa, were designated as 'individual terrorists' in 2023, as proposed by the NIA. Also, four terrorist organisations - The Resistance Force (TRF), People's Anti-Fascists Front (PAFF), Jammu & Kashmir Ghaznavi Force (JKGF) and Khalistan Tiger Force (KTF) - were banned, again on the recommendation of the NIA.

Fast-shrinking Chor Bazaar fights to keep edge in e-age

MUMBAI: Almost everything that Haji Ebrahim Record Shop stocks has lost relevance. Or it is just worth a decorative piece in homes where "antiques" are still valued. Be it a gramophone, an old typewriter, rotary dial telephones or long-playing (LP) records, they all are past their prime. And it is essentially vintage quality of the merchandise available at Chor Bazaar - spanning a few dusty labyrinthine streets near Bhendi Bazaar in South Mumbai - that has earned the neighbourhood its fame. However, some famous streets at Chor Bazaar are complete a misnomer.

Like Mutton Street and Chimna Butcher Street. Though originally home to many qasais (butchers), there is no mutton shop or slaughterhouse here. "They still have a community hall there," says Haji Hasan Rahimo (74), pointing to a fading signboard of Bombay Bakar Qasab Jamaat Khana. If Mutton Street was once the heart of Chor Bazaar, only half of it remains today, the other half getting gobbled up in the Saifee Burhani Upliftment Trust (SBUT), the massive redevelopment project of Bhendi Bazaar. A brainchild of the leader of the Dawoodi Bohras, the late Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin, to decongest Bhendi Bazaar and give cleaner, bigger and better homes to the residents, SBUT is transforming the locality. Though only half of Mutton Street, part of Chor Bazaar, has gone into redevelopment, a rumour, say many shop owners, has been spread that Chor Bazaar is dead. "Many customers wrongly believe there is no Chor Bazaar left. Chor Bazaar is here to stay," says Mohammed Salim who inherited Haji Ebrahim Record Shop from his uncle in the 1960s. Once, recalls Salim, legendary musicians such as O P Nayyar, C Ramchandra and Sajjad Hussain visited Chor Bazaar, including his shop, looking for old music records. "Today, many hunt and shop for rare records and record players online," says Salim. But does the Chor Bazaar have a future? "It will survive as long as people have a taste for antique pieces," he adds. But how did the area get its name Chor Bazaar, literally "Thieves' Market"?

Fulfilling the dream of lasting peace and all-round development in Assam: Shah

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



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

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

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

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

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

in Vatry on December 21 over suspicions of human smuggling. A subsequent court order on December 24 released passengers, with only 276, including 72 from Gujarat, landing in Mumbai. Among the list of Indian passengers sent back, a copy of which TOI possesses, is a child born on August 2, 2021, from Gujarat, identified as an unaccompanied minor at Vatry airport. The source.

India recorded a 22% rise in Covid cases this week as compared to the last

Kerala India recorded a 22% rise in Covid cases this week as compared to the last, with the tally in the past 24 hours crossing 800 for the first time in seven months, reports Amit Bhattacharya. While the overall numbers remain very low and the rise has been gradual - possibly because of

sparse testing and a large number of cases remaining mild - data shows that the JN.1-driven surge is spreading across the country and that infections may already have peaked in Kerala, the state logging the highest counts in the current phase. India recorded a 22% rise in Covid cases this week as compared

to the last, with the tally in the past 24 hours crossing 800 for the first time in seven months. While the overall numbers remain very low and the rise has been gradual - possibly because of sparse testing and a large number of cases remaining mild - data shows that the JN.1-driven surge is spreading across the

country and that infections may already have peaked in Kerala, the state logging the highest counts in the current phase. India reported 4,652 fresh Covid cases during the week ending Saturday (December 24-30) as against 3,818 in the previous seven days. There were 29 deaths from the virus.

B737 MAX for loose rudder nut, Boeing tells airlines AI Express, Akasa & SpiceJet affected

NEW DELHI: US aerospace major Boeing has asked operators of Boeing 737 MAX globally — which in India include Air India Express, SpiceJet and Akasa — to carry out safety checks on this aircraft after finding a loose bolt in one of the planes. Boeing has asked operators to inspect specific tie rods that control rudder movement for possible loose hardware. The three Indian carriers together operate over 40 B737 MAX. Among other things, rudder basically helps an aircraft turn left or

right. A senior Directorate General of India (DGCA) official said, "The original equipment manufacturer (OEM) has already issued instructions to all operators for the necessary checks as is the standard protocol." A spokesperson for Akasa, which has 20 B737 MAX, said: "We have been made aware of this issue by Boeing. Like all operators around the world... Akasa will be following the same checks and procedures that the manufacturer or regulator recommends. Our oper-

ating fleet and deliveries are not impacted so far." With 12 MAX in its fleet, a SpiceJet spokesperson said, "This (issue) will have no impact on our operation." AI Express which has nine MAX is also learnt to be taking all the required steps. Senior pilots operating this type said: "Rudder is connected to empennage (tail of aircraft) through hinges by multiple nuts. Boeing recommended the inspections after an international operator discovered a bolt with a missing nut while performing routine maintenance.

YS Sharmila set to join Congress on January 4

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

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

Gurugram

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

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



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

CM Yogi cautioned people against people working to divide the society by engaging in caste politics

● " Taking pride in heritage, staying united with solidarity and performing civic duty"

Lucknow

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that according to global agencies more than 13 crore people have come above the poverty line in the nine and a half years of the government headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Interacting with the beneficiaries of welfare schemes during the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra, CM Yogi cautioned people against people working to divide the society by engaging in caste politics and to work unitedly towards empowerment of the nation. "Those who robbed the poor of their rights in the past are indulging in caste politics today", he remarked. He

added that today not only schemes are being made for the poor in the country, but also being implemented. The benefits of government schemes are reaching the villages, poor and youth without any discrimination. The objective of Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra is to bring happiness on the face of every person, he remarked. CM Yogi interacted with the beneficiaries from Meerut, Basti, Chandauli, Mahoba and Barabanki districts. He connected online with the beneficiaries of schemes during Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra organized at 800 places in all 75 districts of the state. CM Yogi said that 642 Modi Guarantee vans are running in the state under the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra. So far, Modi Guarantee Van has reached 36983 Gram Panchayats out of 57709 Gram Panchayats of Uttar Pradesh. Also, 1027 programmes have been organised in 762 municipal bodies. Till now, this Yatra has connected with

approximately three crore people within the state, he informed. CM Yogi said that wherever Modi Guarantee Van is reaching in Uttar Pradesh today, thousands of people are joining it while camps are set up for registration of those deprived of its benefits despite eligibility. Talking about Prime Minister Modi's five pledges of a developed India, free from a slave's mentality, taking pride in heritage, staying united with solidarity and performing civic duty, he said that when 140 crore people will move forward with one voice and leadership, no power in the world will be able to stop India from becoming developed in the true sense. Government schemes become the basis of change in every person's life. CM Yogi said that the result of the hard work of the double engine government is that today 55 lakh poor people in the state have got houses under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, three crore peo-

ple have got toilets and 1.75 lakh poor people have got free gas connections under the Ujjwala scheme whereas free electricity connections have been provided to 1 crore 54 lakh families, electricity has reached 1 lakh 21 thousand villages, 10 crore people are covered under Ayushman Bharat scheme and 15 crore people are getting free ration. These schemes are becoming the basis of comprehensive changes in the life of every person today. he pointed out. The country has made progress in every field in nine and a half years. CM Yogi said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, the country has progressed in every field in the last nine and a half years. India's reputation has increased on the global stage, state-of-the-art infrastructure has been developed within the country while people are getting the benefits of government schemes without any discrimination.

Ayodhya's ICCC should become functional before January 22 Ayodhya's smart signage will be in languages

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



Sarita will start after Makar Sankranti, artists/storytellers/Ramlila troupes from India and abroad should be invited to take part Chief Minister's instruction: Get Ayodhya's digital tourist guide app ready, entire Ayodhya will be visible through walk through Chief Minister reviews development works in Ayodhya, says Shri Ram Temple will be a 'Rashtra Mandir' symbolizing cultural, spiritual and social unity of India? Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has given instructions to make all necessary arrangements at the state government level to make the consecration ceremony of Shri Ramlala at Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Temple in Ayodhya on January 22, other-worldly, unprecedented and unforgettable. The Chief Minister has said that today the whole world is eagerly looking towards Ayodhya. Everyone wants to come to Ayodhya. The whole country has become imbued in the spirit of Lord Shri Ram. This is also an opportunity for global branding of Uttar Pradesh. He has said that the state government will leave no stone unturned to ensure a pleasant and satisfying experience for the guests coming for the consecration ceremony as well as

tourists/devotees coming afterwards. With public cooperation, Ayodhya city will be the standard of safety, convenience and cleanliness. In a high-level meeting on Tuesday, the Chief Minister reviewed various projects, which are underway in Ayodhya, and gave necessary directions. Major guidelines given by the Chief Minister in the meeting...? Now only a few days are left for the completion of the much awaited ritual of enshrining Shri Ramlala in the grand and divine Shri Ram Janmabhoomi temple in Avadhपुरi. This Shri Ram temple will be a 'Rashtra Mandir', symbolizing cultural, spiritual and social unity of India.? This historic programme of 'Pran Pratishtha' (consecration) is an occasion of joy, pride and self-satisfaction for crores of Sanatan believers. The whole country is imbued in the spirit of Shri Ram. Deepotsav will be celebrated at Har Dev Temple on January 22 evening. Every Sanatan believer will welcome Ramlala by lighting the Ramjyoti in their homes/establishments.

Ayodhya will witness over 18 forms of Ramleela from India and abroad

Ayodhya

The Yogi government has decided to organize performances of over 18 forms of Ramleelas from India and abroad in Ayodhya to showcase the global significance of Lord Shri Ram. Additionally, various cultural, traditional folk arts, and spiritual programs will be organized. The decisions were taken at a meeting chaired by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday. With this, the Yogi government aims to propagate Lord Shri Ram as the center of faith not only in India, but also as a symbol of global faith. Various popular Ramleelas from India and abroad will be staged. While Ramleela is staged in the traditional local styles in various states of India, several forms of Ramleela are also performed overseas.

In this context, to enhance the glory of the consecration ceremony of Lord Ram in Ayodhya, the staging of various Ramleela forms will take place in different cultural centers of Ayodhya from Makar Sankranti (January 15) to January 22. It is noteworthy that as the 'Navya Ayodhya' is set to showcase its cultural and spiritual richness after 500 years, on January 22, 2024, Lord Shri Ram will be seated in his grand temple by PM Narendra Modi. To make this occasion unique, unforgettable, and spiritual, artists from India and abroad will perform Ramleela based on the Ramayana, while on the other hand, cultural programs based on folk traditions will also be organized. Through this event, the Yogi government aims to make tourists and devotees coming to Ayodhya, including the present and future generations, aware of the ideals and values of Lord Shri Ram. Ramotsav seeks to tie the entire world in one thread. Ramleela troupes of countries such as Nepal, Cambodia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Indonesia, and more have been invited to the Ramotsav celebrations. Additionally, Ramleela troupes from states such as Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Karnataka, Sikkim, Kerala, Chhattisgarh, Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, and Chandigarh will present various events based on the life of Lord Shri Rama.

Tribute ceremony in Dhand on January 7 on Farmer Martyrdom Day: Rajeev Arya

Kaithal: Youth State President of Bharatiya Kisan Union (Maan group), Haryana, Rajeev Arya Dhand said that on the martyrdom day of the farmers Mamanchad and Lakhpat who were martyred in the Narsing firing incident, on 7th January, on the old Kurukshetra road in village Dhand. A tribute ceremony will be organized at the BKU office located near the main gate of the new grain market. In which the farmers will unite and pay their



respects to the martyred farmers and take a pledge to fulfill their unfulfilled dreams. While talking in an interview at the BKU

office located in the town, Rajeev Arya said that BKU will not shy away from making any sacrifice for the interests of the Dhartiputra farmers nor will it let the interests of the farmers be harmed. Will not step back from every movement and struggle for the welfare of farmers. Farmer's welfare is most important for him. Rajeev Arya Dhand said that before the tribute ceremony organized at Dhand office on January 7,

people will pay homage to the statues of martyred farmers Mamchand and Lakhpat located in village Pabnawa and village Chuhadmajra by offering flowers and garlands. Farmers and laborers will be invited to the entire district including other districts of the state to participate enthusiastically in the Martyr Tribute Ceremony, in which the farmers will unite and decide the strategy to protect the interests of the farmers.

Harsh Vardhan Shringla be a potential Lok Sabha candidate in 2024 from Darjeeling?

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

the new year, seem innocuous. Still, the launch of the society just a year before the elections, in mid-2023, and the spread of the poster has everyone guessing. On Shringla's only response when asked about the posters was a counter question -- on whether there were a lot of them around town. In September, after the launch of the society, he had brushed off a similar question. "Don't believe media speculation," was what

he said then. The secretary of the society Dechen Chimi Wangdi said that the society's objective was to work towards the welfare of the people of Darjeeling. The state Bharatiya Janata Party unit has supported the move. Party member Sanjib Biswas said: "All of us would want a professional after having seen politicians for the last three terms." Another person keeping a close eye on developments is BJP's sitting.

Vi and Team Vitality Forge a Strategic esports Partnership in India

Gurugram / Hisar : According to the State of India Gaming Report 2022, the Indian esports industry is expected to grow to \$140 million by 2027. Over the last few years, esports as a category gained recognition as a mainstream sport especially after being debuted as an official medal sports at various international

sports platforms. To capitalise on this growing consumer category, Vodafone Idea (Vi), one of India's leading telecom operators and Paris based Team Vitality, internationally acclaimed esports organisation, have announced a long-term union to boost the esports ecosystem in India. With this first of its kind

collaboration, the two brands jointly aim to create opportunities and exposures to esports fans and gaming enthusiasts alike. The partnership encompasses many aspects such as content partnerships, gaming events and unique experiences at a never-seen-before scale. This will enable Vi customers to participate in

esports and allow exclusive access to some of the popular Team Vitality tournaments and teams. This partnership will create opportunities for budding esports talent from across the country to have access to professional players, master classes, meet & greets with esports talent and many other opportunities.

Glenmark is the first to launch Biosimilar of Popular Anti-Diabetic Drug, Liraglutide, in India

Mumbai, India: Glenmark Pharmaceuticals Ltd. (Glenmark), a research-led, global pharmaceutical company, has launched a biosimilar of the popular 10,11 anti-diabetic drug, Liraglutide, for the first time in India. The drug is being marketed under the brand name Lirafit™ following the approval from the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI). Priced at around INR 100 for a standard dose of 1.2 mg (per day), this will lower the cost of therapy by approximately 70%, and will be available only under prescription. Liraglutide belongs to the class



of glucagon-like peptide 1 receptor agonist (GLP-1 RA) drugs, which increase glucose-dependent insulin secretion and decrease in appropriate glucagon secretion. 12,13 It has been approved globally for the management of type 2 diabetes mellitus in adult patients in the United States

and the European Union. 14 "Glenmark is proud to introduce Lirafit™, a novel and affordable biosimilar of the drug liraglutide, for the first time in India. Clinical trials have shown that it helps improve glycemic control in adult type 2 diabetes mellitus patients along with atherosclerotic cardiovascular diseases (ASCVD) and obesity. 1-5 Liraglutide has also proven to have a positive impact on cardiac and renal safety outcomes among patients in clinical trials, making it an effective choice of treatment for patients.

Tata Asset Management launches four New Fund Offering focusing on Gold and Silver

Chandigarh/Amritsar: Tata Asset Management announces the launch of four new schemes i.e. 2 Exchange Traded Funds (ETFs) & 2 Fund of Fund (FOF): Tata Gold ETF an open-ended Exchange Traded Fund replicating / tracking domestic price of Gold. NFO opens from 2nd January 2024 - 9th January 2024. Tata Silver ETF Fund of Fund an open-ended fund of fund scheme investing in Tata Gold Exchange Traded Fund. NFO opens from 2nd January 2024 - 16th January 2024. Tata Silver ETF an open-ended Exchange Traded Fund replicating / tracking domestic price of Silver. NFO opens from 2nd January 2024 - 9th January 2024. Tata Silver ETF Fund of Fund an open-ended fund of fund scheme investing in Tata Silver Exchange Traded Fund. NFO opens from 2nd January 2024 - 16th January 2024. Investing in gold and silver aims to offer a compelling strategy for diversification of your portfolio and long-term stability. Gold's role as a hedge against currency devaluation, inflation, and market uncertainties, coupled with its scarcity and historical safe-haven status, helps you to preserve wealth effectively.

Servokon Systems Limited successfully completed Type Tests & Special Tests on 5 MVA (33/11Kv) Power Transformer from CPRI Bhopal.

New Delhi : In a momentous accomplishment, the Central Power Research Institute (CPRI) Bhopal, a prominent third-party organisation under the Ministry of Power, Govt. of India, has awarded Servokon Systems Limited with Type Tests & Special Tests certificates on 5 MVA (33/11) Power Transformer. The successful completion of Type Tests & Special Tests on a transformer of this high rating highlights Servokon's pioneering achievement, a testament to the strength of domestic manufacturing and engineering capabilities. This milestone not only marks a significant achievement for Servokon, standing as an impressive technical feat within the industry, but it also coincides with the company's wholehearted embrace of the new year, symbolizing a rejuvenated beginning and auspicious prospects. Mr. Haji Kamruddin, Founder and Managing Director of Servokon Systems Limited, expressed his satisfaction, stating, "Receiving Type Tests & Special Tests certificates on the 5 MVA (33/11) Power Transformer from CPRI Bhopal is a testament to our dedication to



delivering reliable and high-performance power transformers. These certifications reinforce Servokon's position as India's leading power conditioning equipment and transformer manufacturer. Obtaining these certificates from CPRI, whose reputation and international standing further emphasise our commitment to excellence, contributes to buyer confidence." He further highlighted, "It assures our customers, including State Electricity Boards, Government PSUs electrical contractors and project specifiers, that our products meet stringent quality standards and are deemed safe. As the demand for certified products rises, Servokon takes pride in reducing product liability risks and fulfilling regulatory obligations, ensuring our clients receive the highest-quality goods.

Editorial

Congress, struggle to craft a response

While parties, especially the Congress, struggle to craft a response, the BJP is having a field day, with leaders mocking the confusion among the Opposition ranks. The issue, which will likely occupy the centre stage of the BJP's 2024 campaign, is turning into a political quagmire. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) has already declined the invitation, asserting that "religion is a personal choice not to be converted into an instrument for political gain". Nripendra Mishra, the temple construction committee chief and former principal secretary to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, personally delivered the invitation to the CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury on 23 December. Three days later, the CPI(M) released a statement. "It is most unfortunate that the BJP and RSS have converted a religious ceremony into a State sponsored event directly involving the Prime Minister, the UP Chief Minister and other government functionaries," it said. It may have been easier for the CPI(M) to do so, for parties like the Congress, which has a significant presence in the heartland states where Ram Mandir is an intensely emotive issue, responding to the invitation is a tightrope walk. The trust, set up by the Centre to build and manage the temple, has invited Congress leaders, including president Mallikarjun Kharge, parliamentary party chairperson Sonia Gandhi, and the party's Lok Sabha leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury to the ceremony. That's why the politics over the Ram Mandir invitations is ThePrint's Newsmaker of the Week. Political researcher Asim Ali suggests that the Congress is essentially caught between "two axes"—balancing regional considerations and its evolving caste agenda vis-a-vis its traditional 'soft' Hindu nationalist moorings. "If the Congress takes a conciliatory stand, the CPI(M) might make a play for their Muslim votes in Kerala. The Congress needs to maximise its seats in Kerala again to hope to reach the three digit mark in Lok Sabha. At the same time, taking an opposing stand might hurt it in the Hindi belt. The fact that Muslim voters in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, according to Ali, moved away from the Congress in the late '80s and early '90s due to the party's "strategic ambiguity" on Hindutva must also be weighing on the mind of its leadership. As Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi had allowed the opening of the locks of the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid site and had later permitted the laying of the temple's foundation stone as well. During the recent Madhya Pradesh assembly election, Congress' chief ministerial hopeful Kamal Nath also sought to claim ownership of the Ram temple movement, reminding people, in one of his campaign speeches, of Rajiv Gandhi's role in opening the locks placed by the Nehru government in 1949 after idols of Ram appeared overnight at the site. "So does the Congress opt for a clean break now or continue a policy of strategic ambiguity, drawing clear lines of opposition between a 'progressive' caste agenda and a 'regressive' Hindu nationalist agenda?"

It will be keenly watched," Ali said. On Friday, the Congress leadership's dilemma was reflected in Thiruvananthapuram MP Shashi Tharoor's decision not to attend the inauguration ceremony. He said that while the invitees should be "left free to make a personal choice", by turning it down they run the risk of being described as anti-Hindu. And in the event of them going, they will be blamed for "playing into the BJP's hands", Tharoor said.

On , the Shiv Sena (Udhav Thackeray faction), which was instrumental in the Mandir movement in the 1990s, also said it will not attend the event. "This is all politics... Who wants to attend an event by the BJP? This is not a national event. This is the BJP's programme."



BJP is in a dilemma due to the coming together of all the opposition

The suspension of Sanjay Singh, close to BJP MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, from the post of President of Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) is not being digested. He wants to talk to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Sports Minister Anurag Thakur regarding his dismissal. On December 21 itself, in the results of the Indian Wrestling Federation elections, former president of the association Sanjay Singh was elected the president of the association. In the previous body of WFI, when Brij Bhushan was the President, Sanjay Singh was holding the post of Joint Secretary and in fact, on the statement of Sakshi Malik that the President is always a person like Brij Bhushan, who was at the behest of Brij Bhushan Singh to work for him. The allegations were in favor. After being elected President, Sanjay Singh, speaking exactly the language of Braj Bhushan, said that those who want to wrestle, are wrestling and those who want to do politics, should do politics. But now that the post of President has been snatched away from his hands, his irritation is clearly visible. In fact, after the women wrestlers did not get justice, once there was anger among the wrestlers about harassing Sakshi

Malik and then in protest against this, Deaf Olympics gold medalist wrestler Virendra Singh had announced to return the Padma Shri award, Bajrang Punia Had returned his Padmashree. Earlier, Sakshi Malik protested against being elected as the President of the Wrestling Federation and announced her retirement from wrestling, which heated up the politics and ultimately the Sports Ministry had to take action against the President of the Wrestling Federation in the matter of women wrestlers. Is an ally. Is his business partner. If he stays in this federation, I will give up my wrestling. After today, I will never see you there. People from all over the country started reacting to this and the government had to quickly give up its stubbornness and remove Brij Bhushan Singh's associate Sanjay Singh from the post of President of the Indian Wrestling Federation.

Before announcing the return of Padmashree, wrestler Virendra Singh had also posted an open letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on social media platform X, in which he had written that Brij Bhushan Singh has once again won the wrestling association elections. , while the Home

Minister had assured that he would oust Brij Bhushan and his close ones. After the election results, Brij Bhushan Singh gave a statement that there is dominance and there will be dominance. Under pressure from this, Sakshi, the only Olympic winning female wrestler, retired. I will also return the Padmashree for my sister and the country's daughter. Honorable Prime Minister, I am proud of your daughter and my sister Sakshi Malik. However, the issue of physical abuse of the country's daughters and international female players came to the fore in front of the entire country and the world when on January 18, 2023, Vinesh Phogat, Sakshi Many big wrestlers including Malik and Bajrang Punia sat at Jantar Mantar in Delhi. But in this fight, our wrestler daughters lost and Brij Bhushan Singh, who was guilty of physical abuse, won, which not only broke the morale of the women wrestlers but also made Brij Bhushan Singh's heart bigger. The wrestling association also fully defended Brijbhushan Singh. After the order of the Supreme Court, Delhi Police somehow registered a report against Brij Bhushan Singh, but started making noise in the investigation. After this, when the Supreme Court ordered the

police to submit the investigation report, Brij Bhushan Singh was found guilty and a case was registered against him under POCSO. Although POCSO is such a section under which the culprit is directly arrested, the big question still remains that why has the police not arrested Brij Bhushan Singh till date? Even during the election process and results of the wrestling association, the Sports Ministry of the Modi government was sleeping like Kumbhakarni. However, now the Sports Ministry has woken up a bit, obviously the compulsion of the upcoming Lok Sabha elections is clearly visible behind it. BJP sees this issue increasing. Sensing the urgency of the occasion, Priyanka Gandhi reached Sakshi Malik's house with Congress MP Deepender Hooda and she met female wrestlers Sakshi Malik and Bajrang Punia and encouraged them. Secondly, BJP does not want to anger its large number of Jat community voters in the Hindi belt in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections and also wants to keep its MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh and his community in the thrall.

In fact, BJP is in a dilemma due to the coming together of all the opposition parties and in such a situation, it

cannot commit the mistake of being negligent, hence it is considering every vote as necessary. Under that, she is preparing her political strategy. Obviously, after the attempt to save Lakhimpur Kheri accused Ajay Mishra and his convicted son Ashish Mishra in the farmers' movement, this is the second big case in which all the leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party, especially the Center itself, are trying to protect one of their leaders. The Modi government remained engaged. In this dispute that has been going on for the last 11 months, now a small action has been taken by the government. However, for the first time, happiness has been seen on the face of Sakshi Malik's mother Krishna Malik due to this decision of the Sports Ministry, but she is still hopeful of justice in the injustice done to her daughter and other wrestler daughters. But the thing to be seen is that in the previous body of WFI, when Brij Bhushan was the President, Sanjay Singh was holding the post of Joint Secretary and he was accused of working in favor of Brij Bhushan Singh at his behest. And the surprising thing is how I stay out of the wrestling federation.

How IUML is threatening Congress to toe Islamist line while hailing Communists for their stand

Ahead of the Lok Sabha elections next year, both Congress and the communists seem to be competing to woo the Islamic extremist outfit, the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), in Kerala. IUML, an off-shoot of Jinnah's Muslim League, has significant influence in several seats in Kerala and both CPI(M) and Congress are competing with each other to ensure that IUML supports them in 2024. The IUML, on its part, is now using its position to ensure that both parties take more hardline Islamism positions in exchange for their support in elections. With the Ram Mandir consecration ceremony scheduled for 22nd January, IUML is now threatening Congress to toe its line entirely in exchange for

their support. Muslim outfit Samastha, closely associated with IUML, has now slammed Congress for its 'non-committal' stand on attending the Pran Pratishtha ceremony in Ayodhya. In an editorial in its mouthpiece Suprabhaatham, the Samastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulama (SAMASTHA) said: "The Congress stand that the party can attend the ceremony is only meant to prevent depletion of Hindu votes in North India. It is the soft Hindutva approach of the Congress that has taken the party, which ruled the country for 36 years, to the present situation." Asking Congress to review its stand, Samastha threatened Congress saying that if

they remain non-committed, BJP would win Lok Sabha in 2024 — essentially saying that if Congress does not explicitly state that they will not attend the Pran Pratishtha like CPI(M), they would alienate their Muslim vote bank in Kerala. Samastha, it is to be noted, is seen as the backbone of IUML and is an influential Muslim body in Kerala with several prominent clerics and Imams being a part of it. While Samastha has threatened Congress, IUML has come out against the party as well. IUML state general secretary P M A Salam said: "Before every election, it has been the practice of BJP to whip up communal sentiments. In the past, there has been communal violence

Racket iceberg

Indravadan Patel first heard of a plane full of Indians being detained at an airport in France over human trafficking fears, he called a travel agency he had been in touch with to take his son to the US. The travel agents had charted a similar plan for his son's entry into the country — Dubai first, then a brief stop in Europe, before the US — and they had taken ₹25 lakh as advance. Now, the phone went unanswered, and the Ahmedabad office Patel had visited was shut. Patel is one of hundreds of people who transacted with a syndicate that helped Indians enter the US and Canada illegally and on forged documentation, Gujarat police officers told HT, confirming at least 17 FIRs had been filed across the state since the December 22 grounding of an Airbus A340 in Vetry, France blew the lid off such operations. The ring charged each person between ₹70 lakh and ₹80 lakh, investigators said, sharing the first details of what is yet another "donkey route" immigration racket. Two people, who were among a web of at least 50 travel agents and touts based in India, were arrested by the Crime Investigation Department (CID) of the state police. The two men arrested were part of a vast operation involving people across multiple cities, towns and villages," a CID official said on condition of anonymity, identifying the suspects as Kunal

Vriya and Sahil. "They used to forge bank statements and other documents to help people secure visas and obtain passports," this person added. Last week, the Airbus jet operated by Legend Airways was allowed to return with the Indian passengers after French authorities questioned them for four days. Among the 303 originally on board, 276 returned, with the rest having sought asylum in France and a handful of others being detained over what French police say is a human trafficking investigation. While Patel's son was not on the plane, he was in the batch that was due to leave by the end of the month, he told police in his complaint, which is the basis of one of 17 FIRs filed across Ahmedabad, Anand, Mehsana, Gandhinagar, and Patan. When Patel heard about the illegal immigration network and the plane's grounding in France, he tried to contact his agent but his number was switched off. He went to the travel agent's office and found them absconding," this person added. To be sure, the FIRs did not directly reference the Nicaragua-bound flight that was stopped in France but officials aware of the matter said they pertained to the same syndicate. One of the 17 FIRs names 47-year-old Dineshbhai Baldaniya, owner of Lakshmi Overseas Consultancy in Ahmedabad, accusing him of forging documents like SSC mark-

sheets, appointment letter, promotion letter and work experience certificate in the name of Gordhara Infotech to get visas. The FIR is based on a complaint by an officer of the CID, who stated that the department received information about the illegal operations and raided Baldaniya's offices, from where it found a file titled 'Recent Canada Visa 2023', seven laptops, three mobile phones, five hard drives, two computers and essential documents, including the passports of eight people. The police showed the documents to Gordhara Infotech, which said it did not know of the people referred to in them, the complaint added. The FIR also states the accused has a network, naming the others as Bindesh Rameshbhai Sharma, Ganeshkumar Pravinbhai, Leena Ramanbhai Arya, and Manojbhai Karan Giri Goswami. During police questioning, the two suspects shared details of how the network worked — it penetrated deep into villages, where touts would seek out people interested in sending family members to the US and Canada. "The touts would convince these people to take loans from banks or private agents. Once the people were convinced and had the money, the touts put them in touch with "sub-agents" in Ahmedabad, who would in turn be connected to the scams four kingpin, S

Russia's war in Ukraine has had the world divided

As twilight falls in 2023, the uncertainty of the global situation has never been more heightened. The world is grappling with two raging wars with heartrending casualties along with compounding crises amid a bleak global economic outlook. Russia's war in Ukraine has had the world divided and ushered in fundamental transformations in the global order. The question is: Where is the war going two years after its start? The leaders of the two countries, one fighting for influence and the other for survival, Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelenskyy

recently held pressers in quick succession. They unveiled the larger geopolitical logic that's driving the neighbours to bet their whole agency for this war. While Russia's rationale is rooted in irredentism, Ukraine's is rooted in international law. There is no denying that the West's resolve to support Ukraine for as "long as it takes" has now been diluted due to the shift in global attention to the Israel-Hamas war, looming elections in the United States, and the unmissable subtext of declining public sympathy for the aggression against Kyiv. It is evident in the blockade of aid packages for Ukraine in the

European Union (EU) and the US with oodles of realpolitik negotiations being played out every day behind closed doors. It will take a while, but aid is likely to be released from both the US and EU. Ukrainian armed forces chief General Valerii Zaluzhnyi himself acknowledged the counteroffensive to have reached a "positional form". To move forward from this point, Ukraine will need air superiority (F16s), anti-mining capabilities, more drones, electronic warfare, and reserves — in time. The most stunning jolts to Russia in this war, a far superior adversary to Ukraine, has come from Kyiv's ability to

launch repeated attacks on the Black Sea where Moscow was expected to have naval superiority. But Kyiv's attacks on the Russian navy penetrating layers of air defences were startling. From destroying the missile cruiser Moskva and landing ship Novocherkassk to damaging other submarines, Ukraine has wielded an asymmetric advantage. This was facilitated by its use of missiles and drones. Military procurement can take years, whereas drones can be made overnight and also tested on the battlefield directly — exactly what Ukraine is doing. Putin's decision to strike a deal with a Chinese company .

Israel ready 'for any scenario' after strike kills Hamas deputy in Lebanon

on Tuesday evening, it was widely assumed to be behind the killing of Saleh al-Aruri, 57, the political number two of its enemy Hamas and one of the founders of the Islamist group's military wing



Tel Aviv Israeli army spokesman Daniel Hagari stated that the military is highly prepared for any scenario. Israel has vowed to destroy Hamas and labeled Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar as a "dead man walking". Amid the almost three-month-old war, Israel has traded almost daily cross-

border fire with the Lebanese armed group Hezbollah, an Iranian-backed ally of Hamas, while so far avoiding a full-scale war. Israel kept bombing Gaza on Wednesday after the army warned it is ready for "any scenario" following a drone strike in Lebanon which killed the deputy leader of the Palestinian militant group Hamas, stoking

attack, Israeli army spokesman Daniel Hagari said the military was in a "very high state of readiness in all arenas" and "highly prepared for any scenario". The Israeli armed forces again bombed Gaza targets overnight, including in the crowded southern city of Rafah where eyewitnesses said survivors flocked to Al-Najjar Hospital to mourn the dead, including a child. Israel has vowed to destroy Hamas after the militant group's bloody October 7 attack and has launched a relentless military campaign in Gaza that has claimed over 22,000 lives, according to the territory's health ministry. Israel has labelled Hamas's Gaza leader

Yahya Sinwar a "dead man walking" and vowed to also kill other commanders of the Islamist movement considered a "terrorist" group by the United States and European Union. Amid the almost three-month-old war, Israel has traded almost daily cross-border fire with the Lebanese armed group Hezbollah, an Iranian-backed ally of Hamas, while so far avoiding a full-scale war. Maha Yahya of think tank the Carnegie Middle East Center told that Aruri's killing was "a significant escalation" but added: "I don't think Hezbollah will be willing to drag Lebanon into a major conflict at this particular moment and time given the situation."

Nato to help buy 1,000 Patriot missiles to defend allies

Russia's latest round of attacks began Friday with its largest single assault on Ukraine of the conflict



BRUSSELS: Nato announced

Wednesday that it would help buy up to 1,000 Patriot missiles so that allies can better protect their territory as Russia ramps up its air assault on Ukraine. Nato's Support and Procurement Agency said it will support a group of nations, including Germany, the Netherlands, Romania and Spain, in buying the Patriots, which are used to defend against cruise and ballistic missiles as well as enemy

aircraft. According to industry sources, the contract could be worth around \$5.5 billion. The purchase could help allies free up more of their own defense systems for Ukraine. The agency said that "other user nations are expected to benefit from the conditions of the contract," without elaborating. "Russian missile and drone attacks on Ukrainian civilians,

cities and towns show how important modern air defenses are," Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said in a statement. "Scaling up ammunition production is key for Ukraine's security and for ours." As an organization, Nato provides only non-lethal support to Ukraine, but its members send weapons and ammunition individually or in groups. Russia's latest round of attacks began Friday.

Not just TTP: Pakistan now grappling with another deadly terror group

NEW DELHI: Pakistan, which has been dealing with a marked rise in deadly attacks by Tehreek-e-Taliban militants, is now also facing threat from another dreaded terror group: the ISIS. The country's interior ministry informed the Senate that ISIS has been trying to expand its presence in Pakistan even as the threat from TTP terrorists looms large over the security forces, especially since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. The ministry's statement came

as the Senate was briefed about the escalating influence and activities of the TTP in recent months and the inaction of the interim Afghan government led by the Taliban against the banned group. Due to the rise in TTP attacks, Pakistan last year decided to deport all undocumented refugees from the country, a move that impacted approximately two million Afghans. In a written response during the question hour, the ministry said that TTP's reorganisa-

tion and operational expansion during the peace talks in 2022 has significantly increased its militant activities. The TTP has said it wants to establish an Islamic caliphate in Pakistan, similar to what ISIS did in Syria. The ministry added that TTP is also seeking the support of other militant groups to increase strength and capabilities. "It is mostly concentrated in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, especially merged districts, with footprints in Balochistan."

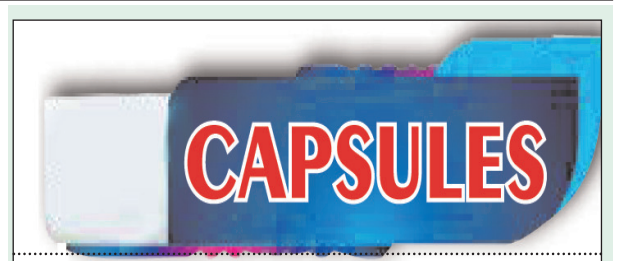
Pakistan: Complete shutdown strike observed in support of Baloch protest

BALUCHISTAN: In the wake of ongoing protests in Balochistan, a complete shutdown strike was observed in multiple areas of Pakistan against the extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances of Baloch people, the Yakjethi Committee said on Wednesday. In a social media post on X, the committee said, "Complete Shutter Down is being observed in Turbat on the call of Baloch Yakjethi Committee on the 41st of the movement against Baloch Genocide. State has tried it's best to sabotage this movement through threats, profiling, harassment and violence. But, We as a nation are committed to END BALUCH GENOCIDE." It added, "Today, entire Balochistan is testifying that this genocide and repression is no more. The ongoing shutter down strike across Pakistan and especially in Balochistan is a message to the state to stop its tricks and join the ongoing movement against Baloch

genocide. Take the demands seriously. Shutter-down strike scenes from Khuzdar." The shutdown was also observed in Islamabad, where people showed their support by voluntarily closing their shopping centres in support of the ongoing protest in Islamabad. Glimpses of Shutter-Down protest on the call of Baloch Yakjethi Committee were also seen in Noshki. People came out voluntarily to close their shopping centres in support of the Sit-In at NPC, Islamabad. Earlier on Tuesday, Baloch protestors called for a shutter-down strike across Pakistan on January 3, The Balochistan Post reported. The announcement about the shutdown strike comes at a time when protestors have been voicing their discontent over what they consider a dismissive attitude from state officials. The Baloch Yakjethi Committee (BYC), which has been organising these protest.

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

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



Controversial Ugandan pastor shot in 'murder attempt'

KAMPALA: An influential Ugandan pastor and outspoken supporter of President Yoweri Museveni was hospitalised after a shooting attack which killed his bodyguard, police said Wednesday. Aloysius Bugingo was shot on Tuesday evening when "unidentified assailants opened fire on (his) vehicle... before swiftly escaping the scene on a motorcycle", said Ugandan police. They said an investigation had been launched into "the attempted murder of Pastor Aloysius Bugingo... and the unfortunate killing of his bodyguard, Muhumuza Richard." Muhoozi Kainerugaba, the son of Museveni who is seen as the president's potential successor, said he had spoken with "our strong supporter" Bugingo, adding "and he is well". "He got slightly wounded in his left shoulder," he posted on X, formerly Twitter, calling the attack "heinous". Bugingo is a controversial figure in Uganda, where he is head of the House of Prayer Ministries -- one of the most influential Pentecostal churches in the religious East African country. He also has his own television and radio channels, which he uses to give unconditional support for Museveni, who has ruled Uganda since 1986. "Despite sustaining injuries during the attack, Pastor Aloysius Bugingo managed to transport the vehicle to Mulago Hospital," police added. "Regrettably, his bodyguard, Muhumuza Richard, succumbed to the assault and was confirmed dead upon arrival at the hospital." They said Bugingo was "undergoing medical treatment and is under close monitoring." Bugingo's support for the president -- and more recently Kainerugaba, too -- regularly attracts wrath from the opposition, who the pastor in turn openly criticises in sermons.

Ex-Pakistan PM Imran Khan charged with contempt of electoral watchdog: Lawyer

KARACHI: Former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan was charged on Wednesday with contempt of the electoral commission, his lawyer Naeem said, a move related to allegations he made derogatory remarks about the chief election commissioner. The 71-year-old former cricket star has been embroiled in political and legal battles since he was ousted as prime minister in April 2022. He has not been seen in public since he was jailed for three years in August for unlawfully selling state gifts while in office from 2018 to 2022. "The Election Commission indicted Imran Khan in the absence of lawyers," Khan's lawyer Haider Panjutha wrote on social media platform X. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) initiated contempt proceedings against Khan and other former leaders of his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, saying Khan and his colleagues .

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

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

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

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

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

JOHNSTON: Someone in Michigan has won an \$842.4 million Powerball jackpot on the first day of 2024, the first time it has been won on New Year's Day since the game's start in 1992. The winning numbers drawn were: 12, 21, 42, 44, 49 and red Powerball: 1. Final ticket sales pushed the jackpot beyond its earlier estimate of \$810 million to \$842.4 million at the time of the drawing, making it the fifth-largest Powerball jackpot and 10th-largest US lottery jackpot ever won. Before the big win on New Year's, the jackpot had been growing since

mid-October. The chance of winning the Powerball jackpot is 1 in 292.2 million. The lucky ticket holder will have the choice between an annuitized prize of \$842.4 million, payable over 30 years, or a lump sum payment of \$425.2 million. Both prize options are before taxes. Other top-winning tickets include four sold in California, Connecticut, Florida and Maryland, that matched all five white balls to win \$1 million prizes. Two tickets, from Florida and Texas, matched all five white balls and won \$2 million prizes by including the Power Play option for an additional

The migrants insulted the wives of veterans of the special military operation

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

Russian media reported. About 3,000 migrants were detained in Russia's second-largest city of St. Petersburg during checks "to prevent crime," Russia's RIA state news agency reported. "As it turned out, more than 600 of the migrants have been in Russia with various violations of migration legislation," RIA cited an unnamed law enforcement agency source as saying. More than 100 people faced deportation, RIA added. Russia's SOTA online news outlet said a man from Tajikistan who was dressed as a Santa Claus was among migrants detained in Moscow. In the west-central Russian city of Chelyabinsk, Russia's top investigative organ, the Investigative Committee, said it was opening a criminal case against three migrants for an "act of hooliganism" against Russian servicemen

and their wives. "A crowd of drunken migrants attacked two young men demobilized from the front line, one soldier was hit with a baton," the Committee said on the Telegram messaging app. "It is also noted that the migrants insulted the wives of veterans of the special military operation." Russia calls the war it unleashed on Ukraine in February 2022 a "special military operation." The Committee said it also opened investigation into "illegal actions of migrants" in the Sverdlovsk region in Russia's Ural mountains and in the Moscow region. Many migrants predominantly from neighbouring Central Asian countries such as Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia, come to Russia in

The government intervention of procuring kharif onion

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

Ram Temple breathes new life into suppressed & exploited civilisations worldwide: CM Yogi

Lucknow

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Wednesday, said that the construction of Ram Temple has breathed new life into suppressed and exploited civilisations worldwide. He added: "Our nationality is Indian, and religion Sanatan. Sanatan Dharma alone is the true path, while all other practices are methods of worship. Despite facing a variety of challenges, Sanatan Dharma has consistently progressed. The

essence of Sanatan is all-encompassing and vast, integrating everyone within itself. The saints have illuminated the path of Sanatan for us." Addressing the huge Bhandara Mahotsav of Shri Shri 1008 Shri Brahmaleen Ayas Ji Shri Yogi Kailashnath Ji Maharaj, the Chief Minister said that the country has a long tradition of accomplished yogis here, who have challenged science. "They rose above the limitations of the physical world and showed us a

new way of living. Our saints have made us experience the true values of Sanatan Dharma", CM Yogi remarked. He added further, "Sanatan faced challenges in some periods, but when the entire nation of Sanatan Dharma followers stood united, all issues came to an end." CM Yogi said that the construction work of the magnificent temple of Lord Shri Ram in Ayodhya is now complete. "After a span of 500 years, on January 22nd of this year.

UP govt receives National Award for excellent work in the field of ODOP

Delhi Lucknow/New Delhi

In yet another accomplishment for Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Uttar Pradesh has bagged first prize for its performance regarding One District One Product scheme. Government got awarded with the first prize in ODOP by the Central Government on

Wednesday. Union Ministers S. Jaishankar and Piyush Goyal presented the award to Amit Mohan Prasad, the Additional Chief Secretary of the Uttar Pradesh government at Bharat Pavilion in New Delhi on Wednesday. After receiving the award, Amit Mohan Prasad said that it was a memorable moment when Uttar Pradesh

was honoured with the first ODOP award at a ceremony held at Bharat Mandapam. This achievement has been possible due to the remarkable vision of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, who initiated this program in 2018, and all other states are now following suit, he added. It is noteworthy that on Wednesday itself.

Sky beckons: DGCA issues maximum pilot licences in 2023

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

293 — in the same period.

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

UP will be the most favorable state for semiconductor manufacturing units: Chief Minister

Chief Minister issues instructions to prepare the semiconductor policy of the state. Semiconductor manufacturing is a vast field, and Uttar Pradesh must seize the opportunity. Chief Minister Semiconductor manufacturing units will get financial and non-financial incentives? In a high-level meeting on Wednesday, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath gave instructions to prepare the semiconductor policy of the state. The Chief Minister highlighted the significant role of semiconductors in today's rapidly evolving

technology-driven era. According to estimates, the global semiconductor ecosystem is expected to have generated revenues exceeding \$950 billion in the fiscal year 2022. Certainly, this is a broad area with immense possibilities. The Chief Minister said that the semiconductor chip sector has announced an investment of more than \$500 billion for the last two years. Various reputed companies have announced the setting up of fabrication units. The Chief Minister said that to attract investment in the semiconduc-

tor sector, the Government of India has decided to provide an incentive outlay of 10 billion US dollars. For the semiconductor and display ecosystem, having fabrication units, mixed semiconductors, outsourced semiconductors, assembly and test units, testing, and packaging units creates a better ecosystem. We also need to create such an environment. The Chief Minister said that the Government of India is giving incentives for semiconductor manufacturing services like semiconductor fabs, display

Chief Minister considers Master Plan for the development of Aligarh



Chief Minister considers Master Plan for the development of Aligarh, Meerut, Azamgarh, Gorakhpur and Mathura-Vrindavan districts. It is necessary to develop inner Ring Road in all cities, prepare action plan. Chief Minister Dedicated clusters should be developed to encourage local crafts and traditional products. Chief Minister Give preference to electric buses in the city, conventional fuel buses should be kept out of the city as much as possible. Chief Minister Identify areas clearly in the Master Plan for Medicity, Sports City, Education City, Convention Center etc? The Master Plan 2031

for Gorakhpur, Azamgarh, Meerut, Aligarh and Mathura-Vrindavan districts was presented before Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath in a high-level meeting held at his official residence on Wednesday. The Chief Minister said that a comprehensive study should be conducted in view of the present situation and future needs of all the districts, so that we can take them into account in the Master Plan. Clusters should be developed to encourage local crafts and traditional products. The Chief Minister said that Inner Ring Road will have to be developed in all the cities

An Air India flight made a very heavy landing in Dubai

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

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

December 27 with its cruising altitude below 10,000 feet, indicating an unpressurised ferry. This means it came home for repairs after being allowed one landing which aircraft-makers allow after studying the digital flight data recorder (DFDR) to the airline's engineering base as a "substandard ferry (without passengers) flight." An Air India spokesperson said: "An investigation has already been initiated, as per DGCA norms. The pilot was appropriately trained and licensed to fly the aircraft. He has been off-rostered till the process of inquiry is on as per norms." The heavy landing happened when the aircraft operated as AI 933 from Kochi to Dubai. Flight tracking websites show that the next flight was to Mumbai on December 27. It has not flown since, as per flight tracking sites. Senior pilots who have operated

the A320 for decades say: "This aircraft made a landing into Dubai exceeding the manufacturer's landing gear structural limitation. It can cause extensive damage to the landing gear structure. Depending on the age of the aircraft and metal fatigue, a young plane may withstand that particular landing but for subsequent landings the structural integrity can fail leading to structural failure." Major engineering investigations have to be carried out before an aircraft that has suffered such a landing is released for further revenue passenger flights so as to ensure its structural integrity is intact. Aircraft-makers often allow airlines to operate a "substandard ferry back to major engineering base" on such planes from the place where they might have suffered damage during a hard landing after studying the digital flight.

Pakistan terrorists smuggling gold via Goa airports: DRI

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



Earthquake of magnitude 3.9 hits Jammu-Kashmir

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

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

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

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

New Delhi

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

Pakistan revealed their playing XI for the New Year's Test

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

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

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

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

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



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

Unchanged XI for Australia Australia, on the other hand, have decided to maintain an unchanged playing XI for the third Test, as confirmed by

skipper Pat Cummins on Tuesday.

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

Warner's farewell Test: The spotlight will be on veter-

eran opener David Warner, bidding farewell to Test cricket in front of his home fans at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

David has appealed for the return of his baggy green cap

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

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



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

pride and dedication throughout their Test careers.

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

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

Steve Waugh has voiced concerns over the future of Test cricket

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

Waugh, speaking to the Sydney Morning Herald, urged the International Cricket Council (ICC) and other administrators to intervene and safeguard the longest format of the game.

"Obviously they don't care. If the ICC or someone doesn't step in shortly, then Test cricket doesn't become Test cricket

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

Australia captain Pat Cummins expressed hope that South Africa's decision was just a phase and not indicative of a broader trend away from Test cricket. "I know the South African team aren't sending their strongest side; I'm hoping it's just a phase," Cummins commented. "I don't think it's as dramatic a decline as it sometimes gets spoken about, but I think there is an issue just with the amount of other cricket.

NEW DELHI: Seamer Mohammed Siraj delivered a career-defining performance, claiming an outstanding 6-15 as India capitalised on a lively wicket to dismantle South Africa's batting line-up. The visiting side successfully bowled out the hosts for a mere 55 runs, accomplishing the feat on the brink of lunch during the opening day of the second Test at Newlands in Cape Town on Wednesday. Siraj, who did it in a straight spell of nine overs, was ably supported by Jasprit

SA 8/2 in 5.3 overs: Returning just one over later, Siraj continued his impressive spell by dismissing Proteas skipper Elgar (4).

Bumrah (2-25) and Mukesh Kumar (2-0) as Indian pacers wreaked havoc after South African skipper Dean Elgar opted to bat in his swansong Test. Here is how the Indian pacers ripped apart South African batting in the first session of the second and final Test:

SA 5/1 in 3.2 overs: Siraj quickly zeroed in on the perfect line, executing a precise delivery that resulted in Aiden Markram's (2) dismissal, giving India its first breakthrough. Yashasvi Jaiswal showcased sharp fielding skills, securing the catch at third slip.

SA 8/2 in 5.3 overs: Returning just one over later, Siraj continued his impressive spell by dismissing Proteas skipper Elgar (4). In a poignant moment, Elgar, playing in his final Test before retirement, ended up chopping the ball onto his stumps, succumbing to Siraj's relentless bowling prowess. SA 11/3 in 8.3 overs: Bumrah enthusiastically joined the triumphant display as he skillfully had debutant Tristan Stubbs (3) caught at short leg, adding another wicket to India's dominant

How sizzling Siraj ripped apart South Africa's batting line-up in second Test

Surprised that South African skipper Dean Elgar chose to bat first: Gavaskar

NEW DELHI: Former captain Sunil Gavaskar expressed astonishment on Wednesday at South African skipper Dean Elgar's choice to bat first in the second Test against India in Cape Town. Elgar's decision did not go as planned, resulting in South Africa being dismissed for 55

runs, their lowest total against India. Although India initially seemed on track for a substantial lead, they encountered a collapse, losing their last six wickets for no runs and getting all out for 153, thereby limiting their first-innings advantage to 98 runs. Gavaskar's sur-

prise likely stems from the unexpected turn of events in the match.

"Well, I tell you what, I was a bit surprised by what happened," Gavaskar said in his match analysis on Star Sports. "Because a lot of times, captains and coaches make a big deal about what

the pitch is gonna be..." Gavaskar expressed the opinion that, having dominated India and won the opening Test within three days, South Africa had a perfect opportunity to assert their dominance by inserting India on a fresh pitch in the second Test. Gavaskar's view

likely reflects the strategic advantage South Africa could have gained by exploiting the conditions and putting India under pressure early in the match. However, the outcome of the match, with both teams facing challenges in their respective innings.

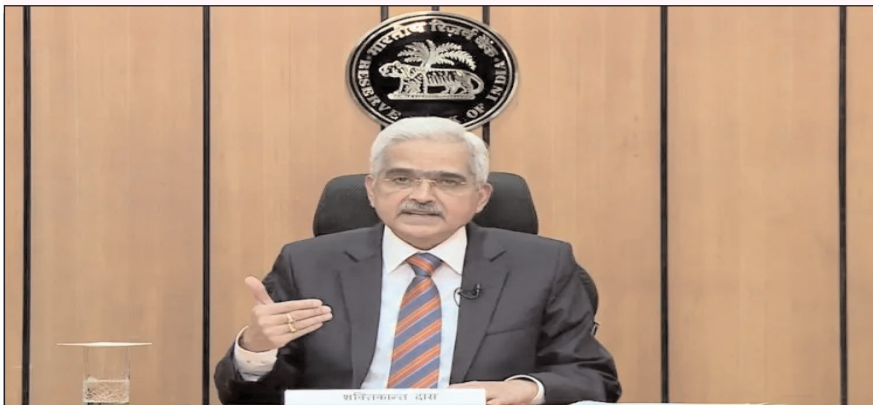


Cummins confirmed that the same winning team from the first two matches would take the field at the Sydney

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

The decision aims to bid farewell to veteran opener David Warner on a high note in his 112th and final Test, following convincing victories in Perth and Melbourne. Cummins, addressing the media on Tuesday, praised Warner as Australia's "greatest three-form player" and emphasized the veteran's significant contributions across formats. "Every time he walks out there, he's competitive, ready to go, so just a champion of Australian sport and hopefully he gets a good send-off this week," Cummins remarked. Warner, who announced his retirement from one-day internationals on Monday, leaves a notable void in the top order for Australia. Cummins did not reveal who would fill the opening position in the upcoming series against West Indies in January but cited Warner's current partner, Usman Khawaja, as an example of a non-specialist who earned his place in the team. On the other side, Pakistan captain Shan Masood faces the challenge of motivating his team after consecutive defeats. Masood acknowledged Australia's dominance but highlighted the positive aspects of Pakistan's performance in Melbourne. "We have to make sure that we're not making a lot of mistakes to close out games," Masood noted. Masood refrained from naming the playing XI on Tuesday due to some "fitness issues," but spinner Abrar Ahmed is in contention to play his first test of the tour, especially considering the possibility of a turning wicket in Sydney. "While acknowledging the significance of Warner's farewell, Masood expressed the team's focus on the game and their aim to challenge the Australian side. "Our job is to get David Warner out early," Masood said. "But we wish him all the best with this test match and what's to come forward for him as well."

Bank loans to NBFCs touched nearly Rs 15 lakh crore in November



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

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

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

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

Vedanta Resources seeks approval for a proposal to revise the terms of its dollar bonds

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



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

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

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

Maharashtra labour department sends notice to TCS over transfers

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

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

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

RBI draws up checklist for AI tech in banking

MUMBAI: RBI deputy governor Rajeshwar Rao has raised concerns over issue relating to fairness, transparency and governance in the use of artificial intelligence in banking. Speaking at the 106th annual conference of Indian Economic Association in Delhi last week, Rao said that despite the transformative potential of GenAI, there are potential impacts on productivity, jobs, and income distribution. While proponents expect widespread economic and societal benefits, sceptics point to concerns such as increased unemployment and challenges in resource reallocation during the transition. Rao outlined specific concerns and expectations for financial institutions deploying AI in their processes and decision-making. These include biases, robustness issues, data privacy, cybersecurity, consumer protection, and maintaining financial stability. He added that AI inherits biases and errors from its training data, making regular fairness audits essential. He highlighted the challenge of AI models being black boxes, making them difficult to decode for audit and supervisory reviews. "AI may also pose some novel challenges for governance, especially where the technology is used to facilitate autonomous decision-making and may limit or even potentially eliminate human judgement and oversight," said Rao. He outlined ten aspects for financial institutions deploying AI models, aiming to balance innovation and responsible technology use. These include fairness, transparency, accuracy, consistency, data privacy, explainability, accountability, robustness, monitoring, updating, and human oversight.

India's energy demand caught the winter chill in December

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



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

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

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

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

Services of audit cos under lens of NFRA

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



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

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

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

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

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

2023 proved to be a tough year for startups

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

With scarce funding and difficult investor questions



being posed around the viability of business models, startups laid off employees, shut cash guzzling verticals, made pivots, while a few players like Dunzo and Koo are struggling to stay afloat. The New Year is not expected to be widely different for startups - analysts see investor sentiment improving in another six to eight months but the bar for investments will continue to be high. "What is not going to change in 2024 is the investor caution. Investors will still ask tough

questions before writing cheques. Indiscriminate funding is not going to happen anymore," said Dipanjan Basu, co-founder and partner at Fireside Ventures. In a year where startups like Byju's, GoMechanic and Mojocare unravelled due to poor corporate governance, investors are taking a closer look at various business metrics before betting on firms. While a company's path to profitability will be key, governance is also going to be a big driver of funding in the years to come.

SUVs, the car industry crossed the psychological 4-million mark for the first time

● The industry, however, feels that going in the new year may not be as strong as in the previous years as the sales-base is now bigger, and backlogs are gone. "Going by the current analysis, it looks like growth would be muted and in single digits



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

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

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

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

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

The transaction count was 8% higher

MUMBAI: UPI transaction value went up 42% year-on-year to Rs 18 lakh crore in December, while volume rose 54% to 1,202 crore. The growth in UPI transaction volume stood at 7% when compared to the previous month. Average daily transactions under UPI touched 40 crore against the targeted 100 crore in three years by NPCI earlier this year. The volume of Fastag transactions touched 34.8 crore in December, up 13% year-on-year. The value of the transactions rose 19% to Rs 5,861 crore over the same period, and 10% higher than the Rs 5,539 crore recorded in November 2023 as Indians took to the road in record numbers during the Christmas vacation. The transaction count was 8% higher.