

• Navy foils ship hijacking bid

hijackers," the Navy said, adding that its "forceful warning" probably made the pirates abandon the hijacking attempt.

The crew members, locked inside the citadel of the vessel, were safely evacuated—a citadel refers to a designated area in a ship where the crew can seek protection in the event of a hijacking.

According to the Navy, the merchant vessel was kept under continuous surveillance using P-8I maritime patrol aircraft,

Predator MQ9B UAVs and integral helos (helicopters on a ship) before MARCOS personnel on the warship boarded the vessel and began sanitisation operations.

The Navy said the aircraft flew over MV Lila Norfolk early Friday morning, established contact and ascertained the safety of the crew. It said INS Chennai, on anti-piracy patrolling duty, was diverted to assist the vessel.

The overall situation, the Navy said, was closely monitored in coordination with other agencies in the area.

"The Indian Navy remains committed to ensuring safety of merchant shipping in the region along with international partners and friendly foreign countries," the Navy said in its statement.

This is the latest in a series of recent maritime incidents in the Arabian Sea. In December, the Indian Navy, responding to a piracy incident, had assisted a Malta-flagged vessel, MV Ruen, in the Arabian Sea, around 700 nau-

tical miles from the Indian coast.

On December 23, a Liberia-flagged merchant vessel, MV Chem Pluto, carrying a crew of 22, of which 21 were Indians, came under a drone attack around 220 nautical miles southwest of Porbandar, while it was on its way to New Mangalore.

The attacks, the Navy said, indicated a shift in maritime incidents closer to the Indian exclusive economic zone.

Aday after the MV Chem Pluto incident, a Gabon-flagged commercial oil tanker, MV Sai Baba, on its way to India with 25 Indian crew members also came under a drone attack in the southern Red Sea, along with another Norwegian-flagged ship.

In the wake of these incidents, the Navy increased maritime security and surveillance in the central and north Arabian Sea by deploying frontline destroyers, frigates as well as long-range maritime patrol aircraft.

Five warships—INS Kochi, INS Mormugao, INS Kolkata, INS Chennai and Talwar Class frigate have been deployed in the Arabian Sea off the Gulf of Aden.

Along with the warships, P8I maritime patrol aircraft, MQ-9B Predator drones and Dornier aircraft have been carrying out enhanced surveillance of the region.

As part of its surveillance efforts, the Navy is involved in active investigation of vessels in the Arabian Sea, including boarding of dhows.

• Higher govt spend & investment

was 2.9 per cent in 2002-03. It grew at 7.5 per cent in 2022-23. In contrast, government final consumption expenditure (GFCE) is seen sharply up at 4.1 per cent in FY24 as against 0.1 per cent in the previous year. Investments—as reflected in Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF)—are expected to stay at a high level of 10.3 per cent in FY24 as against 11.4 per cent in 2022-23.

The first advance estimates of GDP, obtained by extrapolation of data of the first seven-eight months of the ongoing financial year (FY24), are released early to help officers in the Union Ministry of Finance and other departments in framing the broad contours of Union Budget for the next financial year which is to be presented in Parliament on February 1.

Nominal GDP, which takes into account inflation, is estimated to grow at 8.9 per cent in 2023-24, sharply lower than 16.1 per cent, reflecting the deflation in the wholesale price index (WPI) that is used in calculating the GDP deflator. The annual GDP deflator growth is estimated to be at a 48-year low of 1.4 per cent in 2023-24, as per India Ratings. This is expected to affect the government's fiscal deficit calculations as the Union Budget for 2023-24 had assumed a nominal GDP growth of 10.5 per cent.

The First Revised Estimates of national income for 2022-23 are due for release on February 29 which may lead to revision in growth rate of first advance estimate for FY24, NSO said.

Both the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the government had earlier projected a growth rate of 6.5 per cent for FY24, but in its December policy, the RBI revised up the real GDP growth forecast to 7 per cent for FY24.

"Despite global headwinds, the growth momentum witnessed in FY24 is indicative of the Indian economy's resilience. However, the road ahead is not going to be easy so long as PFCE does not recover fully and become broad based. Here the key would be to watch the wage growth especially of the households belonging to the lower income bracket because that is what is critical for broad basing the consumption demand. The data shows that the real wage growth of households belonging to the lower income bracket was marginally negative in Q4FY24. Ind-Ra's calculation shows that a 1% increase in real wages could lead to a 1.12% increase in the real PFCE and the multiplier effect of this could result in a 6.4% increase in the GDP growth," India Ratings' Sunil Kumar Sinha and Paras Aslasi said in a note.

The per capita real GDP is expected to increase by 6.4 per cent in FY24, while per capita net na-

tional income is seen growing 6.3 per cent to Rs 1.05 lakh as against Rs 98,374 last year. "...during the pre pandemic years, the real per capita GDP growth was averaging 5.3%. Additionally, per capita PFCE in real terms will expand by 3.5% in FY24. The post pandemic average of per capita PFCE however is at 6.7%, against 5.5% in pre pandemic era," SBI's Group Chief Economic Adviser Soumya Kanti Ghosh said in a note.

Sectorally, manufacturing is seen growing at 6.5 per cent in FY24 as against 1.3 per cent growth in the previous year, while mining and quarrying is expected to grow at 8.1 per cent from 4.6 per cent. Construction is expected to post double-digit growth of 10.7 per cent. Agricultural output is, however, seen slowing down with 1.8 per cent growth in 2023-24 as against 4 per cent in the previous year. Services sector growth is also projected to moderate to 7.7 per cent in FY24 from 9.5 per cent growth in the previous year. While financial, real estate and professional services are seen growing at 8.9 per cent, higher from 7.1 per cent a year ago, trade, hotels, transport and communication services are seen growing at a slower rate of 6.3 per cent in FY24 than 14 per cent in the previous year.

This comes after the Indian economy had posted a higher-than-expected growth of 7.6 per cent in July-September as against 7.8 per cent in April-June. However, economists and the RBI have estimated a slowdown in the remaining two quarters of the financial year, which is expected to continue in FY25.

With the first advance estimates of GDP at 7.3 per cent for FY24, back of the envelope calculations show that the Indian economy is estimated to grow 7 per cent in October-March, slower than 7.7 per cent growth in April-September. Economists said GDP projections for the second half may be too optimistic.

"In our view, the growth assumed for H2 FY2024 is quite high, given the tepid outlook for agriculture amidst the weak kharif output and ongoing lag in rabi sowing, as well as the feared temporary slowdown in capex ahead of the General Elections," Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist, Head—Research and Outreach, ICRA said.

For the second half in FY24, the GDP projection of 7.3 per cent factors in a slowdown in PFCE at 4.4 per cent as against 4.5 per cent growth in the first half. The concerning aspect in the GDP data is the weak consumption growth at 4.4% (for FY24). This would be the slowest consumption growth in the past two decades barring the pandemic year of FY21..." Rajani Sinha, Chief Economist, CareEdge Ratings said.

FROM PAGE ONE

FULL REPORTS ON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

ED search team attacked by TMC leader's loyalists, Governor warns of action



Governor CV Ananda Bose visits one of the injured ED officers in a Kolkata hospital. PTI

resignation of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee saying law and order had "completely collapsed" in West Bengal, Governor Dr C V Ananda Bose warned the state government he would "explore" his constitutional options and take "appropriate action".

Describing the incident as "pre-election violence", Bose said: "If a government fails in its basic duty, then the Constitution of India will take its course. As governor, I explore all my constitutional options for appropriate action in an appropriate manner."

The Governor summoned state Chief Secretary B P Gopalika, Home Secretary Nandini Chakraborty and DGP Rajeev Kumar and sought a full report on the incident.

In the evening, Governor Bose visited the injured ED officers in hospital. Justice Abhijit Gangopadhyay of the Calcutta High Court also visited the hospital and met the ED officers.

Calling the incident "very unfortunate", the TMC blamed the ED for "intentionally trying to malign" the party's image.

TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh said, "The Sandeshkhali incident is very unfortunate. However, there is serious provocation from the part of Central agencies and Central forces. The agencies are provoking people by reaching different areas every day in the name of a raid under the BJP's instruction."

The ED statement said Sheikh's "mobile (phone) location at that time indicated that he was inside" the house.

As the ED team waited, a

large crowd, mostly supporters of Sheikh, gathered there and pushed away the CRPF personnel accompanying the search team.

The crowd overpowered the officers, vandalised their vehicles and blocked roads. An official said, "Three ED officers received injuries and have been admitted to a hospital. Those injured include an officer of Assistant Director rank."

Sources said the ED officers, who were bleeding, had to leave the area in an autorickshaw af-

ter their car was surrounded by the mob and vandalised.

A local resident told The Indian Express, "Sheikh's followers gathered outside his house in large numbers and manhandled and heckled jawans of the Central force. The locals vandalised the ED cars, threw stones at them too. Seeing the public reaction, the other ED officers left the spot but even after that, the crowd did not stop. Several people took to the streets with bricks and mortars. Some roads have been blocked."

"Everyone here, from young to old, calls him 'Bhai'. He has not just risen within the TMC in the past few years, but also in strength and muscle power... He is very popular. He commands one of the strongest 'teams' in the district. You know what I mean by team," says a TMC leader of Sandeshkhali block, seen close to him. "Shahjahan bhai," he adds, "is now a Godfather."

Sheikh joined the TMC in 2013, two years after it came to power, and was soon seen with the local leaders of the Sarberia Agarhati gram panchayat. In

Kolkata to Delhi, chorus in BJP: Mamata should quit, let NIA probe

"Notably, the Hon'ble Justice of Calcutta High Court, Shri Abhijit Gangopadhyay, remarked that this incident is a constitutional crisis, advocating for the governor's intervention and the implementation of President's Rule. There is also a strong appeal for the deployment of paramilitary forces to Sandeshkhali," he wrote.

In the High Court, when Justice Gangopadhyay was told about the incident by lawyer Sudipta Dasgupta, he remarked, "I was not aware of this incident. If such an incident happened, then ED officials can draw the attention of the Governor or the law and order situation."

TMC goons attacked ED officers... It is now being claimed that the Rohingya did this. It is shameless that under Banerjee, Bengal has become a synonym for jungle raj," he said. "This is the height of anarchy and goondaism. Even Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury of INDIA Alliance has said that this is a collapse of law and order."

TMC's Kunal Ghosh, however, said that "what happened in Sandeshkhali was a result of provocation".

"In West Bengal, central agencies and forces, on the instructions of the BJP, are going to the residence of one or the other TMC leader or worker to harass and provoke people. That's what happened in Sandeshkhali," Ghosh said.

He also criticised Justice Gangopadhyay's comments, calling them "offensive" and "insulting of the chair".

"People see ED, CBI as BJP. Now ED or CBI is not keeping the state government or the police in the loop. If the Chief Secretary was told, they can inform the agency about which areas are sensitive, where and what is happening at what time... Central agencies are conducting operations on their own without knowing this," Ghosh said.

State Industry Minister Sashi Panja said, "We do not encourage or support violence. But the BJP is targeting Bengal with its agenda. People understand this."

Asserting that there was complete "goondaism" in Bengal, BJR spokesperson

ED searches Pawar kin's firm

The money laundering investigation into Pawar's firm is related to allegations of diversion of cash and transfer of earnest payments to Hitech that bid, along with Baramati Agro, to purchase the ailing Kannan Sahakari Sakhar Karkhana.

ED sources said they are investigating allegations that Baramati Agro connived with Hitech to bid for Kannan SSK and manipulated the auction process. The factory, it is alleged, was taken over by Baramati Agro for Rs 50 crore, an undervalued price and suspected to be the result of a manipulated auction under the MSCB.

Reached for comments by The Indian Express, Rohit Pawar, who is the CEO of Baramati Agro, said he was not in India and had posted his reaction on X. His handle on X retweeted condemnations by other NCP leaders who called the ED action politically motivated.

He also posted a photograph of gods and Maharashtra icons and wrote: "The land of

Maharashtra has a long history of struggle... This is the face of a proud and progressive Maharashtra which preserved and developed Maharashtra Dharma for generations."

The MSCB scandal case relates to loans given to sugar factories, allegedly without following procedure, by officials of the MSCB even after they turned into non-performing assets and their subsequent sale to kin of the accused much below the market value.

The probe was initiated after a PIL was filed in the Bombay High Court flagging the alleged irregularities at the bank. An FIR was registered by the Economic Offences Wing and the ED too filed a motion for investigation.

In April last year, the ED filed its first chargesheet against Guru Commodity Services Pvt Ltd, Jarandeshwar Sugar Mills Pvt Ltd and chartered accountant Yogesh Bagrecha. In August, it filed two supplementary chargesheets in connection with the MSCB case.

• Courts must safeguard interests of courageous journalists: High Court

Justice Chitkara made the observations while disposing of the petitions filed by Manraj Grewal (then Deputy News Editor, The Indian Express), Vipin Pubby (then Editor, Chandigarh, The Indian Express), Swatantra Saxena (former Special Correspondent, Dainik Tribune) and Barinder Singh Hamdard (Managing Editor of Daily Ajit and Ajit Samachar).

The petitioners had moved the HC over the dismissal of the criminal revision petition by the Sessions Court of Gurugram, refusing to quash summons issued in a complaint filed for criminal defamation by Param Vir Rathore, a former Additional Director General of Police (CID) of Haryana, over the publication of a news article in 2008.

Among the contentions of the petitioners, Manraj Grewal, through his counsel, submitted

that this complaint has been pending since 2008, and the complainant delayed its proceedings.

She contended that she is not at fault, and is facing the trauma of criminal proceedings.

Justice Chitkara said a bare reading of the news published in The Indian Express points to investigative journalism where the complainant's version was also reflected. The complainant nowhere states that his version was incorrect mentioned or that the journalist had withheld its material as per Justice Chitkara noted.

Justice Chitkara said: "Before the journalist wrote the news, he took the complainant's view and mentioned it, which shows reasonableness and the best possible attempt to verify the information, which he cross-checked, ascertained, and explicitly mentioned the complainant's version to rule

out whether the facts were true or mere concocted lies or rumours."

"What else can we expect from a journalist? This cross-checking and altogether mentioning the complainant's version demonstrates that the reporter acted with reasonable care and a sense of responsibility and decency. The reporting itself proves by a preponderance of probability of due care and caution, and there is no reason why it should not be accepted as the discharging of their burden by the petitioner under Section 106 of the Indian Evidence Act, 1872," noted Justice Chitkara in the order.

The Bench added: "The reporter of The Indian Express had explicitly mentioned the complainant's denial and the corroboration of such denial from the SP Panchkula. A wholesome and complete reading by an ordinary

• Meet TMC's Shahjahan Sheikh

his kangaroo courts.

It's been a steady rise up the Trinamool Congress ranks and a swifter climb up the power stakes for Sheikh over the past 10 years. This has coincided with the party's time in government, and with the springing up of several such heavyweights, muscling their way in where the Left once called the shots.

The BJP has had a brush with him too. In June 2019, just after the last Lok Sabha polls, BJP and TMC workers clashed in Sandeshkhali, under which Sheikh's village Sarberia falls. A BJP worker and a TMC worker were killed in the clash, and Sheikh was among those named in a murder FIR. His name was later removed from the chargesheet which the police submitted in court.

Sheikh would have seen Friday's ED raid coming, being a close associate of former minister and North 24 Parganas TMC district president Jyoti Priya Mullick, who was earlier arrested in an alleged ration scam.

While attempts to reach Sheikh on Friday were unsuccessful, leaders of the TMC, which claims a witch-hunt by the Central agencies against it, were more than happy to talk about the man who thwarted an ED team.

"Everyone here, from young to old, calls him 'Bhai'. He has not just risen within the TMC in the past few years, but also in strength and muscle power... He is very popular. He commands one of the strongest 'teams' in the district. You know what I mean by team," says a TMC leader of Sandeshkhali block, seen close to him. "Shahjahan bhai," he adds, "is now a Godfather."

Sheikh joined the TMC in 2013, two years after it came to power, and was soon seen with the local leaders of the Sarberia Agarhati gram panchayat. In

2018, he became the up-pradhan of the panchayat and his rise in the party began.

Sheikh is now the sabhapati of the Sandeshkhali unit of the TMC, and last year won a zilla parishad seat. He is also North 24 Parganas's 'Matsa Karmadhakshya, that is, in-charge of the district's fishery development.

That appointment was not surprising given Sheikh's ownership of a string of fishery units in the area, falling in the Sunderbans, as well as brick kilns.

The two are the most predominant local businesses, a source pointed out. "Sheikh owns a number of brick kilns and controls over 200 bighas of fisheries. He also owns or controls local wholesale fish markets, and a processing centre for baby shrimps, which he delivers to fish farmers throughout Bengal."

Now, the family—including two other brothers who are too with the TMC—is also said to dabble in land dealings.



Scan for more information

Hamara Sankalp Viksit Bharat

Modi Sarkar ki Guarantee

PM Fasal Bima Yojana becomes safety net for farmers

Claims worth ₹1 lakh 50 thousand crore paid to 16 crore farmers


'FARISHTEY DILLI KE' SCHEME

SC seeks L-G affidavit on Delhi govt plea over funds

New Delhi: With Delhi L-G V K Saxena stating that he is "not involved in any manner" in the Farishtey scheme, which extended cashless medical treatment for road accident victims, the Supreme Court on Friday sought an affidavit from him on a plea by the Delhi government, alleging stoppage of funds for the project post the enactment of the new law by the Centre on control of services in the National Capital Territory. A bench of Justices B R Gavai and Sandeep Mehta cautions the Delhi government that it would impose exemplary costs if it came to light that the court had been taken for a ride.

The bench was hearing a plea by the AAP government which sought immediate re-operationalization of the scheme by release of pending bills and timely payments to private hospitals; and initiation of disciplinary action and suspension proceedings against the "defaulting officials" whom it claimed were "responsible for deliberately orchestrating the de-operationalization of the scheme".

The SC had issued notice to the L-G in the matter on December 8, 2023. Taking it up Friday, the bench told senior Advocate Sanjay Jain, appearing for the L-G, "ask your L-G not to make every issue a prestige issue."

Jain told the bench that the "L-G is not involved in any manner" and added, "It is not a matter where there was an issue between the Council of Ministers and L-G."

The senior counsel pointed out that it is run by a society headed by the Delhi Health Minister who "had a meeting on January 2 and released funds." ENS

Stated the order, "Till date, the

Two accused of aiding man who 'supplied explosives to Maoists' acquitted after 13 yrs

NIRBHAY THAKUR
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 5

KHEM PRASAD, 47, who sells momos in Rajender Nagar, was recently acquitted in a case where he allegedly aided a man named Lok Nath Panth who supplied explosives to Maoists in Nepal. Around 500 detonators were recovered from Panth's possession. Prasad spent 7-months in jail in 2010.

The Indian Express learnt looking at official court documents that the case spanned for 13 years over 83 hearings.

Cardboard boxes, which allegedly had around 80 explosives were recovered from his house, as Prasad had let Panth stay with him for two to three days. While one witness told the court that there were 81 boxes with explosives printed on it, another witness said that there were 79 boxes with super plane detonators printed on them.

Pointing out this contradiction in the two statements by witnesses, Tis Hazari Court Judge Jaginder Prakash Nahar held that the recovery of the boxes was doubtful. While acquitting Prasad earlier in December last year, Judge Nahar also noted that there was no explanation about other

Bidhuri urges CM to close liquor, meat shops on January 22

New Delhi: Leader of the opposition in the Delhi Legislative Assembly, Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, has urged CM Arvind Kejriwal to order the closure of liquor and meat shops in the city on the day of the consecration ceremony of Lord Rama's idol in Ayodhya on January 22. "This is a historic and significant day... decorations will be done in all temples, lamps will be lit, people will be in the devotional mood. If meat and liquor shops are open on this day, it will hurt the sentiments of millions of people," the LOP said. ENS

GK MEDICAL CENTRE ACCUSED GETS BAIL

'Surgery notes insufficient to prove role in conspiracy'

ARNABJIT SUR

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 5



(Right) Dr Jaspreet Singh Bajwa, one of the prime accused in Aggarwal Medical Centre case, was granted bail on December 21. Express

police has not been able to trace out any other case of similar nature against Dr Bajwa. In the absence of any relevant material, this court is constrained to hold that at this stage, the theory of prosecution regarding involvement of Dr Bajwa in the 'conspiracy' despite having availed more than an year of investigation does not have any substance."

The judge further said the relevant communications between accused Dr Bajwa and Dr Neeraj and others began only after the condition of Ali deteriorated. "The conduct of accused Dr Bajwa is highly unethical and may expose him to a prosecution under the appropriate provisions of chapter XI of IPC, but the same is insufficient to assume culpability under IPC section 120B read with section 304," added the order.

'Used credentials behind back'

Arguing for Dr Bajwa, Advocate Sumant Narang stated that he was not available at the Aggarwal Medical Centre during the operation of Ali.

He further stated that Dr Neeraj used Dr Bajwa's name and

credentials behind his back in order to lure patients. He further stated that Dr Bajwa did not provide any false "surgery notes" to Dr Neeraj, who provided the same to police during probe, but even if that were to be the case, Dr Bajwa is only liable to be prosecuted under IPC section 201 (Causing disappearance of evidence of offence and giving fake information).

The Additional Public Prosecutor in the case, Prayag Dutt Pandey, argued that as per relevant documents, Dr Bajwa had issued the surgery notes dated September 19, 2023, in respect of deceased Ali.

On October 12, Dr Bajwa orally informed the police that he has not conducted any surgery upon Ali and has merely prepared surgery notes at the request of Dr Neeraj. CCTV footage of Dr Bajwa's hospital in Faridabad and Sarai toll also showed that he was not present in Delhi at the time of the surgery. Four persons, including Dr Neeraj, Dr Pooja, lab technician Mahender and Dr Bajwa, were arrested by the Delhi Police in November last year following the death of two patients, including Ali, after alleged botched-up medical procedures.

The bench was hearing a plea by the AAP government which sought immediate re-operationalization of the scheme by release of pending bills and timely payments to private hospitals; and initiation of disciplinary action and suspension proceedings against the "defaulting officials" whom it claimed were "responsible for deliberately orchestrating the de-operationalization of the scheme".

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Delhi shivers on 2nd 'cold day', power demand hits all-time high

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 5

PEAK WINTER POWER DEMAND IN MW

2017-2018	4,511
2018-2019	4,472
2019-2020	5,343
2020-21	5,021
2021-22	5,104
2022-23	5,526
2023-24	5,559

WITH DELHI recording significantly below normal maximum temperatures for the second consecutive day on Friday, the city's power demand hit the highest-ever peak recorded in winter.

Delhi recorded a 'cold day' on Friday, with a maximum temperature of 14.6 degrees Celsius, five degrees below the normal for this time of the year.

With Friday's maximum temperature only being a little above 12.5 degrees recorded on Thursday, which was the season's coldest day so far, Delhi's power demand on Friday hit highest-ever peak recorded in winter months – 5,559 MW at around 11 am.

The peak power demand on Friday surpassed what was the previous record of 5,526 MW recorded on January 6 last year.

Data from the BSES shows that

Delhi's peak power demand in the winter has remained below 5,000 MW from the 2015-16 winter to the 2018-19 winter. This winter, the peak power demand is expected to hit 5,760 MW.

Delhi's DISCOMS – BRPL and BYPL – met peak power demands of 2,379 MW and 1,136 MW respectively on Friday. Last winter, BRPL dealt with a peak demand of 2,338 MW, while BYPL handled a peak of 1,181 MW.



'Cold day' conditions set to persist in Delhi on Saturday. Praveen Khanna

DDA e-auction: 138 super HIG flats, 7 penthouses booked

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 5

THE Delhi Development Authority's (DDA) e-auction for its premium high-end flats garnered a total of 274 bookings on the first day of the e-auction. The DDA had announced the sale in late November last year and it was conducted exclusively through the e-auction mode.

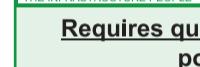
DDA officials said that 129 MIC, 138 Super-HIG, and seven penthouses have been booked on the first day. The authority had received 296 bookings of which 274 have been confirmed sales. "Premium received was as much as 80% in some cases," said one DDA official.

As per DDA, the land authority recovered over 69,94 crore rupees as premium in sales, with Rs 61.5 crore from sale of Super HIG flats alone. The penthouses managed to rake in a premium of 2.12 crore rupees.

RITES LIMITED

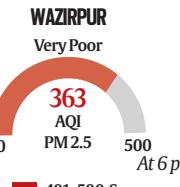
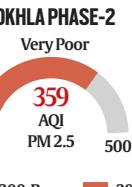
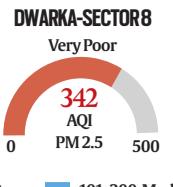
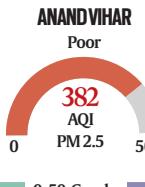
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THE INFRASTRUCTURE PEOPLE



S K Y W A T C H
FORECAST: January 6
Cloudy. Moderate to dense fog in the morning. Cold day conditions at a few places.
AQI: Very poor
MAX: 15 0.4°C below normal | **MIN: 09** 1.1°C above normal

BRIEFLY

Wanted for 13 yrs, Hizbman sent to custody

New Delhi: A Delhi court on Friday sent alleged Hizbul Mujahideen terrorist Javaid Ahmed Mattoo to seven-day police custody. Mattoo, who has been in the wanted list for 13 years, has 11 terror-related cases against him in J&K. According to police, they received information a few days ago that a wanted terrorist from Kashmir would come to Delhi to collect arms. "We found he was doing this at the behest of Pakistan's ISI. We also found that his Pakistan-based handler would carry out terror strikes in Kashmir," an officer had earlier alleged.

MCD achieves ODF status

New Delhi: MCD has achieved the Open Defecation-Free ++ (ODF++) status and a 1-Star Garbage Free City (GFC) rating in the rankings of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban), the corporation announced Friday. This is the first time that the MCD has received both the GFC 1-Star Rating Certificate and the ODF++ certificate. ENS

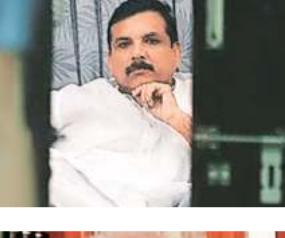
THREE SEATS FALLING VACANT THIS MONTH

Swati Maliwal is AAP RS pick; Singh, ND Gupta renominated

MALLICA JOSHI & JATIN ANAND
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 5



(Clockwise from above) DCW chairperson Swati Maliwal on Friday, Sanjay Singh, and ND Gupta. PTI/Archive/X



AAP's UP in-charge.

AAP has alleged that Singh was arrested in a "fake" case as he was the BJP government's most vocal critic in the Upper House; he was also the party's point-person for coordination with other Opposition parties and leaders in Parliament.

Maliwal, 39, is the first woman candidate to be nominated to the Upper House by the AAP.

A Delhi court on Thursday, meanwhile, allowed Sanjay Singh to sign his renomination documents from jail. Singh, who was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in a case related to the Delhi excise policy, is

summons. "We do not want to ruffle many feathers at this time. If we did not renominate Sanjay Singh, it would send the wrong message that the party has abandoned him. We want to exhibit support for party leaders who are being targeted by the BJP through investigation agencies," an AAP leader said.

According to sources, while the party leadership toyed with the idea of nominating two new faces, the apprehension that Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal may be arrested by the ED got them rethinking. The procedure related to the nomination of the three Rajya Sabha MPs from Delhi was cited as a reason by Kejriwal for skipping Wednesday's ED

schedule.

Maliwal began a career in activism at a young age and has been an active advocate for women's rights and social issues. She has also been associated with various campaigns and movements aimed at combating violence against women, advocating for stricter laws, and promoting gender equality.

In 2015, she was appointed as the DCW chairperson — the youngest to chair a women's commission in the country at the age of 31. She has been instrumental in spearheading initiatives to address issues such as acid attacks, sexual harassment, and women's safety in Delhi.

SAMAN HUSAIN
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 5

THE DELHI Commission for Women (DCW) released its eight-year achievement report highlighting a significant rise in caseload on Friday, which coincided with the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) announcement of sending its chairperson, Swati Maliwal, to the Rajya Sabha on the same day.

"Swati Maliwal, after assuming charge of the commission in 2015, has worked towards rebuilding and transforming the commission. She revived the commission's programmes and increased its grassroots network to assist distressed women round-the-clock," the report stated.

Around 1.7 lakh cases that have been handled during this period include various gender-related crimes such as rape, dowry issues, domestic violence, honour killings, and human trafficking.

Under Maliwal's leadership, the DCW conducted numerous hearings, totalling 41,484 cases and rescued over 2,500 survivors from sex trafficking, the report said. DCW also intervened in critical situations such as Manipur violence, advocating for necessary actions and probe, it added. "Responding to a disturbing and brutal ethnic violence in

Manipur, Maliwal and DCW member Vandana Singh visited the state from July 23 to July 26, 2023, to assist the survivors, making DCW the first government agency to visit the violence-torn state..." the report stated.

In addition to this, several initiatives were launched, including the Mahila Suraksha Yatra, a 13-day foot march across Delhi to fight trafficking and sexual exploitation, which brought together over 5,000 women, it said.

Additionally, movements like "Rape Roko", which was in response to the brutal rape of an eight-month-old girl in Delhi, mobilised public support to urge time-bound death penalties for child rapists. According to the DCW report, the initiative gathered support from more than 5.5 lakh people, who appealed and wrote to the Prime Minister of India within 30 days, while 15,000 citizens assembled to form a human chain as part of "Rape Roko" demonstration.

According to the achievement report, the DCW has provided aid to 1,97,479 survivors in Delhi courts, they have exposed illegal acid sales resulting in the seizing of over 1,000 litres of concentrated acid and has contributed to safety measures for women online, besides extending relief to survivors from the LGBTQIA+ community and supporting parents in finding their missing children.

NIRBHAY THAKUR
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 5

FIVE OF the six accused in the Parliament security breach case gave their consent to undergo a polygraph test even as a Delhi court on Friday extended their police custody by eight days.

The Delhi Police Special Cell had moved an application seeking permission to conduct a polygraph or lie detector test on all the six accused in front of Additional Sessions Judge Hardeep Kaur and sought to conduct brain mapping and narcotics tests on accused Manoranjan D and Sagar Sharma.

While accused Lalit Jha, Mahesh Kumawat, Arnol Shinde, Manoranjan and Sharma gave their consent, accused Neelam Azad denied consent for the polygraph test.

Special Public Prosecutor Akhand Pratap Singh told the court that a Forensic Science Laboratory report on data recovered from the mobile phones of the accused will be ready on Monday.

EXTORTION SCAM EFFECT

Police remove details of missing persons' relatives from ZIPNET

ARNABJIT SUR

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 5

The list, though, still contains the address of the kin of the victims and the contact number of the IO, apart from the police station under the jurisdiction of which the person went missing.

According to official sources, following the death of Pramod, the health department, coming down heavily upon the management at the two hospitals, asked the CMOs concerned to submit a report in the matter. "They have been asked to report as to when the patient came to the hospital, the doctor who attended to him, the time he spent waiting to get treatment, CCTV footage, and

Chauhan, a BCA graduate, was arrested from Uttar Pradesh's Mai for allegedly sourcing information from ZIPNET, a database intended for inter-state police coordination, and calling up at least 904 families in a span of three months, where he claimed that he was from police or the missing persons' cell and had the missing child in his custody.

He would, thereafter, allegedly ask for money for fuel reimbursement for his vehicle or simply in lieu of sharing the missing child's location. After receiving the money on his UPI account, he would immediately cut the call or claim that the child has fled his custody, DCP (North) Manoj Kumar Meena had earlier said.

Said the officer, "Following this, the changes were made within a week and the list now does not contain the phone numbers of the kin of the missing persons."

The list, however, contains the address of the kin of the victims and the contact number of the investigating officer (IO) of the case, apart from the police station under the jurisdiction of which the person went missing.

Said the officer quoted above, "The accused commonly misuses the contact details and calls up the family of the victim in a bid to threaten and extort money from them on the pretext of knowing their location... apart from Chauhan's case, an earlier

Assault accused denied admission: Suspension of 4 docs recommended

GAYATHRI MANI
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 5

DAYS AFTER a 47-year-old sexual assault accused succumbed to his injuries after allegedly being denied treatment at four government hospitals following a road accident, Delhi Health Department has recommended suspension against four doctors from Guru Teg Bahadur (GTB) Hospital and Lok Nayak Hospital for denying treatment to him "despite having beds".

According to official sources, following the death of Pramod, the health department, coming down heavily upon the management at the two hospitals, asked the CMOs concerned to submit a report in the matter. "They have been asked to report as to when the patient came to the hospital, the doctor who attended to him, the time he spent waiting to get treatment, CCTV footage, and

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The health dept will also write to the Delhi Medical Council to inform the body about the alleged negligence

the doctor on duty who allegedly denied treatment and admission to the patient," they added.

The department will also write to the Delhi Medical Council (DMC) to inform the body about the alleged medical negligence. "The patient was first taken to JPC hospital where he was intubated and sent to GTB... GTB hospital then sent him to LNJP... One of the hospitals refused to give the patient even a stretcher to lie on while waiting for a doctor. This is a basic facility one hospital has to provide in emergency cases... We also got information that the hospitals had vacant beds and despite that, they refused to admit the pa-

tient..." a source said.

Sources further said, "Be it an

accused or any other person, a hospital should provide treatment to people from any background..."

Said a source, "We will also be writing to DMC for medical negligence... The recommendation for disciplinary action and suspension against the four doctors (two from GTB and two from LNJP) will be sent to the National Capital Civil Services Authority (NCCSA) for further approval," said the senior official. NCCSA is a three-member committee chaired by the Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and two members — the Chief Secretary and Principal Secretary, Home.

The incident took place on Tuesday when the accused was being taken to the police station in a PCR van. However, he opened the window of the vehicle and tried to jump out in a bid to flee from the police. As a result, he fell on the road and sustained head injuries.

Pahuja, who was arrested in 2016 for allegedly providing information to Haryana Police on the whereabouts of Gadoli — leading to him being killed in an alleged fake encounter at a Mumbai hotel — was shot dead inside a hotel in Gurgaon Tuesday, police said.

Three people, including the owner of the City Point Hotel, Abhijeet Singh (56), were arrested in the case Wednesday.

With the body yet to be found three days after the alleged murder, Jyotsna said the attitude of Gurgaon police in the case has been lackadaisical.

Divya Pahuja

for eight years, Jyotsna, Gadoli's sister, said Pahuja was the main witness and accused in the encounter, and her murderer is a grave matter. "We have nothing to do with this murder and the police should check the possible connection of another gangster (Bindi Gujjar) who has links with the accused," she said.

Meanwhile, police are yet to trace the body of Pahuja, or locate the whereabouts of the two accused who were allegedly tasked with disposing of it.

Stating that the family has been fighting the battle in court

harm herself in the process," the HC observed.

The HC further referred to the Supreme Court's decision in X vs. Principal Secretary, Health and Family Welfare Department, Government of NCT of Delhi and Another and said that the apex court had held that "it is the prerogative of each woman to evaluate her life and arrive at the best course of action in view of the change in material circumstance and also in view of the fact that the right to reproductive choice also includes the right not to procreate".

The HC, thereafter, opined that at this juncture, the woman should be permitted to terminate her pregnancy "because allowing the petitioner to con-

tinue with the pregnancy can impair the mental stability of the petitioner as she is showing suicidal tendencies".

"Accordingly, the petitioner

is permitted to undergo the procedure for termination of her pregnancy at AIIMS. AIIMS is requested to conduct the procedure even though the Petitioner

has crossed her gestation period of 24 weeks," the HC said, making it clear that the order had been passed in the "peculiar facts and circumstances" of the case and the same should not be treated as a precedent.

Since the gestation period of

the petitioner was over 24 weeks, she was not allowed to medically terminate her pregnancy. The petitioner, thus, approached the HC.

Terming it an exemplary exercise, Saxena took to X, formerly Twitter, to say that the move will ensure safer pedestrian movement and reduce traffic jams on the important arterial road, which connects north and south Delhi.

"It will bring major relief to residents and commuters of heavily congested areas like Eid Gaah, Sadar Bazar, Azad Market, Model Basti, Pul Bangash & Motia Khan among others. My salute to the civic spirit of the Temple Management," Saxena said. ENS

MHA asks CBI to conduct inquiry into 'substandard drugs, mohalla clinic scam'

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 5

THE UNION Home Ministry Friday asked the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to conduct an inquiry into alleged supply of substandard medicines in Delhi government hospitals, and whether the drugs were also distributed through mohalla clinics.

A source said the MHA has forwarded the letter along with a complaint copy received from Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena, who recommended CBI inquiry into the matter in December last year, to the central agency. "Data clearly revealed that fake lab tests were carried out at these mohalla clinics that need to be further inquiries," an official from the L-G's office said.

After receiving the complaint, the CBI will conduct a preliminary enquiry and if they find anything amiss, they would register an FIR in the case, sources said.

Only the digit "0" being entered in the section meant for mobile numbers in 11,657 cases; the space left blank in 8,251 cases; and mobile numbers of 3,092 patients entered as 9999999999 are some of the methods allegedly employed at seven mohalla clinics in Delhi to get lakhs of tests conducted on dummy patients, payments for which were made to private diagnostic firms, as per an inquiry by the Vigilance department.

The L-G's office claimed the scam runs into hundreds of crores.

Temple brings down gate to make way for traffic, L-G hails initiative

New Delhi: After Lieutenant Governor (L-G) VK Saxena's intervention, the ancient Jhandewalan Mandir on Rani Jhansi Marg has voluntarily brought down its gate beside the foot over bridge, Raj Niwas said Friday.

Terming it an exemplary exercise, Saxena took to X, formerly Twitter, to say that the move will ensure safer pedestrian movement and reduce traffic jams on the important arterial road, which connects north and south Delhi.

"It will bring major relief to residents and commuters of heavily congested areas like Eid Gaah, Sadar Bazar, Azad Market, Model Basti, Pul Bangash & Motia Khan among others. My salute to the civic spirit of the Temple Management," Saxena said. ENS

Health secy hits back as minister says he didn't follow orders

GAYATHRI MANI
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 5

THE ONGOING tussle between Health Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj and the health secretary over the supply of allegedly spurious drugs at the Delhi government hospitals and mohalla clinics came to a head Friday after the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) referred the matter to the CBI.

Welcoming the move, Bharadwaj reiterated that he had ordered the audit of drugs in circulation at such facilities as soon as he took on the portfolio, alleging that the "health secretary did not comply" with his directions.

Breaking his silence, Health Secretary SB Deepak Kumar, against whom the minister has levelled allegations ranging from seeking to



DELHI CONFIDENTIAL



BIRTHDAY BASH

AMID THE allegations of sexual harassment and the row over the election — which was later suspended — of his close confidant Sanjay Singh as the president of Wrestling Federation of India, BJP's Kaiserganj MP Brij Bhushan Sharai Singh is holding a week-long celebration to mark his birth anniversary in his home district Gonda. As part of the celebrations, a singing competition — 'Suron Ki Mahasamagam Gayan Grand Finale Championship' — was started on a college campus run by Singh on January 1 and it will conclude on January 7. Singh will give cash prizes to the winners on January 8, his birthday. Singh is also organising a talent search competition in which the selected students will be given a scooter and a motorbike along with cash prize. A BJP leader said Singh has organised such programmes on his birthday in the past too.

SILENT CHANGE

THE ELECTION Commission is quite pleased with a change it has been able to effect, though officers claim it has gone unnoticed. According to them, in the last year, there have been no videos showing the custody chain of EVMs being compromised after the voting process. During the last Lok Sabha elections and some Assembly elections held thereafter, social media was abuzz with videos of voting machines found in "unauthorised locations". No such incidents have been recorded in the last two cycles of Assembly elections. Apparently, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar has made it known that there will be no tolerance for any rookie mistakes regarding the transportation of EVMs. Election officers claim the message has trickled down.

EC dismisses INDIA concerns, replies to Cong's Ramesh: Full faith in use of EVMS

DAMINI NATH
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 5

DISMISSING OPPOSITION concerns, the Election Commission said Friday that EVMs and VVPATs complied with the legal framework "strengthened by Governments over the past 40 years". While highlighting that various aspects of the VVPAT system were "sub-judge", it said it had "full faith" in EVMs.

The poll panel's remarks came after Congress leader Jairam Ramesh wrote to it on December 30, saying the Opposition INDIA bloc's concerns over the EVMs and VVPATs had not been addressed despite several representations and requests for a meeting since August.

One such request, he said, was sent to the EC on December 20, a day after INDIA bloc leaders held a meeting where they raised doubts about the integrity of EVMs and passed a resolution calling for "100% counting" of VVPAT slips.

A senior Congress leader, however, took a different line and called the issue of "100% counting" secondary. "The EC is obfuscating. The main point is that voters should be given the VVPAT slip so they can touch it, feel it, verify it and then deposit it into a box. This way there will be two 'sources of truth': one, the box with VVPAT slips and two, the EVM control unit," Praveen Chakravarty, the chairman of the Professionals Congress, told *The Indian Express* Friday.

"The demand for 100% counting is secondary, but the current process of stratified ran-

domised sample to verify meets robust statistical standards. The real concern is that as per various surveys 25-30% of voters don't have faith in the EVM..." said Chakravarty, who also heads the Congress's data analytics department.

Replying to Ramesh Friday, the EC said his latest letter did not "mention any specific issues on VVPATs". It referred him to its website, including the FAQs section, which "cover all reasonable and legitimate aspects of use of EVMS". The FAQ section of the EC website was updated again Thursday.

Earlier on August 23, weeks after it received a memorandum from the INDIA bloc, the EC had directed the alliance counsel to refer to the FAQ section for answers — in his letter to the EC, Ramesh called it "generic".

On VVPATs, the EC said the mechanism was introduced on August 14, 2013, and that various aspects of it were "sub-judge before the Supreme Court".

The Supreme Court is hearing a petition seeking 100% counting of VVPAT slips, as opposed to the current 2%. The EC has told the top court that it opposes 100% counting as it would amount to going back to paper ballots.

In its letter, the EC also included the results of the elections held since 2004 when EVMs were used across the country for the first time.

"Based on the outcomes of the elections conducted using EVMs, legal framework, established jurisprudence, technical security and administrative safeguards, (Election) Commission has full faith in use of EVMs in election," it said.

NEW DELHI MUNICIPAL COUNCIL PARKING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER

NDMC invites e-tenders (Technical & Financial Bids separately) from the eligible qualified firms as per the eligibility conditions mentioned in the RFP for Selection of Financial & Transaction Advisor for Assessment and Monetization of Parking Facilities i.e. to identify & consolidate parking facilities existing / proposed for development for the NDMC, undertake technical and financial feasibility assessment, and assist NDMC in preparation of bid documents for the Project & appointing a Concessionaire for developing the same on PPP mode.

The last date of submission of bid is 27th January 2024 (1500 hours (IST)). The details / documents can be downloaded from the website www.ndmc.gov.in or e-procurement website of GNCTD <http://govtprocurement.delhi.gov.in>. The bidder/s may visit aforementioned websites to check further corrections/amendments, if any and for online submission of their bid on e-procurement website as per the Request for Proposal (RFP).

Sd/-
Joint Director (PMS)

India committed to redefining ties with neighbourhood partners: EAM in Nepal

Says India has decided to extend aid package for quake-hit areas

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE & DIVYA A

KATHMANDU, NEW DELHI, JANUARY 5

INDIA UNDER the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi is committed to redefining its relationship with partners in its neighbourhood, especially Nepal, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said in Kathmandu on Friday.

His remarks came a day after the two countries signed a slew of pacts during a meeting of the 7th India-Nepal Joint Commission, including an agreement for India to import 10,000 MW of hydroelectricity over the next 10 years.

India has also decided to extend a financial package of Nepali Rs 1,000 crore (or USD 75 million) for reconstruction of infrastructure in the districts affected in the 2015 earthquake.

Inaugurating several postquake reconstruction projects on the concluding day of his two-



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar plants a tree during his visit to Pashupatinath Temple in Kathmandu, Friday. ANI

day visit, Jaishankar said bilateral ties between India and Nepal have made significant strides in various sectors. "In recent years, we have witnessed the real transformation of the India-Nepal relationship... Connectivity, be it physical, digital or energy-related, has become a cornerstone of this expanding collaboration, further strengthening the people-to-people linkages between our two countries," he said in his address at the inauguration of Tribhuvan University Central Library in Kathmandu.

"The government of India is committed to moving forward on the ideals of *sabka sath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwas, sabka prayas* and taking friendly neighbouring countries, including Nepal, along with us in our development journey," he said.

The library, and several other reconstruction projects undertaken in Kathmandu after the 2015 earthquake, were jointly inaugurated by Jaishankar and his Nepali counterpart P N Saud.

These included 25 schools, 32 health projects and a cultural heritage project undertaken by India as part of a collaborative effort in the quake's aftermath.

During his visit, Jaishankar reviewed all aspects of bilateral relations as well as areas of cooperation...

The Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950, security and boundary-related matters were also discussed," it added.

Jaishankar said PM Modi during his visit to Nepal in 2014 had given the 'HIT' formula for India-Nepal relations. "HIT as in H for highways I for railways and T for Transways," he said.

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Jaishankar said PM Modi during his visit to Nepal in

GOVT & POLITICS

FIR against Hindi daily editor, 3 others over fake news complaint

ABHISHEK ANGAD
RANCHI, JANUARY 5

DAYS AFTER a senior editor of Ranchi-based Hindi daily *Prabhat Khabar* wrote to CM Hemant Soren on threat calls being made to its chief editor Ashutosh Chaturvedi over the paper's coverage on liquor mafia in the state, an FIR has been registered against Chaturvedi and three others for forgery and printing materials known to be defamatory among other charges.

On December 29, Vijay Kant Pathak, the resident editor of *Prabhat Khabar*, had written to the CM that Chaturvedi received a call from a person named Yogendra Tiwari, who is lodged in the Birsa Munda Central Jail, and was threatened over some recent reports naming him. Tiwari is an accused in a money laundering case. It is also alleged he is a part of a nexus linked to one Prem Prakash, an accused in another PMLA case over illegal mining.

The FIR against Chaturvedi and 3 others was registered on January 3 at the instance of Yogendra Tiwari who complained that *Prabhat Khabar* had published "false news". The FIR also names Sunil Tiwary, the adviser of Jharkhand BJP president Babul Marandi, as an accused. It states that Yogendra Tiwari was being pressured to lodge a false complaint and when he did not budge, Sunil Tiwary allegedly threatened him that a "syndicate (a group of journalists including Tiwary) would harm him in the future".

The FIR quoting Yogendra Tiwary states: "... A false news (report) was published about me in *Prabhat Khabar* that the charge sheet mentions my two marriages and two wives, which is completely wrong..."

The Editors Guild Friday said in a statement, "The Guild also expresses its deep concern on the misuse of criminal defamation laws against journalists in an effort to intimidate and harass them."

AMU minority status: 7-judge SC bench to start hearing on Jan 9

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 5

A 7-JUDGE Supreme Court Constitution bench will start hearing from January 9 pleas regarding the minority status of the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU). The bench presided by CJ D Y Chandrachud will also comprise Justices Sanjiv Khanna, Surya Kant, JB Pardiwal, Dipankar Datta, Manoj Misra and KV Viswanathan.

In 2005, the Allahabad HC had ruled that AMU is not a minority institution. AMU and the then UPA government challenged this before the SC. In 2016, the NDA government informed the SC that it is withdrawing the appeal filed by the government.

On February 12, 2019, a 3-judge bench presided by then CJ Ranjan Gogoi referred the matter to a 7-judge bench.

The 7-judge bench will lay down parameters for granting minority status to an educational institution under Article 30 of the Constitution and also decide whether an educational institution created under a parliamentary statute can be given such status.

DKS probe: CBI moves HC, pleas against withdrawal of probe sanction sent to CJ

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
BENGALURU, JANUARY 5

A SINGLE-judge bench of the Karnataka High Court on Friday referred to the Chief Justice the petitions challenging the state's withdrawal of sanction to CBI for probing a case against Deputy CM D K Shiva Kumar.

It asked CJ Justice Prasanna Varale to see if the matter needed to be heard by a larger bench.

The decision by Justice Krishna Dixit came as it heard petitions filed by BJP MLA Basangouda Patil Yatnal and the CBI, which moved the HC Friday.

The petitions challenged both the Congress-led govern-

ment's decision on November 28, 2023 to withdraw the sanction to CBI for probing the disproportionate assets case against Shivakumar as well as its subsequent order on December 22 shifting the case to Lokayukta.

The CBI had been granted the sanction to investigate this case by the previous BJP-led state government.

Observing that it was a "unique case", Justice Dixit said the question was whether a decision taken by the previous government was binding on the government elected subsequently. Although remarking in his oral observations that a matter "of this importance might be better handled by a division bench", he said it was for CJ



A damaged car on Friday. PTI

TERMING AS "ghastly and alarming" an attack on an ED team and the CRPF personnel accompanying them during a raid on the house of a TMC leader in the Sandeshkhali area of North 24 Parganas district in connection with the ration distribution scam, West Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose Friday said he was exploring options to take action in the matter.

"The ghastly incident in Sandeshkhali is alarming and deplorable. It is the duty of a civilised government to stop barbarism and vandalism in a democracy. As Governor of the state, I am exploring all Constitutional options to take an appropriate action in an appropriate manner," he said in an audio statement.

Bose said, "Jungle Raj and goonda raj will work in a fool's paradise. The state government should better open its eyes and see the reality and act effectively or face the consequences. The state government failed to maintain the law and order at Sandeshkhali."

"The ostrich-like attitude of police pretending not to see the lawlessness around should go... This pre-election violence which has an early beginning, should

find an early end," he added.

When a lawyer drew his attention to the incident after a hearing, Justice Abhijit Gangopadhyay of the Calcutta HC said, "I was not aware of this incident. If such an incident happened, the ED officials can draw the Governor's attention to the law and order situation."

In the evening, Bose met the injured ED officials in the hospital where they were undergoing treatment. Justice Gangopadhyay also visited the hospital to meet the officials. "Are those who attacked ED officials Indian citizens? Are you sure they are not coming from outside by boats?" he asked.

TMC leader Kunal Ghosh said, "Justice Gangopadhyay's comments are offensive and out of his jurisdiction..."

EXPLOAINED

Not first time central agencies vs Bengal battle spilled onto streets

ATRI MITRA
KOLKATA, JANUARY 5

WHEN EIGHT members of an Enforcement Directorate (ED) team investigating the alleged ration distribution scam case in West Bengal's Sandeshkhali were attacked and stopped by hundreds of locals on Friday, it was not the first time a Central investigative team had found itself amidst such an alteration in the state.

The ED officers were in the North 24 Parganas district, accompanied by Central forces personnel, for raids on local Trinamool Congress leader Shahjahan Sheikh's residence. The ED team was trying to open the gates of the house when the protesters turned violent.

Former minister Jyoti Priya Mallick had been arrested by the ED in connection with the scam last October.

CBI vs CM

In 2019, a CBI team was stopped at the Kasba Police

Station in Kolkata on its way to film producer Shrikant Mohta's office in connection with the Rose Valley chit fund case.

Later that year, a CBI team was halted when it went to the then Kolkata Police Commissioner Rajeev Kumar's residence on Park Street to interrogate him in the Sarada chit fund case. A team at the Shakespeare Sarani police station first stopped the CBI outside Kumar's residence.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee herself then sat on a 70-hour dharna in protest against the action at Kolkata's Esplanade. Recently, Kumar was named the state's Director General of Police.

NHRC teams attacked

After the 2021 Assembly elections, the BJP and other anti-TMC parties levelled allegations of poll-related violence against the ruling party. The Calcutta High Court ordered the CBI and National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to conduct an investigation.

But as Atif Rasheed, vice-

chairperson of the National Commission for Minorities and a member of the NHRC team, was visiting the Jadavpur area in south suburban Kolkata, it came under attack.

Child rights panel faces heat

In April 2023, NCPCR chief Priyank Kanongo claimed assault by an officer at Kolkata's Tiljala Police Station while examining the alleged murder of a 7-year-old girl by one of her neighbours. Kanongo claimed that not only was he attacked, police personnel "secretly video recorded the NCPCR's investigation".

Kanongo was allegedly stopped by the local administration in North Dinajpur district again last April when he went to meet the family of a 17-year-old girl who was allegedly raped and murdered. The state government claimed prohibitory orders had been imposed in the region. The West Bengal Commission for Protection of Child Rights accused the national body of "doing politics" over the girl's death.

Rajasthan CM keeps Home, Dy CM Diya Kumari gets Finance

DEEP MUKHERJEE
JAIPUR, JANUARY 5

Disaster Relief and Civil Defence and Public Grievance Redressal departments have also been allocated to him.

Gajendra Singh Khinsar will be the new Health Minister while Madan Dilawar has been allocated the School Education department, along with Panchayati Raj and Sanskrit Education.

Kanhaiyalal Choudhary has been allocated the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) while Jogaram Patel has been allocated Parliamentary Affairs, Law and Justice departments.

Former Union Minister Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore has been allocated the Industries and Commerce departments along with Information Technology, Youth and Sports Affairs along with Soldiers' Welfare.

Avinash Gehlot will be the new Cabinet minister for Social Justice and Empowerment while Hemant Meena is the new Revenue Minister.

Among the Ministers of State (independent charge), Surendra Pal Singh TT, who is yet to be an MLA and is the BJP's candidate for the elections in the Karapur Assembly seat, has been allocated Agricultural Marketing, Indira Gandhi Canal and Minority Affairs. Similarly, MoS Sanjay Sharma has been given the independent charge of Forest, Environment while Gautam Kumar will handle the Cooperative department.

A bench of Justices A S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan which perused the high court judgment said, "We concur with the view taken... no interference is called for under Article 136."

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 5

THE SUPREME Court Friday refused to interfere with the Madras High Court judgment that left it to the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister to decide on Minister V Senthil Balaji's continuation in the state Cabinet following the latter's arrest by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in a case linked to jobs-for-cash scam.

A bench of Justices A S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan which perused the high court judgment said, "We concur with the view taken... no interference is called for under Article 136."

The bench also remarked

orally that a governor cannot remove a minister without the CM recommending the same.

Following his arrest, all portfolios were withdrawn from Balaji, who continues to be a minister. This was challenged by petitioner R L Ravi, an advocate, before the Madras High Court.

Disposing of the plea, the high court had said that "ministers without portfolios do not have any specific ministries nor they do have carved out responsibilities. The chief minister is an executive head. It is the responsibility of an executive head to assign ministerial responsibilities to an elected representative. However, if he feels that a particular elected representative can-

not be assigned the responsibility of a minister, there cannot be moral or constitutional basis to retain such a member of the Legislative Assembly as a minister without portfolio, which would be opposed to the ethos, good governance and constitutional morality or integrity".

The HC, however, left the decision on Balaji to the CM saying "the Chief Minister of the State of Tamil Nadu may be well advised to take a decision about the continuance of V Senthil Balaji... as a Minister without Portfolio, which serves no purpose and which does not augur well with the Principles of Constitutional ethos on goodness, good governance and purity in administration".

According to sources, the choice of the seat has been left to them. The next organisational meeting in this regard is likely over the weekend.

"The decision was taken at an organisational meeting chaired by the party's national leadership on Wednesday. Barring an exception or two, this will hold true for all," a party source said.

The leader gave the example of the recent Assembly elections, where the BJP fielded as many as 18 MPs, including four Union ministers, across Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. "It gave very good results," the leader said, adding: "At least two party stalwarts, including at least one

ALL-INDIA DGP/IG CONFERENCE



Union Home Minister Amit Shah distributes Police Medal for Meritorious Service in Jaipur on Friday. ANI

Shah: Need AI-driven analytical approach to tackle challenges

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 5

UNION HOME Minister Amit Shah on Friday stressed the need for linking of databases and adopting AI-driven analytical approach for tackling the emerging security challenges.

Speaking at the three-day 'All-India Conference of Director/Inspector Generals of Police' in Jaipur, Shah said that in 2023 the nation entered "Amrit Kaal," and highlighted two important developments last year — formulation of the new National Education Policy and enactment of three new criminal laws replacing British-era laws. He said that the new laws are focused on delivery of justice instead of punishment and their implementation would transform the criminal justice system as "most modern and scientific".

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is also scheduled to attend the conference, which is being hosted by the Intelligence Bureau at the Rajasthan International Centre in Jhalana from January 5 to 7. As per the schedule, the PM will take part

in the conference on January 6 (Saturday) and leave the next afternoon; Shah and National Security Adviser Ajit Doval will attend all the sessions.

Shah, during his address on Friday, also stressed the need for training from SHO to DGP level and technology upgrade from police station to police headquarters level for successful implementation of the new criminal laws. He said there has been an overall improvement in the security scenario in the country since 2014, especially violence has seen a significant decline in three critical hotspots — Jammu and Kashmir, North-East and Left Wing Extremism-hit regions.

The Home Minister observed that the DG/G conference has over the years emerged as a "think tank", facilitating decision-making and formulation of new security strategies. He emphasised uniformity of structures, size and skill of counter-terror mechanisms across the country.

Shah highlighted the role of internal security in realising the Prime Minister's vision of India becoming a developed nation by 2047.

Fight LS polls: BJP to senior leaders, those in third term in RS

JATIN ANAND
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 5

incumbent Union minister, are expected to be fielded from Delhi."

Central ministers who are RS MPs include MoS, Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Rajeev Chandrasekhar; Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal; Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman; External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar; Minister of Education and Skill Development Dharmendra Pradhan; Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav; Housing Minister Hardeep Singh Puri; Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya; Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying Minister Parshotam Rupala; Railway Minister Ashwin Vaishnav; Civil Aviation Minister Jayotiraditya Scindia; and MSME Minister Nareyan Rane.

Chandrasekhar and Sitharaman from Karnataka, in addition to Goyal from Maharashtra and Rupala from Gujarat, are among nine BJP leaders currently in their third Rajya Sabha terms. This list also includes former Union minister Prakash Javadekar.

BJP president P Nadda is also a member of the Rajya Sabha, from Himachal Pradesh.



SPEAKER'S ADDRESS

Speaker Om Birla inaugurates 'Panchayat Se Parliament Tak' for Women representatives of Panchayati Raj institutions and urban local bodies in Central Hall, Samvidhan Sadan, Friday

SC upholds Madras HC order on Senthil Balaji continuing as minister

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 5

THE SUPREME Court Friday refused to interfere with the Madras High Court judgment that left it to the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister to decide on Minister V Senthil Balaji's continuation in the state Cabinet following the latter's arrest by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in a case linked to jobs-for-cash scam.

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Disposing of the plea, the high court had said that "ministers without portfolios do not have any specific ministries nor they do have carved out responsibilities. The chief minister is an executive head. It is the responsibility of an executive head to assign ministerial responsibilities to an elected representative. However, if he feels that a particular elected representative can-

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The leader gave the example of the recent Assembly elections, where the BJP fielded as many as 18 MPs, including four Union ministers, across Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. "It gave very good results," the leader said, adding: "At least two party stalwarts, including at least one

ished second in the 2019 elections which it had contested as an NDA ally in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. Bihar has 40 Lok Sabha seats.

Meanwhile, reiterating allegations the previous government had handed over the case to CBI "only to harass me", Shivakumar said: "The CBI is entitled to approach the High Court. They will present their case and we will present our case. It is the Court which will eventually decide. I have complete faith in our judicial system."

The CBI counsel

Days after joining BJP, Kerala Christian priest facing 'complaints' removed from Church posts

SHAJU PHILIP
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
JANUARY 5

DAYS AFTER he joined the BJP, a Christian priest in Kerala was divested of all official responsibilities, with the Church ordering a probe into "various complaints" against him.

Father Shajju Kurian, who belongs to the Malankara Orthodox Church, had joined BJP on December 30 during a Christmas celebration organised by the Pathanamthitta district committee of the party.

At the time, Kurian had said

that he joined the BJP after being impressed by the developmental initiatives of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

As many as 47 other members of the Church had also taken BJP membership along with the priest. After this, a section of the faithful took out a march to the diocese headquarters at Ranni in protest against the priest.

An official release from the Orthodox Church, a prominent non-Catholic segment in Kerala, said: "The Church has received some complaints from diocesan members against Fr Shajju. The diocesan council on Friday decided to appoint a commission,

which would look into the complaints in two months. Hence, Shajju was removed from all posts including the diocesan secretary during the probe period." He had been the secretary of the Church's Nilakkal diocese.

Days after Kurian joined BJP, another priest, Father Mathews Vazhakunnam, raised allegations of misconduct against him in a TV channel debate.

Church sources said the complaints were not of a serious nature, and that they were aware that Vazhakunnam had a pro-CPI(M) stance.

During the previous LDF government in the state, he had

served as a director of the state-run Minority Development Finance Corporation.

Later in the day, Malankara Orthodox Church head Baselios Marthoma Mathews III issued a circular asking priests not to become open advocates of any political parties.

It is better for such priests to keep away from official roles. Priests should be careful not to openly express their political leanings. Priests joining any party would lead to schism among Church members, said the circular.

The sources added that the Church did not want to officially

comment on why the misconduct allegations raised by Vazhakunnam have emerged at this time. The Church release also said it decided to seek an explanation from Vazhakunnam over why he raised allegations against Kurian in a TV channel debate instead of bringing it to the notice of the Church.

The Nilakkal diocese to which Kurian belongs, comes under Pathanamthitta Lok Sabha constituency, where BJP is betting on Christian votes. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, BJP state president K Surendran had unsuccessfully contested from this constituency.

Cleric in Kerala booked for remark on Muslim women

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
JANUARY 5

KERALA'S KOZHIKODE city police have lodged an FIR against a prominent Muslim cleric for an objectionable remark, made during a TV debate, about Muslim women who do not wear headscarves or hijab.

VPSUra, president of NISA, a forum of progressive Muslim women, had filed a complaint on October 7 last year over Sunni cleric Mukkam Umar Faizi's alleged remark. An FIR was lodged Thursday under IPC Sections 295A (outraging religious sentiments) and 298 (uttering words to insult religious feelings).

Suhra said on Friday, "We have had several such incidents. They want to paint the Muslim community and women in a poor light. They want to create tension in the community by dividing the women into those wearing veils and those not wearing it."

Suhra said police initially did not take action. "When I filed a

complaint on October 7, police said they would register a case if they get a directive from the court. Later, we got the legal opinion that the police can act upon the complaint. We ensured the cleric is booked," she said.

The television debate, in which Faizi took part, was in the backdrop of a controversial statement by CPI(M) leader K Anil Kumar during a seminar on the Uniform Civil Code in October last year.

Kumar had said: "The Communist party's influence led to Muslim girls in Malappuram giving up hijab". He equated it to the community becoming more "progressive".

He came under fire from CPI(M) Lok Sabha MP A M Arif and several other Muslim leaders in the party. CPI(M) state secretary and Politburo member M V Govindan had said the party did not agree with Kumar's stand.

"The right to wear what they want is part of one's fundamental and democratic right. Nobody should infringe upon that right," he said.

Draft press rules allow physical inspection of newspaper premises in 'exceptional' cases

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 5

THE PRESS Registrar can carry out a physical inspection of the business premises of a periodical if the publisher fails to furnish an annual statement regularly or if a desk audit recommends such action due to "exceptional circumstances", according to the draft Press and Registration of Periodicals Rules 2024.

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Friday sought comments from the public on the draft rules to implement the recently enacted Press and Periodicals Registration Act 2023.

The physical inspection of documents and other information and records at the business premises of the publisher and the printing press may be carried out only if the publisher is not furnishing the annual statement regularly as per the rules if a desk audit recommends such action due to "exceptional circumstances" or if the Press Registrar

deems such action necessary after information, reference or complaint against a periodical.

The Press Registrar also has to record his recommendation for a physical inspection in writing if such verification is necessary having regard to any information, reference or complaint received by it against a periodical, the draft rules said.

According to the draft rules, the Press Registrar General may verify the circulation of a periodical if a daily newspaper having an average circulation of 25,000 copies or more each day, is empanelled or intends to get empanelled with the Central Bureau of Communication for getting advertisements from the central government.

The verification can also be carried out of any other periodical against which a reference or complaint has been received by the Press Registrar General.

The initial verification has to be a desk audit of the information furnished and carried out in a faceless manner.

A PICKUP truck driver from Surat suffered a brain hemorrhage and multiple fractures after he was allegedly thrashed by four self-styled cow vigilantes on Wednesday in Bharuch, said police. Identified as Aslam Multani, the driver has been hospitalised and is said to be stable.

The four accused, who have been booked under various Indian Penal Code sections including section 307 (attempt to murder), are yet to be traced, officials said on Friday. The driver has also been booked under different sections of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act in a separate FIR.

Seeking strict action against the accused, Aslam's family mem-

bers on Friday afternoon handed over a memorandum to Bharuch District Collector Dr Tushar Sumera and Bharuch District Superintendent of Police Mayur Chawda. Sub-inspector MH Wadher of Panoli police station said, "The accused have gone underground but our teams are putting all efforts to nab them."

On Wednesday, Aslam left his house in Surat's Mangrol taluka to Anleshwar in Bharuch with eight calves and three cows on the pickup truck, as per the police complaint. His vehicle was hit from behind by another vehicle when he lost control. He was then attacked by four self-styled vigilantes, armed with sharp weapons and wooden sticks, police were told. Some locals nearby identified Aslam and they called up his uncle Gulam Mohammed

Multan. With his two friends, Gulam reached the spot and found Aslam in a pool of blood.

Aslam was rushed to Jayaben Mody Hospital where the doctors said he had suffered multiple fractures and severe injuries below the left eye, and on his head, face, and spinal cord. Speaking with *The Indian Express*, Dr Jayapalsinh Gohil of Jayaben Mody Hospital said,

"Aslam Multani had incurred multiple fractures. The patient also had a brain hemorrhage. We carried out a successful operation..."

The self-styled vigilantes identified as Neha Patel, Nirav Patel, and Bharat Bhawad, apart from one unidentified youth, have been booked as an FIR was filed at Panoli police station. Police registered an offence under relevant sections of the IPC and the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights.

The case was filed by NCPCR after a video of a woman who claimed that she, her husband, and children were asked to convert to Christianity in exchange for money and were harassed by the petitioner when they stopped going to church went viral.

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The FIR, lodged on the basis of a complaint filed by a police sub-inspector KK Modi at the Ahmedabad cyber crime police station, states that between December 31, 2023, and January 5, three social media handles—a

The FIR, which doesn't name anyone, has listed 'owners/users' of three social media handles on which the fake invitation appeared as accused in the case. The unknown accused have been booked under IPC section 469 (forgery for purpose of harming reputation) and IT Act section 66C (punishment for identity theft).

The FIR, lodged on the basis of a complaint filed by a police sub-inspector KK Modi at the Ahmedabad cyber crime police station, states that between December 31, 2023, and January 5, three social media handles—a

Facebook page called Kabir Honda and two Instagram pages named 'the Ajju' and 'Gujji ni dhamaal'—allegedly created fake IDs, shared posts featuring a fake wedding invitation card with the purported images of PM Modi and an unknown woman.

The complaint alleged that by indulging in such an act, the accused have "attempted to defame India's Prime Minister causing harm to his reputation".

The police also alleged that such posts can "create animosity among citizens among different castes of the country and disrupt the economy of the country".

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"This cell also employs cost effective hardware which is readily available and a crimped sealing based design which reduces the hardware and fabrication costs significantly," the ISRO statement said.

The cell's ability to survive and perform in the harsh environments of space was demonstrated on-board PSLV Orbital Experimental Module (POEM).

"... These cells are poised to

be used in upcoming operational missions where 35-40% battery mass saving is expected," the statement added.

These were two of the 10 experiments that were taken to space by the POEM in its third flight. While in most multi-stage rockets, the upper stages remain in space before dropping back to the Earth's atmosphere and burning up. However, the space agency started using these spent stages as a platform for technology demonstrations. The other experiments on-board the January 1 PSLV launch included a radiation shielding experiment, an amateur radio and three propulsion systems by space start-ups.

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BJP MLA gets two years in jail, may lose House seat

MANISH SAHU
LUCKNOW, JANUARY 5



Sureshwar Singh is MLA from UP's Mahasi

BJP MLA Sureshwar Singh may face disqualification from his membership in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly after the MP-MLA court in Bahraich handed down two years of imprisonment to him and imposed a Rs 2,500 fine in a 21-year-old case of criminal intimidation and deterring public servant from discharging his duty.

Additional Civil Judge (Senior Division) Anupam Dixit examined five prosecution witnesses during the trial. "The court sentenced MLA Sureshwar Singh to two years of imprisonment and imposed a Rs 2,500 fine on him on Thursday. The judgment was, however, made public today (Friday)," Bahraich government counsel Tabassum said.

Singh, a two-time MLA from the Mahasi constituency in Bahraich district, has been convicted under sections 506 (criminal intimidation) and 353 (assault or criminal force to deter public servant from discharge of his duty) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and under provisions of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, the government counsel added.

Defence lawyer Brij Pal Singh said the MLA filed a bail plea after the sentencing. "The court granted him bail. We will file an appeal against the judgment," the lawyer added.

The jail term could lead to his disqualification from the Uttar Pradesh Assembly as under the provisions of the Representation of the People Act (RPA) 1951, any public representative sentenced to two-year imprisonment or more is disqualified from the date of sentence and is barred from contesting elections for the next six years after serving the sentence.

According to the prosecution,

Bihar State Power Transmission Company Ltd., Patna

Registered Office: Vidyut Bhawan, Bailey Road, Patna - 800021,

STATE LOAD DESPATCH CENTRE

PUBLIC NOTICE

REQUEST FOR COMMENTS/ SUGGESTIONS/ OBJECTIONS

1. State Load Dispatch Centre (SLDC) hereby gives notice to all the stakeholders and general public that it has filed the petition for True-up for FY 2022-23, Annual Performance Review (APR) for FY 2023-24 and determination of Annual Revenue Requirement (ARR) and SLDC Charges for FY 2024-25, before the Hon'ble Bihar Electricity Regulatory Commission under BERC (Multi Year Transmission Tariff and SLDC Charges) Regulations 2021. The petition has been taken on record by the Hon'ble Commission as Case No. 24 of 2023.

2. Summary of the Tariff Petition filed on 13.11.2023 is as indicated below:-

Summary of the Tariff Petition



Govt. of Bihar

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A division bench of Justice Revati Mohite-Dere and Justice Gauri V Godse had, on December 19-2023, concluded the hearing and reserved the verdict in the appeal by Baig, who is presently lodged in Nashik Central Prison.

The verdict was pronounced on Friday. Baig had challenged the rejection of bail by a trial court on October 4, 2021. The HC allowed his appeal and directed him to be released on furnishing a personal bond of Rs 1 lakh with two sureties of the same amount.

It also asked him to report to ATS-Nashik on the second Saturday of every month, and to not leave the jurisdiction of the trial court in Nashik. Advocate Mubin Solkar representing Baig argued that his client was incarcerated for over 13 years and the entire prosecution relied on statements of two witnesses who had studied with Baig.

The tender, floated by Convergence Energy Services Ltd (CESL) on behalf of the MoHUA, seeks bids for buses in Chandigarh, Haryana, Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Bihar, Meghalaya, Odisha, and Puducherry. According to the amended tender, Chandigarh will get 100 low-floor AC buses.

According to the tender, the MoHUA has aggregated the demand from cities shortlisted under the scheme.

On what led to the decision regarding the addition of low-floor

buses, a MoHUA official said it happened after states and UTs demanded the same.

A MoHUA spokesperson, however, did not comment.

Meanwhile, activists and disability rights groups – under the banner of the Freedom of Movement Coalition – wrote to MoHUA Secretary Manoj Joshi on October 26 last year, when a draft for the tender was published.

On November 24, they wrote to the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH), highlighting that the tender had violated the Central Motor Vehicles Rules, which The Indian Express reported on December 3.

According to the activists' letter, the MoRTH automotive industry standard 153 says that Type I buses (urban buses) should have a maximum floor height of 650 mm and be "accessible to people with reduced mobility, including at least one wheelchair user".

The CESL tender, however, had a floor height of 900 mm i.e. a footboard plus two steps.

No bids came for the two remaining properties. ENS

Pune gangster killed over financial dispute, 8 held

CHANDAN HAYGUNDE
PUNE, JANUARY 5

GANGSTER SHARAD Hiraman Mohol, who was once accused of killing alleged Indian Mujahideen terrorist Qateel Siddiqui in the Yerwada jail premises, was shot dead by a group of men, including one of his associates, over a financial dispute on Friday afternoon.

Police said Mohol (39), a resident of Sutardara in Kothrud and a native of Mutha village in Mulshi taluka of Pune district, sustained bullet injuries in the attack. He was rushed to Sahyadri hospital in Kothrud but was pronounced dead, said police. Following the incident, nine teams of the crime branch were formed who nabbed eight suspects travelling in two cars near Shirwal on the Pune-Satara highway on Friday night.

Police recovered three pistols, three magazines and five car-

tridges from their possession.

Police have identified the key suspect as Sahil alias Munna Polekar, a resident of Sutardara. "Prima-facie, it is suspected that the attack on Sharad Mohol was the fallout of an internal rivalry over a financial dispute within his own gang," said Commissioner of Police Retesh Kumaar.

Hemant Patil, senior inspector at Kothrud police station, said about three to four men opened fire at Mohol around 1.30pm. Mohol's aide Arun Dhumal (32) lodged a complaint at the Kothrud police station, based on which police registered an FIR under Sections 34 (common intention), 302 (murder) and 307 (attempt to murder) of the IPC and relevant sections of the Arms Act.

Sources in the police said it was Mohol's marriage anniversary on Friday. He left his office in Sutardara with his wife and was about to take his four-wheeler to go to Dagdusheth Halwai Ganesh



Sharad Hiraman Mohol

temple, when the assailants intercepted him, fired at least three bullets at him with pistols from a close range and fled the spot.

Police said since Polekar was an associate of Mohol, nobody doubted him, as a result of which he and his aides came and attacked him from almost point blank range. Mohol's family and supporters gathered in huge numbers in front of Sassoon General Hospital, where his body was brought for post-mortem. A police force was deployed in the hospital premises to control the law and or-

der situation. DCP Sandeep Singh Gill was present at the hospital while the post-mortem was on.

According to police, Polekar worked for Mohol. Probe so far revealed that due to a financial dispute, Polekar allegedly hatched a plan to kill Mohol with the help of his aides. He kept a watch on Mohol for the last few days. Sharad Mohol was accused in about 15 crimes but is currently out on bail.

Sharad Mohol's wife Swati had joined the BJP and was active in party activities. Mohol had come close to several Hindutva groups in Pune and other parts.

He and his wife were visible in several social activities in the city, said officials. Mohol's funeral took place at the Vaikunth crematorium on Friday night.

Accused of killing terror suspect in jail

Sharad Mohol shot to fame after his name cropped up in the murder case by a Pune court in June 2019 due to lack of evidence.

Man facing 45 cases gunned down by STF in Sultanpur



Vinod Kumar Upadhyay

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
LUCKNOW, JANUARY 5

THE UTTAR Pradesh Police's Special Task Force (STF) gunned down a notorious gangster in an encounter in Sultanpur district of the state in the wee hours of Friday, officials said.

Forty-five cases were registered against Vinod Kumar Upadhyay, who unsuccessfully contested the 2007 Assembly election from Gorakhpur on a Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) ticket, in Lucknow, Gorakhpur, Basti, and Sant Kabir Nagar districts, it is learnt. Upadhyay, a native of Gorakhpur who carried a head of Rs 1 lakh on his head, faced charges ranging from murder to violations of the Uttar Pradesh Gangsters Act, UP Goonda Act, forgery, and cheating, the police said in a press release.

The STF on Friday said a team was dispatched early Friday after they received a tip-off that Upadhyay was coming to Sultanpur's Kotwali Dehat area to meet someone. The STF team cordoned off the location. Around 3.20 am, the police spotted a car coming from the Lucknow side. When signalled to stop, the gangster tried to run away with the vehicle. The police chased him for nearly 3 kilometres.

He stopped the car in a bylane and ran outside before opening fire on the police. The police opened fire in retaliation, in which Upadhyay got injured. He was rushed to a hospital where he died during treatment," said a police officer.

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On December 12, the ED said, Das gave another statement in which he said he retracted his initial statement under the influence of an unnamed person who had arrived with his advocate. The ED told the special Raipur court about this as part of the supplementary prosecution complaint. ENS

ED: Man held in Mahadev app case stands by Baghel cash claim

Raipur: A man arrested by the ED in connection with the Mahadev betting app case in Raipur in November, has told the agency that he stood by his original statement that he had allegedly been sent to deliver cash to former Chhattisgarh CM Bhupesh Baghel, the ED said in a supplementary prosecution complaint filed before a special court.

Asim Das, 38, was arrested on November 3, and the ED had seized Rs 5.39 crore from him. After his arrest, he told ED officials that he was tasked by Mahadev app case accused Subham Soni to deliver the cash to Baghel allegedly as "protection money". However, while in judicial custody on November 10, Das wrote a letter to the court retracting his original statement and saying that the money found on him was for starting a construction business.

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TEMPLE RUN

Devotees during a procession in Ahmedabad on Friday as they transport a flag pole to be put up at Ayodhya Temple. PTI

HC gives bail to Nashik terror plot accused

OMKARGOKHALE
MUMBAI, JANUARY 5

THE BOMBAY High Court on Friday granted bail to Mirza Himayat Baig, arrested by the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) in 2010, in the Nashik terror plot case. He was also arrested in the 2010 Pune German Bakery blast case in the same year.

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On what led to the decision regarding the addition of low-floor

Govt amends PM-eBus Sewa tender, adds 100 low-floor buses

DAMINI NATH
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 5

THE CENTRE has recently amended a tender for the procurement of 3,600 electric buses, first batch under the PM-eBus Sewa scheme launched in 2023, to include 100 low-floor buses that are more accessible to persons with disabilities compared to the ones with standard floor.

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Dhoni files fraud case against former business partners

ABHISHEK ANGAD

RANCHI, JANUARY 5

FORMER INDIAN captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni has filed a criminal complaint in a local court in Ranchi against a company called Aarka Sports Management and two of its directors for allegedly misusing his name. On Friday, Judicial Magistrate (First Class) Raj Kumar Pandey recorded the statement of one of the witnesses in the case and fixed the next date of hearing as January 20.

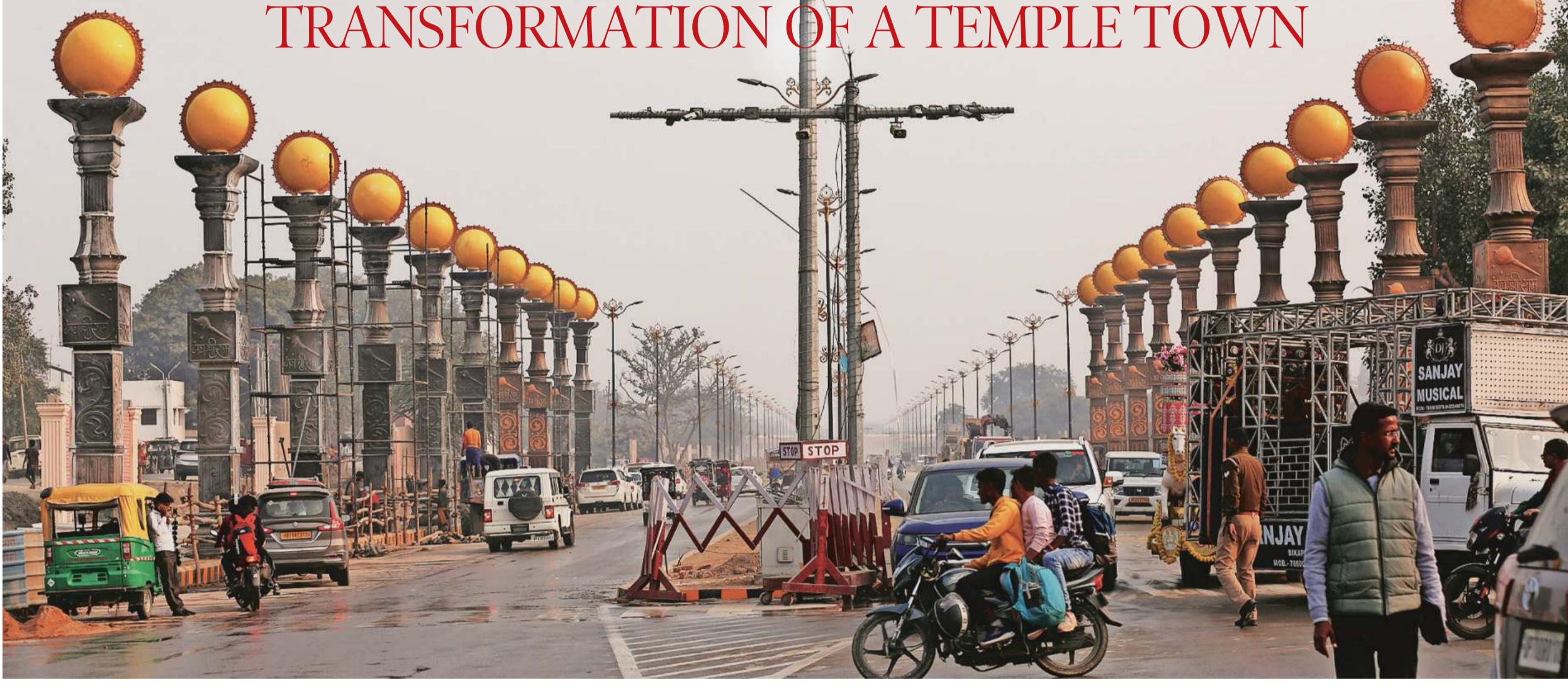
According to court records, a complaint was filed on October 17 by Dhoni through a Seeman Lohani, seeking an inquiry under IPC sections 406 (criminal breach of trust) and 420 (cheating). Dhoni's lawyer Dayanand Singh told The Indian Express: "There was an agreement between Dhoni and Aarka Sports, one Mihir Diwakar and Soumya Das to start cricket academies and sports complexes in his name. It was agreed that

the franchise fees would be paid directly to Dhoni

BIG PICTURE

Ayodhya 2.0

TRANSFORMATION OF A TEMPLE TOWN



A railway station with the 'largest concourse in the country', a new airport, refurbished roads, home stays, hotels and more. As Ayodhya awaits the inauguration of the Ram temple on January 22, MAULSHREE SETH maps the makeover of what was once a town of dilapidated buildings, temples and dharamshalas

AYODHYA EK chota sa town tha, in a radius of 7-8 km. Chota aur shaant, par udaas (Ayodhya was a small town... small and peaceful, but sad.)

Sitting in his old palace, 'Raj Sadan', in the heart of Ayodhya on the newly refurbished Ram Path, Yatinendra Mishra, poet, art critic and scion of the erstwhile royal family of Ayodhya, talks about the town he grew up in - "stuffy, with dilapidated buildings and little hope", whose residents would constantly express their frustration over the frisking that they have had to undergo at security barricades across the city since 1992.

"And then, in just over a year, Ayodhya transformed in front of our eyes," says Mishra.

It's a transformation that is centred around its most political image — the Ram temple, the inauguration of which is scheduled for January 22. Now, with two weeks left for the ceremony, the city is an almost unrecognisable form of its earlier self.

For long, Ayodhya was little more than an appendage of the district headquarters of Faizabad, spreading itself over an area of 10 sq km on the banks of the Sarayu. Until 1992, the town was all about its

temples, each centuries old and each marking a milestone in the life of Lord Rama and those around him — Gulela Mandir, Vashishta Mandir, Sita Rasoi, Hanuman Mandir and so on. There was also the Babri Masjid and the simmering politics around it. That December day in 1992, when hundreds of karsevaks brought down the mosque, changing India and its politics, Ayodhya stirred too — the town turned into a fortress of barricades, with entry into the temples restricted even for its residents.

But now, in the run-up to the BJP government's most ambitious of projects — the opening of the Ram temple ahead of the 2024 elections — the 'udaas' town of dilapidated buildings, narrow lanes, old temples and dharamshalas, a defunct air strip and a railway station with a broken platform, has undergone a makeover. It's now a city of 35 new hotels and 600 home stays, an international airport, a glitzy railway station, wide roads and decorated buildings.

The narrow lane that once led to the disputed temple site is now a wide, two-lane 'Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Path' with grand gates and huge walls decorated with murals.

Railway station like an airport' From being one of the two Municipal Boards of Faizabad district with a budget of around Rs 12 crore, in 2017, Ayodhya got its Municipal Corporation with a budget of Rs 500 crore and an expanded jurisdiction spreading across a radius of 89.58 sqkm. A year later, in 2018, the UP government renamed the district Ayodhya.

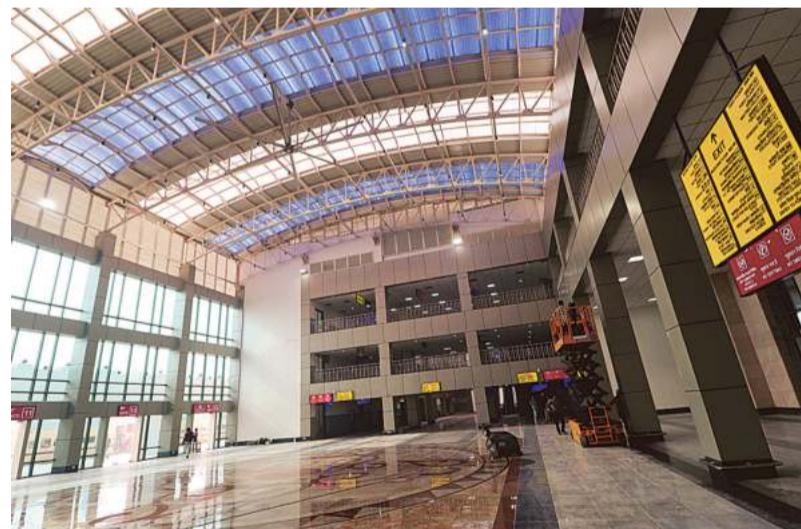
Yatinendra explains, "Until recently, the economy of this town revolved around three religious melas — Ram Navmi in April, Savan in July-August and Kartik Poornima in November. Now with the temple, there will be more people coming to Ayodhya than ever before."

Selling samosas on the road leading to the old railway station that still stands adjacent to the new station, 53-year-old Shiv Shankar, says, "We have been told that even this road could be expanded. So we are not renovating our shops as of now." A new, two-lane road leads to the new railway station, which Prime Minister Modi inaugurated on December 30.

Dhirendra Singh, who is visiting Ayodhya from Delhi, says, "I am here after 10 years. Not only the roads of Ayodhya, the entire city has undergone a transformation. When I last came, even the platform at the station was broken; now it is like an airport."

'Hope Ayodhya retains Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb'

At his ashram near the Nirmohi Akhada, Acharya Satyendra Das, Chief Priest of the Ram temple, gushes about how the purana



(Top): Dharma Path is one of the four roads around the temple complex in Ayodhya; The railway station is spread across three storeys. Vishal Srivastav

(old) has given way to the naya aur naya (new) in Ayodhya. "For long, Ayodhya was behind time... khandahar, purane mandir, purani jagah (ruins, old temples, old place). Now Ayodhya is getting its lustre, there is development happening... Naya airport, naya railway station, naya road, naya Ayodhya. Ab ya han se shuru hogta Ram Rajya (Ram Rajya will start from here)."

Sitting next to him, his head bowed, is Iqbal Ansari, son of the late Hashim Ansari, the litigant in the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid title suit. Asked about this "naya Ayodhya", Ansari says, "All citizens would like to see their city developed. Ayodhya has been Hindu-Muslim ki dharma nagari. I hope this new Ayodhya retains its Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb".

At a distance of few metres, at his office on Ram Path, BJP leader and Mayor Girish Pati Tripathi, who doubles up as the mahant of a local Teer Kalash temple, is busy with preparations for the upcoming 'Pran Pratishtha'. "Today we have a budget of Rs 500 crore, but we also get funds under different heads. For instance, recently, we got Rs 40 crore to organise the Ayodhya Mela. In no time, Ayodhya will be converted into a world-class city," he says, adding that they are in the process of hiring 1,500 safai karamcharies, covering open drains and distribut-

ing cloth bags to keep the city polythene free.

But the change he is most excited about are four roads around the temple complex — the Ram Path, Dharma Path, Sri Ram Janma Bhumi Path and Bhakti Path — which Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated on November 30. The four roads were, not too long ago, narrow and congested lanes leading to the Ram temple, but have now been expanded and beautified and given new names.

All roads lead to the temple

Ram Path, which links Sadatganj to Lata Mangeshkar Chowk at Naya Ghat, is now a 13-km-long, four-lane road built with an investment of about Rs 845 crore. The shops on either side of the road have shrunk to make space for the road-widening. Mayor Tripathi said that while the plan was to widen it to 24 metres, following objections by residents and shopkeepers, the authorities decided to stick to 20 metres. The ADA has painted shutters of shops with Hindu symbols — the shankh, trishul, gada and swastik — and houses have been painted in shades of peach with white temple-shaped motifs.

The Dharma Path, a 2-km-long, four-lane road from Lata Mangeshkar Chowk to the Lucknow-Gorakhpur highway, has been

built at a cost of Rs 65 crore.

Then there is the "Bhakti Path", a 742-metre-long road from Sringhar Ghat to Hanuman Gari that has been widened and developed at a cost of Rs 68 crore.

But the biggest transformation has been that of the 566-meter-long Sri Ram Janmabhoomi Path leading to the temple site. The Rs 41-crore, two-lane road starts from Sugreev Kila, where a huge gate has been installed. The walls on either side are being carved with murals.

Standing outside his bakery on Ram Path, watching ADA workers painting the outer walls of his shop, Ravi Kumar, in his 50s, says that until last year, he used to pay a monthly rent of Rs 1,000 for the shop that has been running for 20 years now, but last year, the rent shot up Rs 8,000. "The owner has said I will have to pay Rs 10,000 once the temple opens in January. I have had to borrow to meet this sudden spike in rent. Bas yahi umeed hai ki mandir khulne ke baad bhagya khul jaye (Now there is just one hope, that with opening of the temple, our fortunes also open up)."

Among those who have tied their fortunes to the temple is Manoj Kumar Tiwari, who works as a supervisor at the Ram Temple construction site. "I have been working for three months at the temple site. Earlier, I was working in Saudi Arabia but when I came here on leave, I got to know about this vacancy at the temple site and applied. I hope with this temple, our youngsters find more jobs," he says.

Flying in to Ayodhya

Around 13 km from the temple is the Maharishi Valmiki International Airport, among the latest postcards of this new Ayodhya. The airport has become operational with Air India and Indigo commencing operations.

Where once lay an airstrip spread across 178 acres, with hardly any traffic, now stands the new airport across 821 acres, its facade built in the 'Nagara' style of North Indian temple architecture. The terminal has been decorated with murals and artworks and other symbols depicting the Treta Yuga, the Hindu era during which Lord Ram is believed to have ruled over Ayodhya. The building has shikharas like in temples and an entire wall in the terminal has paintings and murals depicting the "life and times of Lord Ram".

The old runway of 1,500m x 30m has been extended to 2,200m x 45m. Officials say the plan is to extend the runway further to 3,700 metres.

Built at a cost of Rs 1,462 crore, of which the Airports Authority of India has spent about Rs 328 crore and the remaining Rs 1,134 crore by the Uttar Pradesh government, the airport has two aprons and hangars for eight aircraft in the first phase. The 6,250sqm terminal building is expected to accommodate over 500 passengers during peak hours.

At his home in Raj Sadan, Yatinendra Mishra says, "Usually, my friends and other coming to Ayodhya from abroad or other states would land in Lucknow and then come to Ayodhya. They would then go back and stay in Lucknow to be able to catch the flight back. When I asked to stay, they would ask me, 'Kyun? Why should we?' Now with the airport and the way Ayodhya has changed, it's other way around. They want to come here and I have been asking them to wait for some time."

STATE-ISTICALLY SPEAKING

In numbers

HARIKISHAN SHARMA

AYODHYA, WHICH has taken centre stage in the political discourse ahead of the Lok Sabha elections as it awaits the consecration of the Ram temple on January 22, lies in the heart of Uttar Pradesh, surrounded by Gonda, Barabanki, Basti, Ambedkar Nagar, Sultanpur and Amethi districts.

Rs 11,081.24 CRORE

Ayodhya's district domestic product at constant prices (2011-12) during financial year 2021-22 accounted for just 0.94% of Uttar Pradesh's gross state domestic product of Rs 11.81 lakh crore.

Rs 56,787

The per capita income of the district of Ayodhya in 2021-22 was lower than UP's average per capita income of Rs 70,792 and well below the national average of Rs 92,583.

24,70,996

As per the 2011 Census, Ayodhya population was just under 25 lakh. It has a higher population than five states — Nagaland, Goa, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, and Sikkim. Ayodhya accounts for 1.24% of UP's total population. 84.75% of Ayodhya is Hindu, 14.8% Muslim, 0.13% Christian and 0.08% Sikh.

962

In 2011, Ayodhya's sex ratio — the number of females for every 1,000 males — was higher than UP's average of 912 and the India average of 943.

52.3%

Almost half the women aged between 15 and 49 were anaemic, as per the 2019-21 National Family Health Survey-5. Across UP, 50.4% of women in the 15-49 age group were anaemic in 2019-21, while the national average was 57%.

19.09% AGE POINTS

The literacy gap between men and women in Ayodhya during 2011. As per Census 2011, the male literacy in Ayodhya stood at 78.12 per cent and female literacy at 59.03 per cent.

251.15 KWH

Per capita electricity consumption (kWh) in Ayodhya in 2020-21. It is still very low compared to the state average of 390.93 kWh.

180.66 KM

The total length of pucca roads per lakh population in Ayodhya has seen a steady increase in recent years, up to 180.66 km in 2019-20 from 155.4 km in 2011-12.



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

ON THE UPSIDE

NSO's GDP estimate surpasses expectations. Continuing weakness in private consumption remains a worry

THE INDIAN ECONOMY is estimated to grow at a healthy 7.3 per cent in the ongoing financial year, up from 7.2 per cent last year, as per the first advance estimates released by the National Statistical Office. The NSO's growth estimate for this year is considerably higher than what most independent analysts had projected. In fact, it is even higher than the 7 per cent growth projected by the Reserve Bank of India in the December monetary policy committee. The estimate implies that the economy, after growing at 7.7 per cent in the first half, will likely grow at 7 per cent in the second half of the year. However, as the full year growth estimate is based only on data for the first seven to eight months of the year, it is possible that these numbers will be subsequently revised, especially considering the intimations of the economic momentum slowing down more sharply towards the end of the year.

The sector-wise data shows that the agricultural sector is expected to slow down significantly. Growth for the full year has been pegged at 1.8 per cent, down from 4 per cent last year. However, in an El Nino year, this growth is better than expected. Alongside, the industrial sector is estimated to grow at 7.9 per cent this year, up from 4.4 per cent last year, driven by stronger manufacturing and construction activities. Manufacturing companies have reported healthy profits and steel and cement production has been fairly healthy so far. On the flip side, the services sector is likely to slow down from 9.5 per cent last year to 7.7 per cent this year, with trade, hotels, transport, and communication dragging down the performance.

The latest data also points to a continuing weakness in consumption. Private consumption is expected to grow at a mere 4.4 per cent this year, reflecting perhaps subdued wage/income growth. Investment activity, though, is expected to remain healthy, with the latest estimates pegging growth at 10.3 per cent. However, investment activity driven by higher government spending might slow down in the months ahead as the national elections approach. In fact, recent data from the Controller General of Accounts shows that central government capex was down 8.8 per cent during October-November. The NSO also estimates nominal GDP to grow at 8.9 per cent this year. This is considerably lower than the 10.5 per cent factored in the Union budget's estimates. Slower nominal GDP growth would suggest that even if the government meets its fiscal deficit target in absolute terms, it is possible that the fiscal deficit ratio edges to around 6 per cent of GDP, marginally higher than the budget estimate.

INDIA IN PUNJAB

AAP vs Congress in the state highlights the difficulties the anti-BJP front faces nationally

CONVERSATION IN PUNJAB'S political corridors and backrooms currently centres on a question: Should the national agenda supersede the state's interests? A conundrum confronts the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and its opponent, Congress. Ever since the coming together of the Indian National Democratic Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) last year, this issue has plagued the minds of leaders of both parties in the state. Congress is the primary opposition to the AAP government, which secured an overwhelming 92 out of 117 seats in the assembly elections in 2022. Having promised to tackle systemic corruption, the AAP government has gone all guns blazing against former Congress ministers and MLAs, with Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann declaring "sab phade jaange", the corrupt won't be spared. Several Congress leaders, including a former deputy chief minister and senior ministers, have spent time behind bars.

While the AAP government has taken a high moral ground on these investigations and arrests, Congress has stoutly dismissed them as a witch-hunt. Cries of vendetta were particularly strident this week when Congress leader and Bholath MLA Sukhpal Singh Khaira was arrested in another case a few hours after he got bail from the Punjab and Haryana High Court after spending over three months in jail in connection with a drugs case dating back to 2015. Before his interment, Khaira was arguably one of the loudest critics of the AAP government, often taking to social media to "expose" a "scam". Leaders of both parties have been vociferously opposing any alliance for the coming Lok Sabha polls in the state with only sitting Congress MPs and maverick party leader Navjot Sidhu striking a conciliatory note. Last week, CM Mann, who says voters have already written the obituary of the Congress, appeared to have softened his stand when he said any decision on the alliance would be taken by party seniors at the central level. However, the recent Khaira incident highlights the deep-seated animosity and rift between the two parties.

It's not merely a lack of trust. Both parties also view any alignment as politically unwise. The AAP rose to power due to voter alienation from traditional parties such as Congress, which had been ruling the state in alternation with Shiromani Akali Dal. Congress, which won 18 seats even as the SAD was almost wiped out in the last assembly polls, feels it has the potential to rebuild itself and come out stronger in the next elections by capitalising on disillusionment with the ruling party. Partnering with the AAP could eliminate its chance of being a viable alternative. For INDIA, in Punjab, therein lies the rub.

A SPECIAL VICTORY

For India, Cape Town Test series was also about missed opportunities. It must plan ahead, a busy season beckons

INdia's TEST TRIUMPH over South Africa at Cape Town was special in several ways. One of the greatest wins abroad, it entered the record books as the shortest ever Test match in the history of the game. Even leveling the series in South Africa is considered a feat for Rohit Sharma and his men since it has been achieved only once before in nine trips. But once the immediate euphoria subsides, India could reflect on the series as a lost opportunity. It has never won a Test series in South Africa and the failed attempt of the 2023-24 tour once again proves that Indian cricket's final frontier remains daunting.

Virat Kohli dazzled, prospering in the harshest of conditions; KL Rahul stroked a grittily graceful hundred. But the rest of Indian batting crumbled, struggling to negotiate the moving and bouncing ball. The performances of the trio considered as the future of Indian batting — Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill and Shreyas Iyer — too were disappointing. True, the conditions were extreme on most days, but some batsmen, like Kohli, Rahul, Dean Elgar and Aiden Markram showed that run-making is indeed possible, though it required awareness and courage, steeliness of mind and sturdiness of technique. South Africa's batsmen, too, did not fare significantly better in a two-Test series that lasted barely the duration of an entire Test.

A better preparation in the build-up to the Test series would have equipped them to deal with the vagaries. Even the bowlers were erratic in the first Test, thus emphasising the virtues of practice games and camps before important away tours. But if India are serious about emerging as a world-beating Test side, there's little time to brood over missed opportunities. A busy season beckons; India would play 15 more Tests this calendar year, apart from the T20 World Cup and IPL. Now is the time to plan ahead — to ensure that players are fit for the big series, they are not fatigued, the fast bowlers are smartly managed and the batsmen tighten their game. Else, they would be left ruining chances not taken, as in South Africa.



SANJAY BHATTACHARYYA

At stake in Dhaka

This Bangladesh election is crucial, for consolidation of democracy and keeping fundamentalism at bay

ipation and representation. Foreign observers have been invited to witness the promise of free and fair elections.

Violence has been a feature of elections in Bangladesh with its history of assassinations that created deep mistrust between AL and BNP. It came in the way of dialogue and consensus and led to zero-sum options. In 2014, the Opposition boycotted the elections on the caretaker issue. In 2018, it contested the elections, but amid allegations of electoral violations, the ruling alliance received an overwhelming mandate.

The Opposition BNP entered the fray in

2023 with a depleted organisation, weakened leadership with many figures in detention or overseas and dissension within. Its strategy of agitation to stall the elections led to more arrests of opposition workers. Many BNP local leaders reportedly wanted to contest elections, despite a diktat to boycott, and several broke away to form new parties. This reaffirmed the importance of electoral politics and the marginalisation of those who would not join elections.

Islamist forces have been on the fringes of electoral processes. Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (Jamaat), Bangladesh Islami Chhatrashibir (Shibir) and other Islamic parties aligned with the BNP were barred from contesting elections following court rulings — and their leaders were sentenced for war crimes committed during the liberation war. AL had courted certain Islamic groups to expand its vote base. Breakaway Islamic groups, including from Jamaat, formed new parties that were recognised by the Election Commission. This trend of the mainstreaming of Islamist forces will need monitoring.

Bangladesh was sensitive to the criticism from the US and Europe about its democratic process. Not only has the US questioned its ability to hold free and fair elections but it also imposed visa restrictions on those who obstructed free and fair elections. The government feared that such criticism might come in the way of its larger aspirations for economic growth and its place in a globalised world. So, while it gave no quarter to the opposition parties within Bangladesh, it sought to reassure foreign critics of its intention and ability to conduct the polls with high participation.

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It is important to understand that Bangladesh chose democracy, unlike its estranged twin Pakistan. A confident and rising Bangladesh will be an important member of the global community, a partner for free and open societies and the spread of democracy.

The writer is a former ambassador and Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs



RINKU GHOSH

THE WOMEN OF RAMAYANA

In the age of hypermasculinity, they provide a moral compass

AS THE TEMPLE at Ayodhya solidifies the image of Lord Ram in our attempt to crystallise civilisational glory, one wonders whether women of the Ramayana will ever have their own stories to tell or shrines edifying them. Although their relevance is scattered across various versions of the Ramayana, Sita, Kaikeyi and Mandodari exist in the shadow lines of their husbands — Ram, Dasharath and Ravan — flickering between myth-making and historicity, finally settling into a metaphor. Yet they are the moral compass and a quiet counterfoil to the hypermasculinity of the epic, and, therefore, relevant to discussion.

These women have been etched variably in regional versions of the Ramayana, clearly reflecting the societal context of their origins. Parts of India, where the sacred feminine dominates, have retold a more robust role for them in retelling the epic. Perhaps, it is this fluidity of interpretation that has layered their persona and made them more dynamic, complex and ever-evolving. That's why Sita is the Prakriti to the Purush and to understand her, one must go back to the story of her origins, something which is glossed over in popular narratives. Born of the earth, she became a symbol of fertility and continuity in an agricultural society. Sita came from Videha, also known as Mithila, which historically is believed to have moved from a monarchy to a republic. Some versions affirm how her father King Janaka allowed her a democratic space to thrive.

Neither did she want male approval or rehabilitation. Questioned about her chastity, she chose to leave Ayodhya and raise her twin sons, Luv and Kush, as a single mother. Sita never returned to her father, nor did her father seek her out. In the fullness of being, she detached herself from a society that wanted to circumscribe her within its rules and deny her equality as a woman. Sita's independence may not seem fiery enough in texts, but it's the reason King Janaka in one of the versions, is quoted as telling her, "May you carry happiness wherever you go." An assertion of her

completeness that need not be referenced in a man's world.

Kaikeyi, Dasharath's favourite of his three wives and one who saved him, is seen as a flawed character. But this grey-shaded woman, who loves Ram but wants legacy rights for her son and one from whom Dasharath sought advice, is the most human and believable. There are references that growing up among seven brothers, she became just as adept in warfare and sagacious in statecraft. Some interpretations of the epic also wonder why she didn't contest Lord Ram's ascendance to the throne on his return and theorise if the banishment was her way of initiating Ram into the ways of the world so that he deserved the throne by merit rather than birth.

Mandodari, Ravan's wife, is the voice of conscience amid his hubris. But she also questions the privilege of the high-born Aryans and their patronising attitude towards asuras. So when Sita asks her if the asuras ever respected women, she asks her if Aryan warriors ever gave maryada to women during war by holding them captive. She is depicted as well-versed in statecraft and is seen as preserving Lanka's long-term interest over her husband's maniacal ego.

It is easier to extol Sita and her kind as purity inviolate. But that's a passive construct. In the new age, it's time we free their spirit and essence.

rinku.ghosh@expressindia.com



JANUARY 6, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

BOYCOTT OF GOVERNOR

THE RULING LEFT Front in West Bengal fired its first salvo against state Governor A P Sharma when it decided to boycott functions attended by him. Only CM Jyoti Basu has been exempted from the directive issued by Left Front chairman Saroj Mukherjee. All others, including ministers, MPs and MLAs, have been asked not to attend the Governor's functions.

BJP'S SUPPORT TO HEGDE

THE BHARATIYA JANATA Party will continue its support to the Hegde government in

Karnataka. This was decided by the national executive of the party. It had taken up a note prepared by Shivappa, president of the Karnataka unit of the party, and Acharya, leader of the BJP in the Karnataka Assembly, on the political situation in Karnataka.

ACADEMIA DEBATE

UNION EDUCATION MINISTER Sheila Kaul's letter to the Director of IIT Madras, P V Indiresan, and her reply to a question in Parliament expressing the Centre's "displeasure" on his observations on the reservation system for SCs and STs in IITs has sparked de-

bate in academic circles. Main issues of debate are the draconian and colonial era restrictions on academicians and the reservation policy.

SOBHRAJ'S EXTRADITION

LEGAL ACTION HAS been initiated on Thailand's request for the extradition of Charles Sobhraj, one of Asia's most notorious underworld figures. The magistrate will decide whether a *prima facie* case exists under the Indian Extradition Act. Though there is no bilateral extradition treaty between the two countries, the act can be extended to cover extradition to certain countries.

THE IDEAS PAGE

The revival of the tiger

Its near extinction in 1973 was a pivotal moment in India's conservation history.
Now, Corbett has the highest density of wild tigers in the world



DHEERAJ PANDEY

INDIA HAS HAD a long and varied history of forest and wildlife conservation. The management of tiger reserves is based on the Tiger Conservation Plan which includes a detailed plan for core and buffer zones. At Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR), both these zones, together span large swathes of land, 1288.31 sq km to be precise, covering three districts of Uttarakhand. Just four years ago, CTR recorded 231 tigers. According to the 2022 report, the reserve now records the highest density of wild tigers in the world, with a figure of 260 tigers. This indicates a healthy forest and ecology.

CTR has a richly-forested, highly-biodiverse landscape. The variety of birds and wildlife at the reserve, attract bird-specialists, environmentalists, wildlife enthusiasts, researchers, conservation biologists and tourists in large numbers. Many a veteran visitor would vouch for the eco-spiritual experience of the wilderness. A glimpse of the peerless king of all his majesty is truly captivating; the dread and danger lurking in the treacherous gaze of a stalking tiger, an unforgettable sight. However, embedded within this wilderness story narrated by globalised voices that recognise and vocalise their resolve to maintain the delicate ecological balance for survival of all life forms, are other heroic tales of everyday sustenance, survival and stewardship. These include stories of villagers, who live in close proximity to wild animals, in areas surrounding the reserve and of forest staff, including foot-soldiers, *mahouts* and forest guards, whose heroism might seldom be chronicled in the narrative of global environmental conservation, but who are in fact, an undeniable part of the reserve's ecosystem.

The peerless forest staff, armed with their timeless resolve and a keen and instinctive eye, devote their lives to the protection, betterment and maintenance of the reserve. Their split-second decisions lead them into or away from danger. Patrolling the forest comes at great risk, often at the hands of a stalking tiger or a herd of "gentle giants", or an occasional *makhana*, a lone male pachyderm, infamous for its aggression. Clearly, an adequate number of field staff is crucial to protect and manage the forest. Their safety and security are paramount. In this regard, the steps taken lately include timely payment of wages, regular rations, weapons for defence and emergency medical help. Moreover, an engagement and dialogue with senior forest officials facilitates experience-sharing, including discussions regarding human-wildlife conflicts, challenges and problems faced on-field and help to re-strategise management practices and re-shape policy in a productive and meaningful manner.

Forest and wildlife management are multi-faceted and inter-linked areas. A healthy forest ecology entails a delicate balance of forest flora and fauna. Tigers can only breed if they and their habitat are well-protected. At CTR, there are 27 different kinds of grasslands. Grassland management and protection are vital for the breeding of cheetah, sambhar and other ungulates, which constitute the chief prey-base for the apex predator. Thus, a multi-pronged and integrated approach towards grassland and water management, is followed. Palatable grasses are developed and restored for the consumption of wildlife, while invasive weed species are eradicated. To serve the vital water requirement of wild animals, particularly during the pinch period, land-



C R Sasikumar

scape management practices like strategically placed solar-pump fed interlinked waterholes, are followed.

Strategic wildlife corridors are vital for the gene pool exchange of tigers and they are prescribed in consonance with the provisions, aspirations and recommendations of the Tiger Conservation Plan. Tigers and elephants, flagship species of the reserve, are long-ranging terrestrial animals. Their movement is crucial for the sustainable management of existing forest patches. These corridors are also pivotal to a healthy gene pool exchange for both tigers and elephants, reducing the chances of inbreeding amongst these animals. Moreover, when tiger numbers rise, the risk and scope of human-tiger conflict increases. In the absence of a sufficient number of corridors due to habitat fragmentation, a growing number of tigers, now also breeding in buffer zones, soon starts moving to fringe forest areas, which are situated close to villages. Additionally, privately owned land and construction activities limit the movement of animals, specially tigers and elephants. Therefore, underpasses, overbridges, elevated roads and corridors, and proper urban planning are key to ensuring an unhindered movement of these wild animals.

The rising incidence of human-elephant and tiger-human conflict poses a formidable challenge to park management. Milch and domestic animals, from villages and fringe forest areas tend to stray into forest areas and become "easy prey" for the tiger, whose population is on the rise. This behavioural conditioning of the tiger towards "easy prey" often snowballs into tiger attacks on unsuspecting village women, who may, on occasion, forage too deep into the buffer forest area, for their everyday material needs.

The forest department has taken robust steps towards the protection of wildlife at the reserve. As a result, poaching activities have been completely obliterated, especially in the highly sensitive-southern boundary of the reserve. Intensive patrolling is carried out by foot soldiers. Digital patrolling has been instituted in the form of the electronic-eye under the aegis of the project E-eye.

Over the years, the human-wildlife conflict problem has proved to be a "wicked problem". Given its nature and scope, every wildlife-human problem is unique, every attempt at a solution is significant and there is no easy or final solution. The only way ahead is by enjoining forest conservation upon all local stakeholders, a concern voiced by the leg-


AT THE STEERING WHEEL
THE ROAD AHEAD
AN EXPRESS SERIES
INSTITUTION LEADERS REFLECT ON THE OPPORTUNITY — AND CHALLENGE

In the absence of a sufficient number of corridors due to habitat fragmentation, a growing number of tigers, now also breeding in buffer zones, soon starts moving to fringe forest areas, which are situated close to villages. Additionally, privately owned land and construction activities limit the movement of animals, specially tigers and elephants. Therefore, underpasses, overbridges, elevated roads and corridors, and proper urban planning are key to ensuring an unhindered movement of these wild animals.

endary ornithologist Salim Ali when he championed a realistic, grassroots strategy involving "willing cooperation" from the villagers.

Arguably, community benefit must accrue to villagers with houses in fringe forest areas, whose lives and livelihoods are affected by the tiger. Ramnagar, a district outlying the reserve, is largely dependent on the tiger for its economy. Hundreds of resorts and local homestays cater to ecotourism around the tiger's habitat and generate employment for villagers as nature-guides-cum-naturalists, Gypsy guides, cooks, hotel staff, etc. Paradoxically, their lives are risked and crops raided by wild animals. This means that for the forest department, any attempt at garnering "willing cooperation" from villagers, starts from its role recognised not only as advisory, managerial and regulatory, but also collaborative, engaging and socio-culturally-sensitive.

Public initiatives by the department are an attempt towards mutual support and cooperation. Our beehive-fencing project involves the strategic placing of beehives along the interface of village-forest border areas, to guard crops against wild elephants; the outcome, the brand "Corbee Honey" is managed by local Eco Development Committees (EDCs), aimed at creating an economic hook based on cooptation and cooperation by and for local stakeholders. Started as a pilot project, we hope to scale it in future.

Similarly, we have fostered the "Living with Tigers" initiative in villages and schools around the peripheral area of the reserve. This involves activism around behavioural and response awareness amongst school children and villagers around human-wildlife conflict issues and the patterns of behaviour they must cultivate, practice and propagate in order to stay safe.

In India, the tiger is a significant part of religious and mythological iconography. It also has a historic significance, mythopoetically woven into the stories of and by the hunter-turned-conservationist Jim Corbett. That is why the tiger's near-extinction in 1973 was a pivotal moment in the conservation history of India. The revival of the tiger since then has also meant a cultural renaissance and revival of our conservation ethics and values. Today, CTR is part of our spatial imaginary, straddling across several discourses — historical, cultural, political, anthropological, sociological, legal and democratic. The future of CTR, its wildlife and its people are inextricably interlinked.

The writer is Field Director, Corbett Tiger Reserve

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Whether Mughal art would get such a warm reception in the India of Narendra Modi is a piquant question, but in the age of digital exhibition, these south Asian paintings should be shared more widely. Today, Milton Keynes; tomorrow, the world."

—THE GUARDIAN

Democracy's year of reckoning

As nations in the developed West flounder, contrary to the false commentary by naysayers, India will again set an example



RAM RAJYA

BY RAM MADHAV

STOIC PHILOSOPHER SENECA had said that "every new beginning comes with some other beginning's end". The eventful 2023 has ended and the new year of 2024 has begun. It is not going to be merely the change of year. It is going to be a year of change.

Like every new year, 2024 too brings much anticipation and many resolutions. A leap year, it is going to witness significant events like the Olympics and Paralympics in Paris and advances in frontier technologies like Artificial Intelligence. But the most unique feature of this year is going to be the "dance of democracy" in the world. Of the around 100 functional democracies, more than two-thirds, over 70 countries, will go for elections this year. The oldest democracies like the United States of America and the United Kingdom, to the youngest ones like Bhutan and Tunisia, to the largest, India, will hold elections this year.

For some time now, there has been anxiety about the future of democracy. Extreme Left-wing groups are encouraging greater anarchy in the name of woke freedoms in the developed West, while terrorism, climate challenges and despotic regimes are causing huge suffering and massive migrations in the developing world. Both are putting enormous pressure on democratic regimes, leading to fears of rising authoritarianism and decline of democratic values.

This year, in that sense, is going to be a defining one for the future of democracy.

The maturity of the Indian electorate can be gauged from its recent voting pattern.

Gone are the days when parochial factors of caste, creed and religion would determine the outcome. Today, the Indian electorate demands and rewards performance. To the chagrin of the agenda-less Opposition, the 10-year rule of Prime Minister Narendra Modi stands tall on account of performance and delivery.

Indian elections will be fought on four main criteria — identity, economy, security and national pride. On all these parameters, the Modi government's record has been exemplary.

Modi successfully roused among the citizens of Bharat a sense of their distinct identity as a cultural and civilisational nation that could subsume all the narrow and parochial identities of caste, language, region and religion. He commands an economy that is scaling new heights with every passing year. He was able to neutralise the security threats from terrorism to Pakistan and effectively stood up to the China challenge.

As democracies in the developed West flounder in chaos and uncertainty, contrary to the false commentary of the jealous and often supremacist clique, India is going to lead the democratic world by presenting a shining example in this new year.

The British poet-politician Tennyson's words — "The year is going, let him go; Ring out the false, ring in the true" — will be India's new year message for the world.

The writer, president, India Foundation, is with the RSS



C RAJ KUMAR

Many happy returns, Kapil Dev

My childhood hero can inspire the next generation, in sports and in life

TODAY IS KAPIL Dev's 65th birthday — an occasion to celebrate the life and contributions of an extraordinary person, a phenomenal cricketer, and most importantly, a truly transformative leader. His cricketing career is not just a benchmark of success and excellence, but stands as a testament to his character, marked by humility and self-effacing grace, and is a symbol of hope for millions across India where cricketers once rose only from the major metropolises.

Kapil's career is full of impressive achievements. He took 434 wickets in 131 test matches, while in one-day international (ODI) cricket, he took 253 wickets in 225 games. He remains one of the best all-rounders India has ever produced. He scored 5,248 runs in 131 test matches (including eight centuries) and 3,783 runs in 225 ODI matches (with one century). He is the only player in the world to have achieved an all-rounder's double of 4,000 test runs and 400 test wickets. He was also the youngest cricketer to take 100 wickets (at 21), 200 wickets (at 24) and 300 wickets (at 27).

Impressive as he was as a player, as a leader, Kapil was instrumental in defining the future of cricket in India.

Born in a relatively poor family, Kapil rose, through sheer grit and determination, to play

cricket at the highest level. The trials and tribulations of life made him disciplined and responsible, qualities that shaped his greatness. In 1978, he joined the Indian cricket team and barely five years later, he captained India at the Cricket World Cup in 1983. Against all odds, the team won the World Cup, and as Kapil lifted the coveted trophy, he also raised the confidence of 750 million Indians.

Indeed, the World Cup victory proved a defining moment for Kapil, Indian sports and the nation. Four decades after Independence, India was facing numerous challenges — social, political and economic. Above all, though, was a crisis of confidence in an uncertain world. The Indian cricket team led by Kapil scripted a new imagination for India. It had not only won the World Cup but also empowered a new generation of youth by driving its aspirations and self-esteem.

Over the next 40 years, Indian cricket was dramatically transformed. The seeds of this change were sown under Kapil's leadership. He forged a unique sense of purpose, camaraderie, community and aspiration that not only helped the Indian cricket team win the World Cup and surpass the limits of its performance but which transcended the sport itself.

For that generation and the ones that came after, especially mine, Kapil's career has epitomised hard work, commitment, excellence and national pride. Following him, the rise in the gradual professionalisation of sports and the creation of leagues in the last four decades, helped in the democratisation of the sport itself, enabling new talent to come from across the country. It also brought with it many new challenges. One such challenge is the need to build a culture of sports in India that is not based solely on corporate funding and the profit motive. The new generation of sports enthusiasts needs to be inspired by the life and contributions of Kapil.

Indeed, influential figures like Kapil Dev need to appreciate the unique and distinct roles they can play in educational institutions compared to corporate settings. Within academic environments, these personalities have the unparalleled opportunity to shape young minds, instil values, inspire dreams, foster aspirations and develop a sense of responsibility. Kapil Dev's story could serve as a compelling source, not only for cricket triumphs but also for the principles of discipline, perseverance, integrity and ethics that extend beyond the realm of sports.

In contrast, within the corporate sphere,

their influence tends to lean towards promoting products or services, necessitating a different approach. While educational institutions allow them to mould future leaders, the corporate arena involves contributing to the promotion and success of a brand. By sensitively acknowledging and navigating these responsibilities, influential figures can leave a lasting impact on the hearts and minds of students, and indeed, the consumer market.

It will be ennobling and empowering for young people across Indian schools, colleges and universities to hear Kapil Dev's story so that they understand that the privileges that they enjoy in their lives come with responsibilities. I believe that Kapil Dev, my childhood hero from Haryana, can inspire the next generation not only to become transformative leaders in the field of sports, but in other walks of life as well.

The greatest lesson that young people can learn from Kapil Dev's life is to pursue a calling in life for the sheer joy that comes with a profound sense of dedication. All other outcomes and benefits are purely incidental and transitory.

The writer is the founding vice chancellor of OP Jindal Global University

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PAUSE AND REFLECT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Dispiriting no-show' (IE, January 5). The Indian Science Congress (ISC) is a prestigious annual event. But in the last few years, the ISC's reputation has been in tatters. This year's pause is an opportunity to consider the relevance of the ISC. Some reputed scientists have called the event a "circus" that is deleterious to the cause of science in India. But the ISC also hosts thousands of students every year who have an opportunity to listen and learn from talks by researchers. Instead of being cancelled, the ISC should become an independent, more frequent, and more coherent event after a critical appraisal of what the national scientific community, including its members in the private sector, offer up to the table.

Khokan Das, Kolkata

BJP LIKE BRITISH

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Cowboy legislation' (IE, January 5). The writer has exposed the process adopted by the BJP government to replace the three colonial-era criminal justice laws as evasive and exclusionary. It bypassed the 30-day consultation with the general public over explaining the need, and financial

and legal impact of these laws. The committee that oversaw the framing of these laws lacked members from marginalised social groups. Lastly, Bills were hurriedly passed in the Parliament without proper debate and in the absence of a majority of Opposition members. The formation of law itself can't be exempted from due process. The irony is that just like the British, who did not consult its subjects while framing laws, the government, which is claiming to decolonise, is equally uncharitable.

LR Murmu, New Delhi

DIASPORA ISSUES

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Voting with their visas' (IE, January 3). The reality of migrants taking whatever dangerous routes are available to them to get into countries like the USA is indicative of dissatisfaction with the current economic and social systems in India. Though NRIs serve as "living bridges" of culture and economy, their safety is jeopardised by unscrupulous travel agents and aggressive nativist movements in their destination countries. Discussions must be held between India and other nations to ensure the safety of our migrant citizens.

Anany Mishra, via email

Classifieds

PERSONAL

I Suman Dahiya W/o Anil Dahiya R/o Narela, Delhi declares that Suman & Suman Dahiya are both one & same person 0050233841-1

I Geeta Rani D/o Ashok Kumar Arora R/o H. No. 4, Street No. 16, Sarojini park, Shastri Nagar, Shahdara, Delhi-110031, I have changed my name from Geeta Rani to Geeta Arora for all future purposes. 0040706858-2

It is general information that I GANGA PRASAD S/o Shri BABU RAM residing at 669 near Barat Ghari Purnavas Colony, Pocket-4, Sector-A-6, Narela, North West Delhi-110040 declare that the name of mine and my father has been wrongly written as GANGA PD and B RAM(FATHER) in my RC and TSR PERMIT and my RC No. DL1RQ0962 and TSR Permit No. TL1RQ/0962 and GANGA PRASHAD in my Driving Licence and BATCH and my DRIVING LICENCE No. DL07 19970076467 and BATCH No.078559. The actual name of mine is GANGA PRASAD and my father name is BABU RAM respectively which may be amended accordingly it is certified that I have compiled with other legal requirements in this connection 0070881920-1

Im, MadhuBala w/o Satish, R/o flat-no-203, Tower-Society, Great Value Sharanan, sector-107, Noida, Goutam Budh nagar, U.P-201301, Have changed my name to Madhu Malik for all future purposes. 0070881924-1

I, ZEESHAN MALIK,S/O SHAHABBUDDIN, H.NO.A-31/150H GALI NO.3, GURUDWARA MOHALLA MAJUPUR,NORTH EAST, DELHI 110053,changed my minor daughter name LABISNA MALIK,for all,future purposes. 0040706931-2

I, Suneeta Koul Zutshi,W/o Sudhir Zutshi R/o H.N.O.-121, Block-A,Palam-Vihar, Gurgaon,Haryana-122017,Have Changed My Name to Suneeta Koul,for all,future Purposes. 0040706929-1

I, Shweta Sadana W/o Kamal Sadana R/o-2294 4th-floor, Gali-No.3, Raja-Park, Shakurbasti, Delhi-34, have changed my name to Shweta Sidana. 0040706931-7

I, Savita W/o,Guddu Parsad,R/o-E-218,Vijay-Vihar Phase-1,Deli-110085,inform that in my minor son Adarsh Kumar School-record my name was written as Savita Gupta, whereas correct-name is Savita. 0040706927-6

I, SHIVRAJ SINGH,S/O,BHANWAR SINGH RATHORE,R/O HOUSE,N.O.S-3/192, GALI NO.6,NEAR-MANGAL BAZAR ROAD, SWARN PARK,NANGLOI,DELHI-110041,have changed my name to SHIVRAJ SINGH RATHORE. 0040706927-9

I, SANJAY BHIMRAO INGLE,S/O,BHIMRAO INGLE,HOUSE,N.O.302,3RD-FLOOR, PLOT.N.O.9,SHIV SHAKTI APARTMENTS OM-VIHAR PH.IA,BEHIND-MAGGO HOSPITAL,UTTAM-NAGAR WEST,DELHI-110059,changed my name to SANJAY INGLE,for all,future purposes. 0040706931-1

I, Rupali Wadhwa,D/o Sanjay Gulati,W/o Viren Wadhwa,R/o,House.Number.3 6,Street No.6,West Patel-Nagar,New Delhi-110008,have changed my name,from Rupali Gulati to Rupali Wadhwa,for all,future purposes. 0040706931-5

I, Romi Bansal,S/o Rajkumar Bansal R/o E2/7,Third Floor, Near DPS School,Vasant Vihar,Vasant Vihar-1,South West-Delhi,Delhi-110057,have changed the name of my minor son Utsav Bansal aged-12-years and he shall hereafter be known as Utsav Bansal. 0040706930-9

I, TASnim BEGAM,W/O AFZAL HUSSAIN,R/O D-703 AASHIANA APARTMENT MAYUR VIHAR PHASE-1 EXTENSION,DELHI-110091, HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO TASNEEM BEGUM. 0040706924-6

I, Ritu Rani W/o Amit Sharma,R/o H.no-249,Street.no-4,Madan Puri,Gurgaon Haryana,Have changed my name to Ritu Sharma,for all purposes. 0040706927-4

I, Ravinder Kumar,R/o-98A/2, 4th-Floor, Chirag Delhi, New Delhi-110017,have changed my minor son's name,from Shiv to Shiv Gautam,for all,future purposes. 0040706927-5

I, Ranju Davi,W/o.Vipin Gowro, R/o.H.No.162,Sewa Samiti-B,Tah ipur,East Delhi-95,inform in my,Ration Card.No.077004781154 my, name wrongly-written Ranju Gowro,My correct name is Ranju Davi as per my,Aadhar Card,Which should be corrected accordingly. 0040706931-4

I, RAKESH AGRAWAL,S/O JAGDISH SARAN AGRAWAL,R/O 3/155,2ND-FLOOR,SUNDER VIHAR,PASCHIM VIHAR,DELHI-110087.HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO RAKESH AGGRAWAL. 0040706924-3

I, Pankaj Ramesh Patel,S/o Ramesh Patel R/o 805,Pearl Court-3,Essel Towers,MG Road,Gurgaon(Haryana)-122001,have changed my name to Pankaj Patel. 0040706930-5

I, POOJA CHOUDHARY,W/O AKASH LAKRA R/O,HNO.104,ARVIND ENCLAVE,MUNDKA,DELHI-110041,HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO POOJA. 0040706924-4

I, Neha,D/o Pawan Kumar,R/o,RZ-13/14,Flat No-206,Sanskarp Apartment Matiala Extn.Delhi-110059,Have Changed My Name To Neha Aggarwal. 0040706927-8

I, Neeraj Pathak alias Neeraj Kant Pathak S/o Mahesh Kumar R/o-3626,Raja Park Shakur Basti Delhi-110034,changed my name to Neeraj Kant. 0040706924-8

I, NAHID AFZAL,D/O AFZAL HUSSAIN R/O D-703 AASHIANA APARTMENT MAYUR VIHAR PHASE-1 EXTENSION,DELHI-110091, HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO NAHID AFZAL HUSSAIN. 0040706924-7

I, Mohammad Shahid,S/o Abdul Wasey,R/o-1377, Gali No.4,Faiz Ganj Bahadur Garh Road Delhi-110006,have changed my name to Mohd Shahid for future. 0040706948-2

I, Meetu Madan W/o Sh.Sarvan Kumar Madan,R/o H.No.3-C-117,NIT Faridabad,have Changed my name from Meeta Madan,for all future purposes. 0040706851-1

I, MANSI BHASIN DUA,W/O VARUN DUA, ADD-36/28, EAST PATEL-NAGAR CENTRAL,DELHI-110008,changed my-minor daughter name ANAHITA DUA to ANAHITA DUA,for all,future purposes. 0040706931-3

I, MANU AGARWAL,W/O RAKESH AGGARWAL,R/O 3/155,2ND-FLOOR,SUNDER VIHAR,PASCHIM VIHAR,DELHI-110087.HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO MANU AGGARWAL. 0040706924-2

I, MANISH KUMAR,S/O BHAGWAT PRASHAD SAINI,R/O H.N-4617,STREET-13 Jal MATA MARKET TRI-NAGAR DELHI-110035,HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO MANISH KUMAR SAINI. 0040706930-2

I, Krishna Devi Antil W/o Naresh Chander Singh R/o D-2/12, Jeewan-Park, Uttam-Nagar, New Delhi-110059, have changed my name to Krishna Devi. 0040706931-8

I, Krishn S/O Ram kumar,R/o,O,House.no. 350,Village Chatiya Aulia Sonipat Haryana,have changed my name to Krishan Mehra,for all purpose. 0040706927-1

I, Kamal Sadana S/o Nanak Chand R/o-2229 4th-Floor, Gali No.3, Raja-Park, Shakurbasti Delhi-34,have changed my name to Kamal Sadana. 0040706931-6

I, Jaswinder Singh,S/o Sant Singh,R/o,VPO. Ibrahimwai Tarf Arshad Khan,Kapurthala, Punjab-144819,have changed my name to Balwinder Singh Multani. 0040706930-3

I, Hitesh Kumar S/o Subhash Singh,R/o-536-A,Sector-15,Part-1,Gurgaon,Haryana-122001,have changed my name to Hitesh Deshwal,in future. 0040706930-4

I, Guddu Parsad,S/o Ramvilas,R/o E-218,Vijay-Vihar Phase-1,Delhi-110085,inform that in my minor son Adarsh Kumar School-record my name was written as Guddu Parsad Gupta,whereas correct-name is Guddu Parsad. 0040706852-2

I, Bharti D/o Shri Satbir Tyagi,R/o-332,Barri (4) Sonipat Haryana-131101,have changed my name from Pooja Tyagi,to Bharti,for all,future purposes. 0040706948-1

I, BHARAT KUMAR BERIWAII,S/O RISHI KUMAR, B-95, CHETAK APPARTMENT SECTOR-9, ROHINI,DELHI-110085, HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO BHARAT KUMAR. 0040706927-2

I, BABY,D/O ROHTAS KUMAR,R/O,A-3,GALI NO-3,ARJUN NAGAR,SAFADJRUNG ENCLAVE,SOUTH WEST-DELHI,DELHI-110029,changed my name to BABY KUMAR. 0040706929-2

I, JASHWANI GUPTA,R/o-3A,ELITE TOWER-C CENTRAL-PARK RESORT-2 SECTOR-48,SOUTH CITY-2,GURGAON,HARYANA 122018,have changed my minor daughter name Arshiya to Arshiya Gupta,for all,future purposes. 0070881921-1

I, Asad Mian,S/o-Mehboob Hasan,R/o-C-14-DDA Flats,Mata Sundri Road,Delhi have changed my name to Mohammad Asad Mian,alias Mohd Asad Mian,for all purpose. 0040706921-1

I, AJAY JINDAL S/O NARESH KUMAR R/O 322/3,OLD ANAJ MANDI,GOHARA,SONIPAT,HAR YANA-131301.HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO AJAY KUMAR. 0040706924-1

I, AFZAL HUSAIN,S/O IQBAL HUSAIN R/O D-703 AASHIANA APARTMENT MAYUR VIHAR PHASE-1 EXTENSION,DELHI-110091, HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO AFZAL HUSSAIN. 0040706924-5

I, Mumtaz Ahmad S/o Zaheer Ahmad R/o E-222, 4 thFloor, Shaheen Bagh, Okhla Modern Public,Abul Fazal Enclave Part-2, Jamia Nagar,Delhi-110025 inform that in my minor son Mohd Aariz's school records his mother's name wrongly written as Shabista Parveen, while correct name is Savista Perveen, which may be amended accordingly. 0040706924-1

I, RAKESH AGRAWAL,S/O JAGDISH SARAN AGRAWAL,R/O 3/155,2ND-FLOOR,SUNDER VIHAR,PASCHIM VIHAR,DELHI-110087.HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO RAKESH AGGRAWAL. 0040706924-3

I, md Khurshid Alam s/o md Jalil Ansari R/O G39/1 Flat no c-4 Vijay vihar phase-II Rohini sec-4 pin code 110085 have changed my name to mohd Khurshid Alam 0070881835-1

I, md Jalil Ansari S/o Ibrahim Ansari R/O G39/1 Flat no c-4 Vijay vihar phase-II Rohini sec-4 pin code 110085 have changed my name mohd Jalil Ansari 0070881933-1

I, Sudhanshu Gour S/o Rakesh Kumar Gour R/o Flat No. -0350, Etenia Mahagun Moderna, Sector-78, Noida, UP-201301 have changed my name to SUDHANSU GAUR for all future purposes. 0070881923-1

I, Sarika Jhamb W/o Sh. Rajeev Vij, R/o B-7/6, 2nd Floor, DLF Phase-I, Gurgaon -122002, Haryana have changed my name to Sarika Rajeev Vij for all future purposes. 0040706917-1

I, Sanya Haswani,D/O Harish Parmanand Haswani, R/O Apex Athena,sector-75, Noida 201304, have changed my name to Sanya Harish Haswani and will be known the same henceforth. 0070881916-1

I, Reeta Arora W/o Sanjay Khanna R/o E-16/47, UGF floor, Block-16, Geeta Colony, Shahdara, Delhi-110031, have changed my name from Reeta Arora to Ritiha Khanna for all future purposes. 0040706948-2

I, Meetu Madan W/o Sh.Sarvan Kumar Madan,R/o H.No.3-C-117,NIT Faridabad,have changed my name from Meeta Madan,for all future purposes. 0040706851-1

I, Mansi Bhasin DUA,W/O VARUN DUA, ADD-36/28, EAST PATEL-NAGAR CENTRAL,DELHI-110008,changed my-minor daughter name ANAHITA DUA to ANAHITA DUA,for all,future purposes. 0040706931-3

I, Manu Lata Agrawal W/o Pradip Kumar Agrawal R/o N-26, Sector-11, Noida,G.B.Nagar, have changed my husband's name Pradeep Kumar Agrawal to Pradip Kumar Agrawal for all future purposes. Both are same person. 0040706924-2

I, Manu Lata Agrawal W/o Pradip Kumar Agrawal R/o N-26, Sector-11, Noida,G.B.Nagar, have lost my ICICI Bank I Card No.2304133 at Rohini Sector-8,Market on 5 Jan.2024 Finder Cont.9911556929. 0040706924-10

I, Krishan Kumar Jain lost my Possession Letter of my House,D-12/AKASH Bharti Apartment,I.P.,Ext-24,Patparganj,Delhi-110092.Finder contact:Krishan Kumar Jain,S/D/W/O-Late Shri.Shiv Sharukh Jain,D-12/AKASH Bharti Apartment, I.P.,Ext-24,Patparganj,Delhi. 0040706930-10

I, KRISHNA Devi Antil W/o Naresh Chander Singh R/o D-2/12, Jeewan-Park, Uttam-Nagar, New Delhi-110059, have changed my name to MEENA for all purposes. 0040706855-1

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I, KRISHNA Devi Antil W/o Naresh Chander Singh R/o D-2/12, Jeewan-Park, Uttam-Nagar, New Delhi-110059, have changed my name to MEENA for all purposes. 0040706855-1

I, Kamlesh Kumar S/o Son of Sumer Prasad R/o House no. 255,Gali-Number-6,Near Diksha Public School,Surya-Vihar,Phase-3, Sector-9, Faridabad,Haryana-121013 do hereby affirm that in my PF account no. 101617119099, my name has been wrongly mentioned by mistake as " MOHIT" instead of "KAMLESH KUMAR".Both "MOHIT"and"KA MLESH KUMAR"are one and same person. 0040706930-4

I, Krishan Kumar Jain S/o Late Akash Bharti Apartment IP-24,Patparganj,Delhi-110092.Finder contact:Krishan Kumar Jain,S/D/W/O-Late Shri.Shiv Sharukh Jain,D-12/AKASH Bharti Apartment, I.P.,Ext-24,Patparganj,Delhi. 0040706930-10

I, KRISHNA Devi Antil W/o Naresh Chander Singh R/o D-2/12, Jeewan-Park, Uttam-Nagar, New Delhi-110059, have changed my name to MEENA for all purposes. 0040706855-1

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SENSEX: 72,026.15 ▲ 178.58 (0.25%) NIFTY: 21,710.80 ▲ 52.20 (0.24%) NIKKEI: 33,377.42 ▲ 89.13 HANG SENG: 16,535.33 ▼ 110.65 FTSE: 7,689.61 ▼ 33.46 DAX: 16,594.21 ▼ 23.08



GOLD

₹ 63,450



USD RATE

₹ 83.16



OIL

\$ 78.01



SILVER

₹ 76,900

Note: Gold, silver rates at Delhi spot market, gold per 10g, silver per 1 kg; Crude oil (Indian basket) as of January 4

International market data till 1900 IST

Sebi tells institutional investors to disclose short-sale trades upfront

HITESH VYAS
MUMBAI, JANUARY 5

MARKET REGULATOR Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) Friday told institutional investors to disclose all short-sale transactions upfront at the time of placing an order. The regulator, however, permitted retail investors to make a similar disclosure by the end of the trading hours on the transaction day.

Short-selling is the sale of a stock which a person does not own at the time of trade but has merely borrowed. The aim is to profit from a decline in the asset's price by later buying the shares at a lower cost to cover the short position.

In October last year, Sebi had issued a broad framework on 'Short-Selling and Securities Lending and Borrowing Scheme'. The norms issued Friday are an addition to that framework.

UN report revises forecast for 2024 GDP growth down to 6.2%

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 5

A UNITED Nations report Friday revised India's gross domestic product (GDP) growth forecast for the 2024 calendar year to 6.2 per cent from its earlier estimate of 6.7 per cent.

"Growth in India is projected to reach 6.2 per cent in 2024, slightly lower than the 6.3 per cent estimate for 2023, amid robust domestic demand and strong growth in the manufacturing and services sectors," said the World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) report.

The 2023 GDP growth projection was revised upwards by 0.5 percentage points to 6.3 per cent.

The report said GDP in the larger South Asian region grew by an estimated 5.3 per cent in 2023 and is projected to increase by 5.2 per cent in 2024, driven by a robust expansion in India, "which remains the fastest-growing large economy in the world".

The UN report said investment prospects in China face headwinds from a struggling property sector though government-led infrastructure investments are partially offsetting the shortfall in private investments. The assessment comes at a time India is positioning itself as an alternate invest-

Dec services PMI hits 3-mth high on rise in new orders

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 5

SERVICE SECTOR growth in India rose to a three-month high in December supported by favourable economic conditions and positive demand trends, a monthly survey said Friday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Services PMI Business Activity Index rose from 56.9 in November to 59 in December, highlighting a sharp increase in output that was the most pronounced since September.

In Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) parlance, a print above 50 means expansion while

SHORT-SELL DISCLOSURE NORMS TIGHTENED

■ While institutional investors have to disclose short sales upfront, retail investors can do so at the end of trading hours.

■ Brokers must upload scripwise short positions on exchanges before trading begins next day.

■ Exchanges must put up this info on their websites.



■ The norms, an addition to a Sebi framework issued in Oct, come 2 days after SC turned down CBI probe into Adani, asked govt to probe volatility caused by short positions of Hindenburg

The new norms come two days after the Supreme Court rejected demands for a court-monitored probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) or a special investigation team (SIT) into allegations of stock manipulation and accounting fraud against the Adani Group by the

Hindenburg Research in a January 2023 report.

The court also asked the Centre to probe "the loss which has been sustained by Indian investors as a result of the volatility caused by the short positions taken by Hindenburg Research and any

other entities acting in concert with Hindenburg Research" and "enquire into whether there was any infraction of law by the entities which engaged in short-selling on this occasion".

"The institutional investors shall disclose upfront at the time of placement of order whether the transaction is a short-sale," Sebi said in its framework for short-selling.

The market regulator mandated brokers to collect the details on scrip-wise short-sale positions, collate the data and upload it to the stock exchanges before the commencement of trading on the following trading day.

The stock exchanges should then consolidate such information and disseminate the same on their websites for the information of the public on a weekly basis, it said.

In the framework issued in October, Sebi had allowed short-selling for all classes of investors,

including retail and institutional. It has banned "naked short-selling" in the Indian securities market and asked all investors to mandatorily honour their obligation of delivering securities at the time of settlement. Naked short-selling is when a trader sells shares in some asset without first borrowing them or ensuring they could be borrowed.

Sebi has not allowed any institutional investor to engage in day trading – that is, square-off their transactions intraday. In other words, all transactions would be grossed for institutional investors at the custodians' level and the institutions would be required to fulfil their obligations on a gross basis.

As per the framework, the securities traded in F&O (futures & options) and segments are eligible for short-selling and Sebi may review the list of stocks that are eligible for short-selling transactions from time to time.

Brookfield to buy ATC's telecom tower ops in India for ₹21,000 crore

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU

MUMBAI, JANUARY 5

CANADA-BASED Brookfield Asset Management will buy American Tower Corporation's (ATC) mobile tower operations in India for ₹21,000 crore (\$2.5 billion). This will be Brookfield's third acquisition in the Indian telecommunications space.

The leading global alternative asset manager is purchasing ATC – one of the largest real estate investment trusts in the world – through its affiliated infrastructure investment trust, Data Infrastructure Trust (DIT).

The total cash proceeds include an enterprise value on the ATC India operations of approximately \$2 billion, plus a ticking fee that accrues from October 1, 2023, to the date of closing. "Proceeds associated with the enterprise value assume the repayment of existing intercompany debt and the repayment, or assumption, of the existing India term loan, by DIT," ATC said in a statement.

Furthermore, considered within the total potential cash proceeds above, ATC will retain the full economic benefit associated with the optionally converted debentures issued by Vodafone Idea and will be entitled to receive future payments related to existing ATC India receivables. Proceeds from the

LARGER FOOTPRINT



■ This is Brookfield's third acquisition in the Indian telecom space.

■ With ATC's 78,000 towers, Brookfield will now have 2,53,000 towers in India.

transaction are expected to be used to repay ATC's existing indebtedness, it said.

"The transaction, which reflects the completion of the previously announced strategic review of American Tower's operations in India, is subject to customary closing conditions, including government and regulatory approvals, and is expected to close in the second half of 2024," the company said.

Brookfield also has a portfolio of roughly 175,000 towers that were acquired in 2020 from Reliance Industrial Investments and Holdings Ltd. ATC India has around 78,000 mobile tower sites across India. ATC India will be included in DIT, which includes the existing telecom assets.

In KYC norms, RBI revises definition of 'politically exposed person'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, JANUARY 5

THE RESERVE Bank of India (RBI) has changed the definition of Politically-Exposed Persons (PEPs) under its norms, a move that will make it easier for those individuals to carry out various banking transactions, including availing loans.

Certain changes have been made in the RBI's Know Your Customer (KYC) norms.

The earlier norms pertaining to PEPs were open-ended and there was a lack of clarity on the definition, apparently leading to issues for bankers, parliamentarians and others. There were also concerns in certain quarters that PEPs were finding it difficult to get loans or open bank accounts.

In the amended KYC master direction, the central bank defines PEPs as "individuals who are or have been entrusted with prominent public functions by a foreign country, including the heads of states/governments, senior politicians, senior government or judicial or military officers, senior executives of state-owned corporations and important political party officials".

The new rules also include a person who is entrusted by a foreign country with a public function. Bank accounts of PEPs have additional KYC norms under the current provisions and special due diligence has to be undertaken by a senior bank official.

Red Sea disruption: Costs up, crisis may deepen, says official

Maersk warns of big disruption, diverts ships from Red Sea

RAVI DUTTA MISHRA

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 5



Suez Canal is used by one-third of global container ship cargo

Another official said: "During the last few days, exporters are holding back consignments due to rising costs. Exporters of mostly low value high volume consignments such as textiles are being held back due to rising freight rates. The charges are even higher from the eastern ports of the country... that is the feedback we are getting. Each wing of the government is looking into it and there will be an

impact if the problem persists. The drought in Panama was also discussed but there has not been an impact on India as of now."

Shippers across the world are switching away from the Red Sea – and so the shortest route from Asia to Europe via the Suez Canal – after Houthi militants in Yemen stepped up attacks on vessels in the Gulf region to show their support for Hamas fighting Israel in Gaza.

JAYSHREE P UPADHYAY

MUMBAI, JANUARY 5

GUJARAT International Finance Tec-City, or GIFT City, has given approval to billionaire Azim Premji's wealth fund to set up a family investment fund in the financial hub, two sources with direct knowledge of the matter said.

Premji is the founder and former chairman of Indian IT major Wipro. With the approval, the fund will be able to invest overseas, the sources said.

While family investment funds can invest overseas, they require the central bank's approval, whereas funds established in GIFT City do not.

According to minutes of meetings uploaded on a government website, Premji's family fund had applied for approval last July. The fund has \$10 billion in

assets and the proposed GIFT entity would initially invest \$200 million, according to the minutes.

Apart from Premji, Infosys co-founder Narayan Murthy's family fund, called Catamaran Artha, had also applied to set up an investment fund worth ₹15 billion (\$180.49 million) in August. "This will encourage more global family offices to set up their operations in GIFT City, leveraging on progressive regulatory framework and make global investments," said Jaigan Patel, partner at EY India.

Several Indian-origin high net worth executives are visiting GIFT next week. ■ REUTERS

GIFT City gives nod to Azim Premji fund to invest overseas

Premji family fund will initially invest \$200 million

JAYSHREE P UPADHYAY

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assets and the proposed GIFT entity would initially invest \$200 million, according to the minutes.

Apart from Premji, Infosys co-founder Narayan Murthy's family fund, called Catamaran Artha, had also applied to set up an investment fund worth ₹15 billion (\$180.49 million) in August. "This will encourage more global family offices to set up their operations in GIFT City, leveraging on progressive regulatory framework and make global investments," said Jaigan Patel, partner at EY India.

Several Indian-origin high net worth executives are visiting GIFT next week. ■ REUTERS

with the watchdog, Aramex and the Indian complainant did not respond to queries.

A finding of cartelisation could bring a fine of up to three times the profit in each year the fee was fixed by the companies, or 10% of annual revenue for each year of violation, whichever is greater.

Most companies being investigated submitted emails to the watchdog in response to notices sent after it identified key executives involved in the alleged misconduct, the documents showed.

Investigators have sought more time, until March, to study all the evidence, before preparing an internal report. ■ REUTERS

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CCI probes DHL, FedEx, UPS over price collusion

ADITYA KALRA

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 5

INDIA'S ANTITRUST body is investigating domestic units of global delivery companies, such as Germany's DHL, US-based United Parcel Service and FedEx, for alleged collusion on discounts and tariffs, documents seen by Reuters showed.

It is the latest such scrutiny for the logistics industry, some dating back to 2015, when France levied fines amounting to \$735 million on 20 companies, including FedEx and DHL, for secretly colluding to increase prices.

The publisher said company executives exchanged commercially sensitive information regarding volumes, charges and discounts on courier and storage services offered at airports, be-



A finding of cartelisation could bring a fine of up to three times the profit in each year the fee was fixed

fore deciding on rates, the documents stated.

They "appear to be sharing commercially sensitive information amongst themselves ... for taking joint or collective decision to arrive at tariffs", the CCI said in an early assessment that led to the broader inquiry.

In a statement, FedEx categorically denied the accusations in the complaint but told Reuters it was co-operating with the CCI, while adding that it was committed to legal compliance. DHL also said it was co-operating fully and always maintained legal compliance. UPS said it could not give details of an "an ongoing, non-public investigation" but was co-operating

with the watchdog. Aramex and the Indian complainant did not respond to queries.

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Form No. 4
Valsad Civil Court
IN THE COURT OF V. D. Modh
PRINCIPAL SENIOR CIVIL JUDGE

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF A PERSON ACCUSED (See Section 82)		ATUL LIMITED COMPANY REGISTERED UNDER THE PROVISION OF COMPANIES ACT, THROUGH HARDIK S. VYAS
		NEXT DATE : 09-

TOP OF THE
WORLD

SRI LANKA

Govt declares
1-yr moratorium
on research ships

Colombo: Sri Lanka has declared a moratorium on foreign research ships entering its waters for a year amid concerns from India over Chinese research vessels docking in its neighbourhood. Though the moratorium comes ostensibly for capacity building it is seen as a reaction to growing concerns in India.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Niluka Kadurugamuwa told The Associated Press on Friday that the moratorium relates to all countries and will allow local researchers to build capacity be on a par with their foreign counterparts in joint researches. Chinese ships have docked in Colombo in recent years for research based on agreements between between agencies in China and Sri Lanka. AP

NEPAL

Permits to work
in Russia, Ukraine
halted due to war

Kathmandu: Nepal has stopped issuing permits to its citizens to work in Russia and Ukraine until further notice, an official said on Friday, after at least 10 Nepali soldiers were killed while serving in the Russian army. Nepal has asked Russia not to recruit its citizens in the Russian army and to immediately send all Nepali soldiers back to the Himalayan nation and compensate the families of those killed. The government has said that up to 200 Nepali citizens were estimated to be working in the Russian army, and foreign minister N.P. Saud told state-run RSS news agency that about 100 Nepalis were missing. REUTERS

RUSSIA

Poll body clears
two candidates
against Putin

Moscow: Russia's national elections commission on Friday registered the first two candidates who will compete with President Vladimir Putin in the March polls. The commission approved putting Leonid Slutsky of the nationalist Liberal Democratic Party and Vladislav Davankov of the New People Party on the ballot for the March 15-17 vote. Davankov is a deputy speaker of the lower house of parliament, the Duma. The Communist Party has put forth Nikolai Kharitonov — who finished second behind Putin in 2004 — as its candidate, but the elections commission has not formally registered him. AP

SOUTH KOREA

Rival Koreas hold
provocative drills
on sea borders

Seoul: The rival Koreas fired artillery rounds into the sea as part of provocative drills along their disputed sea boundary on Friday, in violation of the fragile 2018 inter-Korean military agreement. The firing exercises are expected to escalate tensions on the Korean Peninsula. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said North Korea fired 200 rounds in the waters north of their western sea boundary on Friday morning. It was North Korea's first frontline maritime firing exercise in about a year. AP

SENATOR CITES HARSH CLIMATE, SECURITY REASONS TO DEFER POLLS

Pak Senate approves delaying Feb 8 elections, but decision not binding

Resolution was moved in session with only 14 lawmakers out of 100 in attendance

REUTERS
KARACHI, JANUARY 5

PAKISTAN'S SENATE approved a resolution on Friday to further delay national elections which had been scheduled to take place on Feb. 8, the chairman of the senate said while addressing senators.

The resolution passed by the senate, however, is not binding and does not necessarily mean elections will be further delayed. There was no immediate comment from the election commission, the body that conducts elections in the country.

Elections in the politically and economically troubled South Asian nation were originally due to be held in November, 90 days after the dissolution of the lower house of parliament in August.

These were first delayed to February due to the fresh demarcation of constituencies under a

new census.

"January and February are the coldest months in majority areas in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (provinces)," said Senator Dilawar Khan, who moved the resolution during a session with only 14 lawmakers in attendance, adding that there were security concerns too.

Pakistan is currently being run by a caretaker government under interim Prime Minister Anwaar ul Haq Kakar that is meant to oversee a general election.

Caretakers are usually limited to overseeing elections, but Kakar's set-up is the most empowered in Pakistan's history.

Political analysts fear that a prolonged period without an elected government would allow the military, which has ruled Pakistan for over three decades since independence in 1947 and wields considerable control even if not in power, to consolidate control.

Apex court reserves verdict in lifetime disqualification case

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ISLAMABAD, JANUARY 5

PAKISTAN'S SUPREME Court on Friday reserved its judgment in the hearing of a key case that would settle the issue of lifetime disqualification of some leading politicians, including former prime ministers Nawaz Sharif and Imran Khan.

The verdict is expected to determine once and for all the controversy around the period of disqualification under Article 62(1)(f) of the Constitution and the Elections Act 2017.

A 2018 judgment by a five-member bench of the apex court had declared that disqualification under Article 62(1)(f) was



Imran Khan; Nawaz Sharif

for life, but changes made in the Elections Act 2017 on June 26, 2023, by a coalition government led by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) restricted it to a five-year term only.

A seven-member bench, headed by Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa, held the hearing on Friday.

During the hearing, the chief justice remarked that the

Supreme Court verdict on lifetime disqualification and the amendments to the Elections Act 2017 could not co-exist. He also stated that discrepancies in the apex court's interpretation and the law could result in "confusion" in the upcoming general elections.

At the hearing's conclusion, the chief justice said a short order would be issued without specifying a time for its announcement.

"We will try to come up with a shorter order as soon as possible. Probably not today, but it will be very soon, God willing," he said.

However, it was not clear if the limit of disqualification should be imposed through a court order or an amendment to the Constitution.

Maldives President Muizzu to meet Xi in China next week

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BEIJING, JANUARY 5

MOHAMED MUIZZU, the new Maldivian President, will pay a state visit to China from January 8 to 12, the Chinese Foreign Ministry announced on Friday.

Muizzu, who is seen as a pro-China politician, took oath as the eighth President of the Maldives after defeating the India-friendly incumbent Ibrahim Mohamed Solih in the presidential runoff held in September.

Muizzu is visiting China at the invitation of Chinese President Xi Jinping, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said in a press release.

Muizzu's predecessors in the recent past visited India first, considering the wide-ranging bilateral ties and the Maldives' proximity to India, followed by China which has expanded its influence in the island nation by investing in major infrastructure projects.

However, Muizzu chose Turkey as his first destination for a foreign visit soon after his election followed by the UAE where he met Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the



Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu. Reuters

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28) on December 1 and discussed the progress of the wide-ranging bilateral ties.

The Maldives is India's key maritime neighbour in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and occupies a special place in its initiatives like 'SAGAR' (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and the 'Neighbourhood First Policy' of the Modi government.

The Maldives' proximity to India — barely 70 nautical miles from the island of Minicoy in Lakshadweep — and its location at the hub of commercial sea lanes running through the Indian Ocean gives it significant strategic importance.

Ukraine fires drones, missiles at Crimea, and southern Russia

ASSOCIATED PRESS
KYIV, JANUARY 5

over the northwestern part of the Black Sea, the ministry said.

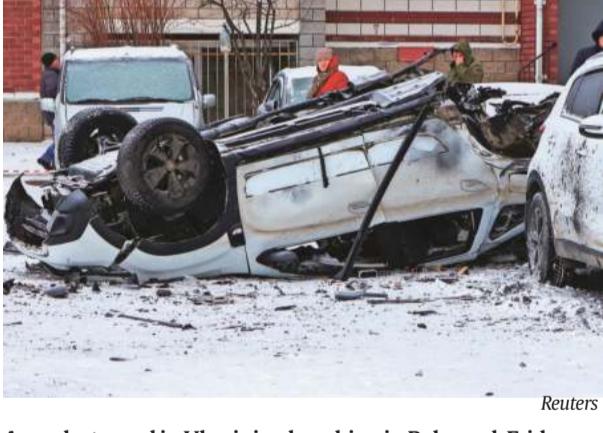
The developments came after three people were injured Thursday night by other Ukrainian rocket and drone attacks on the Russian border city of Belgorod and the surrounding region, said Belgorod Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov.

He posted photographs on Telegram of an apartment building with some windows shattered and damaged cars.

Ukrainian attacks on December 30 in Belgorod killed 25 people, officials there said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has pledged to hit more targets on the Crimean Peninsula and inside Russian border regions this year. The goal is to unsettle Russians as President Vladimir Putin seeks another six years in power in a March 17 election.

Ukraine said its attack on military facilities in Crimea Thursday affected a command center and its air defense system.



A car destroyed in Ukrainian bombing in Belgorod, Friday

After Baghdad airstrike, Iraq to shut down US-led mission

REUTERS
BAGHDAD, JANUARY 5

THE IRAQI government is forming a committee to prepare the closing down of the U.S.-led international coalition's mission in the country, Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani's office said on Friday.

Sudani's statement came a day after a US strike killed a militia leader in Baghdad, prompting anger among Iran-aligned groups which demanded the government end the presence of the coalition in Iraq.

"Government is setting the date for the start of the bilateral committee to put arrangements to end the presence of the international coalition forces in Iraq permanently," a statement from the PM's office said. The committee would include representatives of the military coalition, a government official said. The U.S. military launched Thursday's strike in retaliation against recent attacks on U.S. personnel, the Pentagon said.

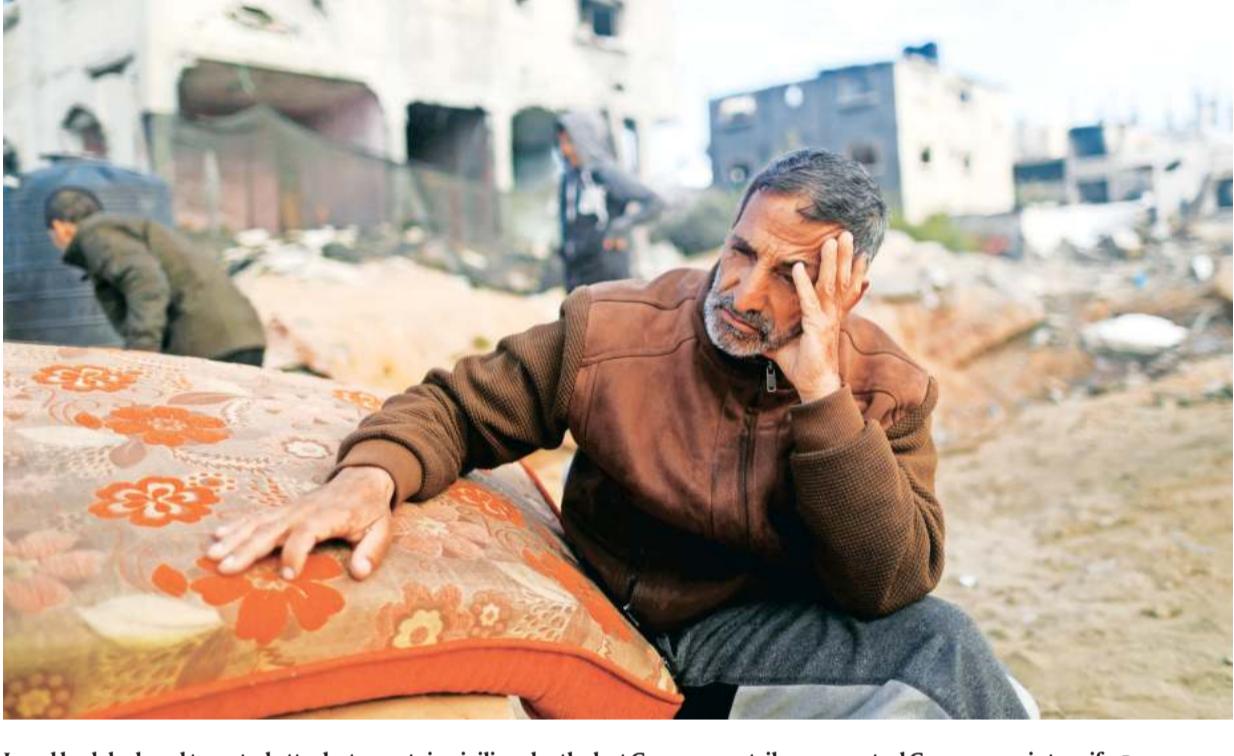
The United States has 900 troops in Syria and 2,500 in Iraq on a mission it says aims to advise and aid local forces trying to prevent resurgence of Islamic State.

Iran-aligned militia groups in Iraq and Syria oppose Israel's campaign in the Gaza Strip and hold the U.S. partly responsible.

Sudani has limited control over some Iran-backed factions, whose support he needed to win power a year ago.



Funeral procession of those killed in US airstrikes in Baghdad on Thursday. AP



Israel had declared targeted attacks to contain civilian deaths but Gazans say strikes on central Gaza camps intensify. Reuters

US offers \$10 mn for intel on Hamas sponsors as Blinken works to quell Gaza war spillover

REUTERS
CAIRO, JERUSALEM, JAN 5

US SECRETARY of State Antony Blinken and Europe's top diplomat Josep Borrell began a diplomatic push on Friday to quell the spillover of Gaza war into Israeli-occupied West Bank, Lebanon and Red Sea shipping lanes.

Their visits to the Middle East came almost three months since Hamas militants from Gaza attacked Israel, triggering a retaliatory offensive that Palestinian officials say has killed 22,600 people and devastated the enclave.

Israel has announced a more targeted approach under global pressure to limit civilian casualties. But Gazans said Israeli planes and tanks had intensified attacks overnight on densely populated camps in the centre of Gaza.

Meanwhile, the US is offering up to \$10 million for information on five Hamas financiers or anything leading to the disruption of its financial mechanisms, the State Department said on Friday.

The five are Abdelbasit Hamza Elhassan Khair, Amer Kamal Sharif Alshawa, Ahmed Sadu Jahleb, Walid Mohammed Mustafa Jadallah, and Muhammad Ahmad Abd Al-Dayim Nasrallah, who have all been previously designated global terrorists by the US.

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EXPLAINED POLICY

ARMY REVIEWS ITS EX-CHIEF'S BOOK: RULES THAT GOVERN WRITING BY SERVING, RETIRED DEFENCE OFFICERS

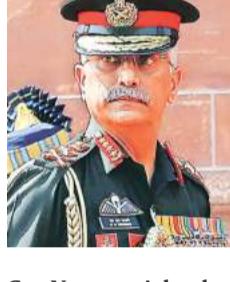
AMRITA NAYAK DUTTA

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 5

THE ARMY has begun a review of the memoirs of its former Chief General MM Naravane (retd) after news agency PTI published excerpts from it last month.

The excerpts revealed hitherto unknown details of the Indian leadership's response to the crisis arising out of the stand-off with China in eastern Ladakh in 2020, and on the discussions on various aspects of the Agnipath scheme of recruitment in the armed forces before it was launched last year.

The book, titled *Four Stars of Destiny*, is scheduled for release this month.



Gen Naravane's book talks about the crisis on the LAC. Archive

An Armed Forces personnel writes a book that is unrelated to his/her work, or is of a literary or artistic nature.

Do these Rules also apply to a retired officer such as Gen Naravane?

The Rules do not explicitly state the process that is to be followed by retired defence services officers while publishing a book.

Some officials told *The Indian Express* that the review process for books to be published by Armed Forces personnel can draw from the Central Civil Services (Pension) Rules, 1972, which were amended in June 2021 by the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT).

This is despite the fact that the Armed Forces do not come under the purview of these Rules.

The amended Rules barred retired government servants who have served in intelligence or security-related organisations from publishing any information related to the organisation after retirement without prior permission.

Retired civil servants who do not belong to this category do not require government sanction to publish a book, the officials said.

Have other Army officers written books earlier?

Yes, several serving and retired Army officers have written books on various military-related subjects in the past.

Books written by former Army Chiefs include *Kargil: From Surprise To Victory* by Gen V P Malik (retd), and *Courage and Conviction: An Autobiography* by Gen VK Singh (retd).

Former Chief Gen K Sundarji wrote *Blind Men of Hindooostan: Indo-Pak Nuclear War and Of Some Consequence: A Soldier Remembers*.

Officials said the rule may not apply if

Also, it is prohibited to "publish or cause to be published any book or letter or article or other document on such question or matter or containing such information without the prior sanction of the Central Government".

Serving officers also cannot "deliver a lecture or wireless address on a matter relating to a political question or on a service subject or containing any information or views on any service subject" without prior sanction.

The Rules explain that "service information" and "service subject" include information or subject...concerning the forces, the defence or the external relation of the Union".

Officials said the rule may not apply if

ASTHE population of pollinators like bees and butterflies continues to dwindle, some flowers are evolving to self-pollinate more often, which can limit their capacity to adapt to future environmental changes, according to a new study. Pollinators are crucial for plant reproduction as they carry pollen from one flower to another, leading to fertilisation and seeding.

The study, 'Ongoing convergent evolution of a selfish syndrome threatens plant-pollinator interactions', has been



PAPER CLIP

published by the journal *New Phytologist*.

The scientists analysed field pansies growing near Paris and found that their flowers were 10% smaller and produced 20% less nectar than flowers growing in the same locations 20 to 30 years ago. These flowers also have evolved to fertilise their own seeds more often, rather than those of other plants. This doesn't allow flowers to mix their DNA, leaving their future generations more vulnerable to diseases, droughts, and other challenges. ENS

Bees are fewer, flowers evolving to self-pollinate, new study says

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Drishti IAS General Studies Foundation Batch (Prelims + Mains) (Along with Free Online Facility) Offline Batch Admissions Open 8010-440-440 OR Visit Our Karol Bagh Centre at 21, Pusa Road, Delhi.

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EXPLAINED FOREIGN POLICY & STRATEGY

Bangladesh elections & India

A stable, prosperous, and friendly Bangladesh is in India's interest. This is why India will hope that incumbent Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina returns to power after the January 7 elections

EXPERT EXPLAINS

C RAJA MOHAN

backslding in Bangladesh under Prime Minister Hasina?

The political stability in Bangladesh under Hasina has been very helpful for India, and thus, she remains India's best bet. She has kept radical extremist forces at bay, and rekindled India's relationship with Bangladesh.

There have been questions raised by some regarding Bangladesh's democratic backsliding under Hasina. But the alternatives to her are a bigger threat not only to democracy but also to peace and prosperity in the region.

Isn't Hasina's increasing 'proximity' to China a concern for India?

This is somewhat overstated – it is not as if she is turning to China at the expense of India. It must be remembered that China is the second largest economy in the world, and located next door to South Asia. It has investments across the globe. To expect that India's neighbours will not do business with China is unrealistic.

In fact, compared to all other neighbours with the exception of Bhutan, Bangladesh has been far more careful in navigating the tensions between India and China.

At the end of the day, New Delhi's main consideration is that Bangladesh, or for that matter any neighbour, does not do anything that hurts India's security. That is the red line which Dhaka under Hasina has respected.

What is at stake for India?

NATIONAL SECURITY:

Before Hasina came to power in 2009, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party-led government was quite hostile to India – and provided safe haven to numerous anti-India terrorist and militant groups. It allegedly also had links to Pakistan's ISI, and gave space to hardline Islamist radicals.

Hasina has dramatically eased India's security burden on its long eastern border. Her

crackdown on anti-India

elements and counter-

terrorism cooperation has

singl-e-handedly improved

India's overall se-

curity situation in the last

decade or so.

Given the deteriorating

situation in Myanmar, it

becomes even more

important that India and

Bangladesh remain close

security partners.

ECONOMIC TIES:

One of the big changes in South Asia over the last few years is the economic rise of Bangladesh, which has replaced Pakistan as the second largest economy in the region. According to World Bank data, the GDP of Bangladesh was \$460 billion in 2022, more than Pakistan's \$375 billion.

In 2022-23, Bangladesh was the fifth largest export destination for Indian goods, after the United States, the UAE, the Netherlands, and China. It accounted for more than 2.7% of all Indian exports, worth \$12.2 billion.

Under Hasina, Bangladesh is facilitating efficient connectivity to India's Northeast overland and through inland waterways.

Bangladesh is also crucial for economic integration within the subcontinent, especially since Pakistan refuses to support regional economic cooperation.

REGIONAL COOPERATION:

Beyond the subcontinent, India would like Bangladesh to become a fulcrum for regional cooperation in the Bay of Bengal littoral linking South and South East Asia. Dhaka hosts the secretariat of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) that connects the eastern subcontinent with Myanmar and Thailand. In recent years, many of India's friends such as Japan have invested heavily in Bangladesh.

C Raja Mohan is a Senior Fellow at the Asia Society Policy Institute, Delhi, and a contributing editor on international affairs for *The Indian Express*.

He spoke with Arjun Sengupta

What about allegations of democratic

WHO WON, WHEN

The US has been very critical of Hasina and her government. How does this impact India's interests, given its friendship with US?

There are historical reasons for Bangladesh's tense relationships with the US and the UK, given their proximity to Pakistan and their negative role in 1971. Sheikh Hasina surprisingly views them with great distrust.

The US' own record has been fairly inconsistent when it comes to calling out authoritarianism.

While the Americans seldom talk about democracy in Pakistan, they tend to bully Bangladesh. Things eased up under the Trump administration, but under President Joe Biden, the US had gone back to its 'human rights agenda' in Bangladesh.

Over the past few weeks, however, there appears to have been some rethinking in Washington DC. Peter Haas, the US Ambassador in Dhaka, has tempered his activist interventions in the electoral process.

At the G20 Summit in Delhi, Hasina met Biden and his senior advisors. It seems that the Biden Administration has begun to appreciate India's interests in Bangladesh and is willing to tone down its hostility to Dhaka.

India would hope that Sheikh Hasina does everything to make sure that her domestic and foreign critics do not get any ammunition over the next two days. It is important that the election process is fair and non-violent, so that outsiders can take a more strategic and positive view of Bangladesh.

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Vendors and pedestrians in front of an election banner of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in a Dhaka street earlier this week. Reuters

With a history of fraught elections, the fairness of the process is under lens

ARJUN SENGUPTA

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 5

BANGLADESH GOES to national elections on Sunday. Major opposition parties have boycotted the vote.

Issues at play in the election

In an election that most observers anticipate will be one-sided, the major issue is the fairness of the election process.

Elections under Bangladesh's partisan governments have always been controversial – from Mujib's victory in 1973 to the elections held under Ziaur in 1979 and then under H M Ershad in 1986 and 1988, to those held in 1996, 2014, and 2018.

This is why a caretaker government system was instituted in 1990, and the 1991 elections under the government of Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed were viewed as the fairest yet. Elections held in 1996, 2001, and 2008, all under caretaker governments, were considered fair both domestically and internationally.

However, after the army-backed caretaker government far exceeded its remit in 2006–07 – sending hundreds of politicians, including Hasina and Khaleda, to prison – Hasina decided to do away with the system in 2011. "We cannot allow unelected people to oversee national elections," she had said.

But the opposition has alleged that this has only allowed her to continue to rig elections, and stamp out all opposition. The BNP has been boycotting elections since 2014, and had run a campaign focussed on bringing back the caretaker system last year.

The state of the economy could be a factor in the elections.

While Hasina has been credited with taking Bangladesh's economy to a good place, the cost of living has jumped as the country struggles to pay for costly energy imports amid weakening domestic currency and depleting dollar reserves.

In December last year, the International Monetary Fund cleared the first review of the country's \$4.7 billion bailout, providing immediate access of \$468.3 million.

EXPLAINED YOUR MONEY

Markets this year: Here's why 2024 could be as good as 2023 for investors



GEORGE MATHEW

THE YEAR has begun amid positive signals for the stock markets, which expect India's robust macro fundamentals and strong corporate earnings delivery to override geopolitical risks and inflation worries – and perhaps repeat the performance of 2023 when the Nifty gained 20% to hit an all-time peak of 21,834.35, and the Sensex hit a high of 72,561.91. Should the Sensex gain 20% in 2024, it will cross 86,000. Could it happen?

Actions of the US Fed

Actions of the Federal Reserve will be a key driver for the Indian stock markets. The

ation in consumption demand through election-related spending. Investment growth could pick-up in H2 2024 with an acceleration in private spending as the new government's policy priorities become apparent.

In addition, given India's large domestic growth base and improving external position, its economy is relatively less exposed to global macro risks emanating from slower global growth, still elevated interest rates, and greater geopolitical uncertainty, the Standard Chartered report said.

Inflation, interest rates

The Indian economy will grow by a robust 7.3% in the 2023-24 fiscal against 7.2% a year ago, the National Statistical Office said in its First Advance Estimates of national income released on Friday. With a better-than-expected second-quarter gross domestic product (GDP) print at 7.6%, the RBI had earlier revised its growth estimate for FY2024 upwards to 7% – the fastest among major economies – from 6.5%, and kept the inflation estimate for the fiscal unchanged at 5.4%.

"As we embark on 2024, there are green

shoots in the form of continued corporate earnings momentum domestically, healthy GDP growth, benign commodity prices outlook as well as likely rate cut globally. Thus, there seem to be more positives than negatives ahead. India is in a sweet spot vis-à-vis global peers with macroeconomic stability and corporate earnings in sight," Pankaj Pandey, Head-Research, ICICI Direct, said.

Most analysts expect inflation and interest rates to fall in 2024. That will put more money in the hands of consumers, and boost demand for goods and services in certain sectors. Retail inflation is expected to be 5.4% in 2023-24, but could fall to 4% by the second quarter of 2024-25, according to the RBI's projection. This will give it room to cut interest rates, which is good news for the markets.

"I think we are approaching the point where an interest rate cut is necessary to prevent an excessive real interest rate," Jayant Varma, an external member of the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee, had told *The Indian Express* in an interview last week.

Markets and elections

The last five general elections indicate that markets approach elections with optimism. The Nifty rose an average 13% over the 6-month period leading up to these elections. This can be attributed to a pick-up in pre-election spending and populist measures, which are positives for consumption demand, Standard Chartered said.

Post-election performance data indicate that markets dislike surprise outcomes. The defeat of the NDA in 2004 triggered a sharp correction, and the markets cheered the clear verdicts of 2009 and 2014. The reaction to the 2019 outcome was, however, mixed.

This time, it appears so far that markets are pricing in the likelihood of continuity in the government, especially after the NDA's strong performance in the recent state polls.

Retail push, FPI flows

The current rally is riding on a sustained push from retail investors, who have pumped in money into the stock market through mutual funds and direct investments. The number of demat accounts reached 10 crore in November 2023, and the MF industry's net

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