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EXPRESS NETWORK

KERALA BJP LEADER'S MURDER: 15 PFI MEN GET DEATH PENALTY P7



REMEMBERING THE MAHATMA

President Droupadi Murmu, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and others pay homage to Mahatma Gandhi on his death anniversary at Rajghat on Tuesday. *Renuka Puri*

AN EXPRESS INVESTIGATION

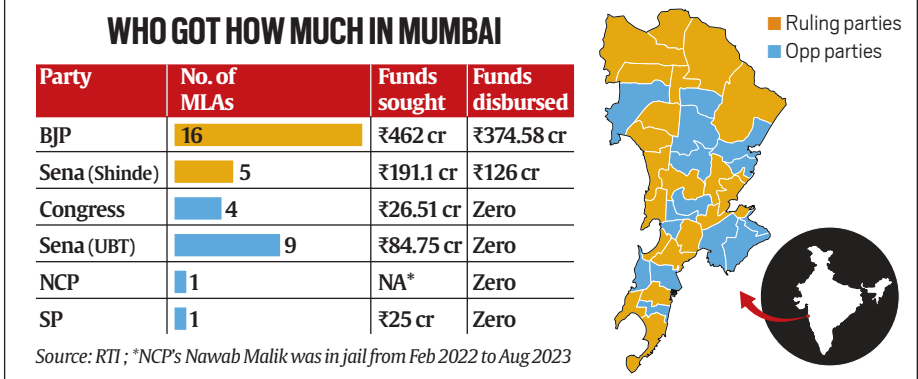
Polls on hold, Mumbai civic body gave Rs 500 crore for city upgrade — all to ruling BJP-Sena MLAs, none to Opp

Under BMC policy, up to Rs 35 crore can be given to every MLA. Of Mumbai's 36 MLAs, 21 from ruling alliance got funds; 11 of 15 Opp MLAs ask and wait

PRATIP ACHARYA
MUMBAI, JANUARY 30

IN MUMBAI, the country's financial capital, with the civic elections on hold for two years now, the quality of infrastructure in your neighbourhood could very well depend on which party your MLA is from. For, the purse-strings have been opened when the MLA is from the ruling party and closed when they are from the Opposition, an investigation by *The Indian Express* has revealed.

Mumbai has 36 MLAs: 21 of the ruling BJP-Shinde Shiv Sena alliance; and 15 of the Opposition. Under a February 2023 policy that allows MLAs to seek funds from the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) for civic works, each of the 21 ruling al-



liance MLAs sought, and promptly got, funds till December 2023, show official records obtained under the Right to Information Act and investigated by *The Indian Express*.

In stark contrast, not one of the 15 Opposition MLAs (of the

Uddhav Bal Thackeray Shiv Sena and Congress) got any money even though as many as 11 of them had asked for funds. *The Indian Express* spoke to each of these Opposition MLAs to independently verify if they applied for funds, and if the Guardian

Ministers approved it. Incidentally, the Opposition MLAs applied for funds around the same time as those from the ruling party, February to December 2023.

The money, if sanctioned, **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

Chhattisgarh: 3 CRPF men killed, at least 14 injured in Naxal attack

JAYPRAKASH SNAIDU
RAIPUR, JANUARY 30

THREE PERSONNEL of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), including two from the specialised Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA), were killed and at least 14 others injured in an encounter with Naxals on the border of Sukma and Bijapur districts in Chhattisgarh's Bastar region on Tuesday.

The encounter took place in Tekulagudem village, which was the site of another encounter in

2021 that left 23 security personnel dead.

Officials said Tuesday's incident took place hours after a new security camp was established in the village, which is 616 kilometres from state capital Raipur. After setting up the camp, a joint team of the CoBRA, Special Task Force and District Reserve Guard was conducting anti-Naxal operations in Jonaguda-Aliguda area when, at about 2 pm, Naxals opened fire at them, taking advantage of the forest cover.

The security personnel fired **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

Soren back in Ranchi, meets MLAs with wife; ED seizes cash, SUV

ABHISHEK ANGAD
RANCHI, JANUARY 30

THE WHEREABOUTS of Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren was at the centre of a fierce war of words in the state, with the opposition BJP saying he had gone "missing" and putting up posters to that effect, and the ruling JMM hitting back sharply. It was around 2 pm that Soren emerged and attended a meeting with his MLAs in Ranchi. Also present at the meeting was his wife Kalpana Soren.



Chief Minister Hemant Soren leaves for a meeting with MLAs in Ranchi. *PTI*

The drama unfolded a day after a team of the Enforcement Directorate visited Soren's South **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

Killing in US, village grieves in India: He was kind... So distressing we deleted video

PAGE 1 ANCHOR

SAURABH PARASHAR
BHAGWANPUR (PANCHKULA), JANUARY 30

VIVEK SAINI was supposed to fly home from the US on January 25 — his first visit since 2022. The 25-year-old had made elaborate plans with his elder sister, who is



A road leading to Saini's house in Bhagwanpur. *Saurabh Parashar*



Vivek Saini, 25, was killed by a homeless man whom he helped

settled in New Zealand. The siblings were to meet at the Delhi airport before heading home to their native village in Haryana. Vivek did come home on that **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

8 AAP-CONG VOTES INVALIDATED

BJP takes post of Chandigarh Mayor, AAP and Cong say fraud

Denied win, alliance candidate moves HC to set aside election, hearing today

HINA ROHTAKI
CHANDIGARH, JANUARY 30

THE KEENLY contested election for the post of Mayor in the Union Territory of Chandigarh descended into chaos Tuesday with the AAP-Congress combine questioning the manner in which eight of its votes were declared invalid by the presiding officer, tipping the scales in favour of BJP candidate Manoj Sonkar who was declared the winner.

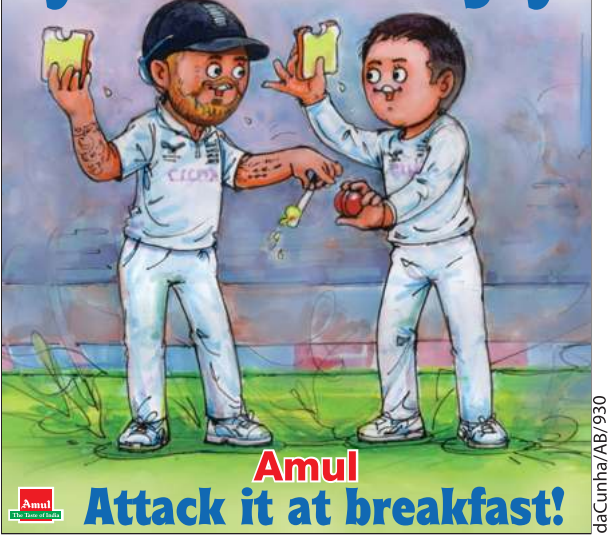
As the angry AAP-Congress alliance, the first tie-up among the INDIA bloc constituents, alleged fraud and boycotted the electoral process for the remaining posts, the BJP also walked away with the seats of Senior Deputy Mayor and Deputy Mayor.



BJP's Manoj Sonkar after he won the post of Chandigarh Mayor on Tuesday. *Jasbir Malhi*

Kuldeep Singh Tita, AAP councillor and alliance candidate for the post of Mayor, burst into tears after being denied victory. He later moved the Punjab and **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

Hyderabadazi haar gaye



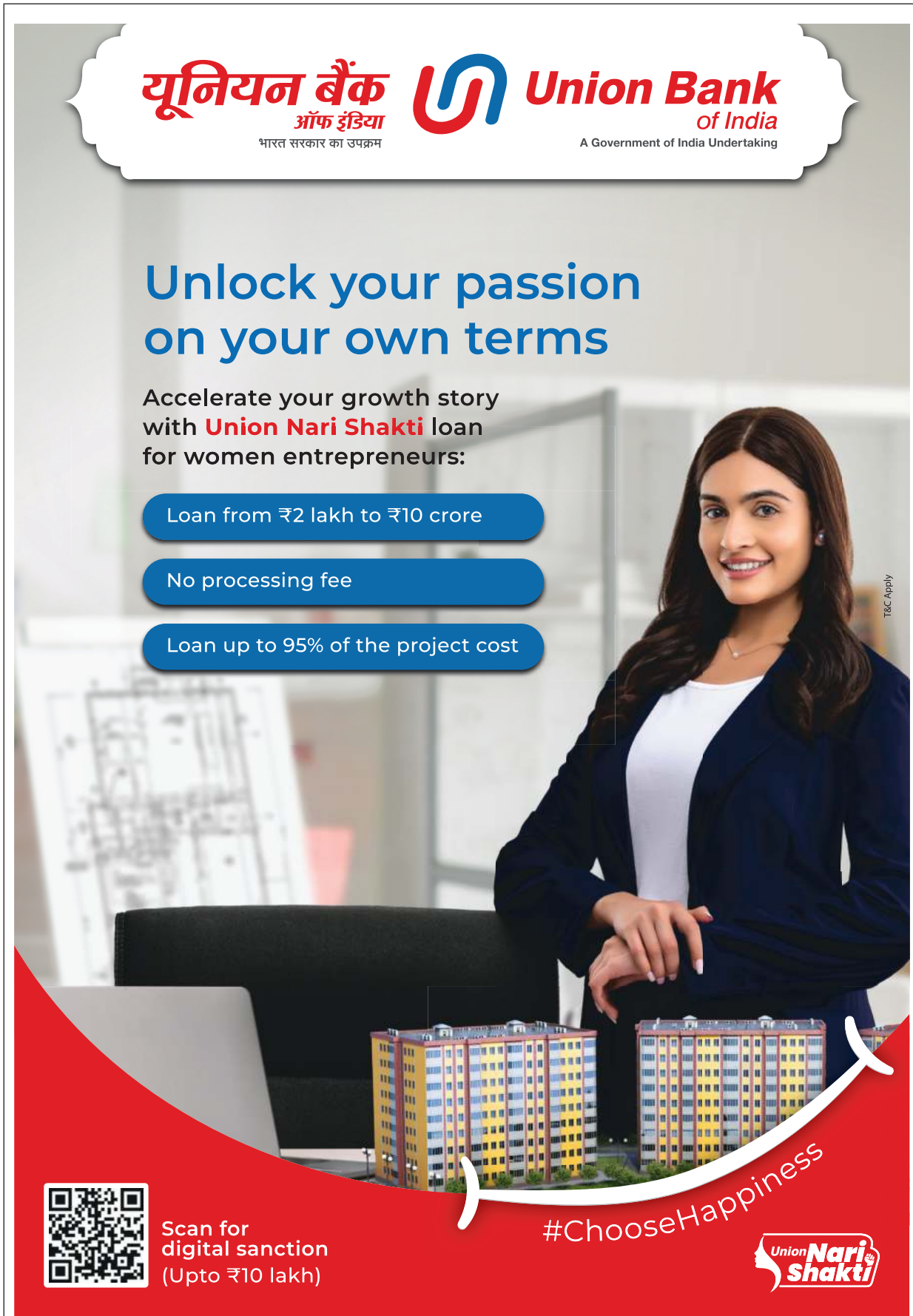
Budget Session begins today, suspension of 14 Opposition MPs revoked

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

ON THE eve of Parliament's Budget Session, the suspension of 14 Opposition MPs — 11 from Rajya Sabha and three from Lok Sabha — was revoked Tuesday to enable them to attend the customary President's address to both Houses of Parliament on Wednesday.

The decision came hours before senior ministers met Opposition leaders and floor leaders and sought their cooperation for conduct of a smooth session.

A record 146 Opposition MPs, from both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, were suspended during the Winter Session for disrupting proceedings to press their demand for a statement from Home Minister Amit Shah **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**



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FROM PAGE ONE
FULL REPORTS ON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM
BJP takes post of Chandigarh Mayor

Haryana High Court, urging it to set aside the election which he called a "complete fraud". His petition will be heard Wednesday.

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann slammed the manner in which the elections were conducted, and called it "the death of democracy".

AAP leader and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who called it "a black day for democracy," said, "Gandhiji was assassinated on this date and after 76 years, they have murdered democracy... Anyone can win or lose elections, but the country should not lose.. The issue is that they have won the Chandigarh Mayoral elections with open fraud."

Pawan Kumar Bansal, former Congress MP from Chandigarh and a Minister in the erstwhile UPA government, alleged that election agents of neither the AAP nor Congress were allowed to see the ballot papers.

"The presiding officer announced the rejection of eight votes, declared the BJP candidate the winner and went away. BJP members rushed to the table and tore the ballot papers," Bansal said.

Incidentally, in a first, the media was kept away from the House and the poll proceedings were beamed on a screen outside the Municipal House.

Elected for a year, the Mayor's powers are limited to calling meetings and deciding the agenda. This year, the three mayoral posts were reserved for Scheduled Caste candidates.

On the face of it, the scales seemed tipped in favour of the alliance which had 20 votes with

13 AAP and 7 Congress councillors up against 14 BJP councillors. BJP MP Kirron Kher too had a vote. There was one councillor representing the SAD.

With 36 votes at stake, the AAP-Congress combine was confident of a victory. But eight of its votes were declared invalid and it managed only 12 in favour of its candidate. Sonkar, the BJP candidate, was declared the winner with 16 votes in his favour.

The AAP alleged that the presiding officer, Anil Masih, a nominated councillor who is the general secretary of the BJP minority cell, had himself scratched the ballot papers in a bid to invalidate them – a charge he rejected.

Masih said, "I invited polling agents of the two parties to come forward to check the ballot papers. Instead, two AAP councillors... attempted to seize the ballot papers, which got slightly torn. Fortunately, Chandigarh Police intervened, and marshals sealed the ballot papers. Everything has been videotaped."

The voting began at 11.13 am, after almost an hour's delay. Deputy Commissioner Vinay Pratap Singh said that voting would take place ward-wise. The lone SAD councillor asked if there was a provision for NOTA, but the DC said no.

Soon after the counting began, Congress and AAP councillors alleged that Masih was scribbling on ballot papers, and that led to 8 votes being declared invalid.

The moment Masih declared BJP's Sonkar the winner with 16 votes, there was a ruckus in the House and marshals were called to restore order.

The alliance stayed away as the polls for Senior Deputy Mayor and Deputy Mayor were held and the two posts too went to the BJP.

The BJP alleged that the moment Sonkar rose to take the Mayor's seat, AAP councillors tried to come near the dais and tear the ballot papers, a charge that the AAP rejected. The AAP instead accused the BJP of tearing the ballot papers.

Arun Sood, BJP in-charge for Chandigarh and a former Mayor, told The Indian Express that the AAP and Congress did not manage to keep their flock together.

"The alliance was not between the two parties but between Pawan Bansal and (AAP Rajya Sabha MP) Raghav Chadha for personal objectives. They did not trust their own councillors who were kept hostage for days before this election," Sood alleged.

"The councillors were asked not to bolt the door even while going to the washroom. This mistrust led to gaps and eventually to this result. All our 16 votes remained intact," he said.

The elections, which were earlier scheduled for January 18, were deferred at the last minute when the presiding officer reported ill. Masih said he had a backache and was admitted to the government hospital in Sector 16.

This was a day after Raghav Chadha called the alliance the beginning of the end of BJP rule in the face of Opposition unity.

Thereafter, there was a move to defer the polls to February 6, but AAP approached the High Court which scheduled the polls for January 30.

● Suspension of 14 Opposition MPs revoked

on the Parliament security breach on December 13. While the other MPs were suspended for the remainder of the Winter Session, the suspension of 14 MPs was referred to the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha privileges committees.

The 14 MPs included 11 from the Rajya Sabha: Congress's Jebi Mather, Hisham, L Hanumanthaiha, Neeraj Dangi, Rajmani Patel, Kumar Ketkar and G C Chandrashekhar; CPI's Binoy Viswam and Sandosh Kumar P; DMK's M Mohamed Abdulla and CPM's John Brittas and A A Rahim. The remaining three from the Lok Sabha are: Congress's K Jayakumar, Abdul Khaleque and Vijay Vasanth.

Earlier in the day, the government said it had asked the presiding officers of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha to revoke the suspension. "Everybody's suspension will be withdrawn. We have requested the Speaker and the Chairperson on behalf of the government, and they have agreed," Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi said.

Setting the stage, the Rajya Sabha privileges committee met and adopted a resolution recommending withdrawal of the suspension. Two weeks ago, the Lok Sabha privileges committee had adopted a similar resolution for revoking the suspension of the three Congress members.

Opposition sources said the MPs had written letters to the privileges committees expressing regret for their action, arguing that the disruptions were not intentional or personal indiscipline.

At the all-party meeting, the

government told the Opposition floor leaders that they should implement the decision on barring MPs from bringing placards or similar materials inside the chambers.

Opposition leaders are learnt to have sought discussions on a range of issues, including what they called misuse of the investigative agencies, attack on the federal structure and "overreach" by Governors.

Left MPs Elamaram Kareem and P Sandosh Kumar expressed concern over attempts to "communalise" the polity. Kareem also sought a clarification from the government over remarks by ministers that the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, which was passed by Parliament in December 2019 but whose rules are still to be framed, would be implemented across the country soon.

The meeting, chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, was attended by Leader of the House in Rajya Sabha Piyush Goyal, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Joshi and his deputies Arjun Ram Meghwal and V Muralaedharan. In attendance from the Opposition were Congress's Pramod Tiwari and Kodikkunil Suresh, TMC's Sudip Bandyopadhyay, DMK's T R Baalu, Shiv Sena's Rahul Shewale, Samajwadi Party's S T Hasan, JD(U)'s Ram Nath Thakur and TDP's Jayadev Galla.

Tiwari said he raised the issue of the "violent attack" on the Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Assam and the state government's curbs on it. An "unwritten dictatorship" prevails in the country, he said, and accused the central government

of misusing probe agencies such as the CBI and ED to target Opposition leaders like Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren and RJD supremo Lalu Prasad.

Suresh said the Congress would try to raise the issue of unemployment, price rise, agrarian distress and the Manipur situation during the session. TMC's Bandyopadhyay said the Finance Minister should include the pending dues to West Bengal on account of various central schemes in the interim Budget.

SP's S T Hassan demanded steps to strengthen the Places of Worship Act, 1991, that freezes the status of religious places of worship as they existed on August 15, 1947, and prohibits their conversion while ensuring the maintenance of their religious character. His demand comes in the wake of demands to hand over the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi to the Hindu community.

The session, the last before the Lok Sabha elections, will be a short one. It begins on Wednesday with President Droupadi Murmu's address to the joint sitting of both Houses – her first in the new Parliament building – and ends on February 9. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will table the interim Budget on Thursday, after which both the Houses will take up discussions on the motion of thanks to the President's address.

"They have given suggestions, but since this is the last session of the present Lok Sabha, we have said we will give them an opportunity in the next session," Joshi said.

● Soren back in Ranchi, meets MLAs with wife; ED seizes cash, SUV

Delhi residence to question him in an alleged money laundering case, but he was not present there. The ED claims to have seized Rs 36 lakh in cash, a BMW SUV "registered under a benami name", and documents from the premises. Its team camped there for almost 13 hours.

The ED has issued 10 summons to Soren so far – the latest asked him to appear for questioning on January 29 or January 31. He was also questioned on January 20 at his Ranchi residence for seven hours.

Soren also chaired another meeting with JMM and ally Congress legislators in the evening. Sources said 35 MLAs attended the meeting. A legislator who was present said, "All MLAs entrusted their faith in the CM and said they will stand by whatever decisions he takes."

Those who were present also said they discussed what could happen in case Soren is arrested. According to sources, there was no consensus on whether his wife should step into his shoes since other members of his family could object. "We discussed several permutations and combinations," said an MLA.

In an email to the agency on Sunday, Soren agreed to record his statement on January 31 at 1 pm at his residence. He had said the agency's insistence on recording a statement on or before January 31 "reveals political agenda" to disrupt the functioning of the state government and prevent an elected representative from discharging his official duties. He wrote that most of the questions the ED had were "inaccuracies" in affidavits filed by him with the Election Commission and only three or

four questions were related to the plot of land in Bargai area "wrongfully alleged to be owned" by him.

Sources in the government said Soren had returned to Jharkhand via road late Monday night.

On Tuesday, hitting out at the BJP, the JMM said the CM had some work in Delhi following which he returned. "The CM is an institution, not a person. BJP has maligned him. He has been defamed. We will file a criminal case against the BJP chief and MPs who tweeted photos of Hemant Soren with Rs 11,00,000 prize money. My party will spend Rs 11 lakh on a psychiatrist who will find out what is happening with BJP's Babul Marandi."

Marandi had led the attack on Soren through the day. "The Chief Minister of our state has been missing for the last 40 hours due to fear of the central agencies and has again run away, hiding his face," he had posted on X.

Asked about the ED claiming it found cash at Soren's Delhi residence, JMM general secretary Supriyo Bhattacharya said, "ED reaches before time at the CM's residence... Has the money been planted by Marandi? Openly, hooliganism is being promoted."

After a brief meeting with the MLAs in the afternoon, Soren paid homage to Mahatma Gandhi. Asked by reporters on his whereabouts, he said: "I was in your hearts."

Meanwhile, the Ranchi district administration issued prohibitory orders around 100 metres of Soren's residence, the Raj Bhavan and the office of the Enforcement Directorate.

● Chhattisgarh: 3 CRPF men killed

back, following which the Naxals ran away and took cover in the forests, said officials. The injured personnel have been airlifted to Raipur for treatment.

"We have received information that at least six Naxals were also killed in the encounter. Unfortunately, we lost three of our men in the attack," said Inspector General of Police for Bastar range, Sundarraj P.

"The Naxals suffered heavy casualties too. Video feed which we have received shows Naxals carrying bodies," said Chhattisgarh Director General of Police (DGP) Ashok Juneja, adding, "our jawans have suffered bullet or splinter injuries".

"Our strategy is to go into the core areas (of Naxals). The anti-Naxal operations will be intensified further. We will set up more camps in core areas and provide government schemes so that they (local people) break away from Naxals and connect with our government," said Juneja.

Asked about reports of Naxals using a tunnel to attack security forces, Juneja said: "Let the video feed come. We will decide accordingly."

Speaking to reporters, Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai said "over 500" Naxals were involved in the attack. "Our jawans fought with great valour. The Naxals were in a big number and made use of home-made bombs. The police camps are set up to provide government schemes. The Naxals are shocked by the formation of the BJP's double-engine government, and are carrying out such cowardly attacks. Naxalism is nearing its end. Our double-engine government will end it completely," he said.

This is the first major Naxal attack under the new BJP government in the state. Sai and his deputy, Vijay Sharma, also visited the injured men at the hospital.

The three CRPF personnel who were killed have been identified as constables Deven C and Pawan Kumar from COBRA 201, and constable Lambdhar Sinha from CRPF battalion 150. The COBRA is a specialised force under the CRPF to combat extremists and insurgents in guerrilla/ jungle warfare operations.

Earlier this month, Union Home Minister Amit Shah had chaired a review meeting with stakeholders in Raipur on Left Wing Extremism, where he said the Naxal menace should end in the next three years.

January has also seen five alleged Naxals, including two women, being killed in encounters in the state. A six-month-old girl had also died in cross-firing during an anti-Naxal operation.

Since November last year, nine new police camps have come up in Sukma and Bijapur districts. This Republic Day, the Tricolour was hoisted for the first time in two police camps in remote Chintagufa area, on the Sukma-Bijapur border.

During the state's two-phase polls in November, members of the banned CPI(Maoist) had killed two security personnel and injured another in three separate attacks using IEDs.

In 2022, 10 security personnel, 33 civilians and 32 Naxals were killed in Chhattisgarh, but the election year, 2023, saw a sharp rise in the deaths of security personnel, with 24 casualties in the state. Further, 31 civilians and 23 alleged Naxals were killed last year.

● Polls on hold, Mumbai civic body gave Rs 500 crore for city upgrade — all to ruling BJP-Sena MLAs, none to Opp

would have been used for various development works in their areas – from the repair of a drain in Dharavi to the beautification of a park in Sewri to the installation of paver blocks in Satyanarayan Chawl.

Despite repeated attempts, BMC Commissioner IS Chahal was not available for comment.

These are works that the 227 elected BMC corporators would have ordinarily undertaken. But with the country's richest civic body functioning without an elected body for close to two years now, on February 16, 2023, days after the Budget was presented on February 4, the BMC passed a resolution saying funds to run the city would be routed through Mumbai's 36 MLAs.

The approval note that followed said: "A large number of letters have been received from MLAs/MPs for providing funds for various development works, infrastructural works, beautification work etc within their respective constituencies. Therefore, an approval was given for this new provision by the administrator on February 16, 2023."

As per this provision, the civic body set aside Rs 1,260 crore – around 2.5 per cent of the Rs 52,619 crore BMC budget – for civic works to be carried out in the constituencies of the 36 MLAs. Each MLA was entitled to seek a maximum of Rs 35 crore.

However, in the 10 months between February 2023 and December 31, 2023, Municipal Commissioner and Administrator Chahal disbursed Rs 500.58 crore, all to 21 MLAs belonging to the BJP and the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena, while the Opposition MLAs drew a blank.

The process and how it was selective

The region that falls under the BMC's jurisdiction has 36 MLAs in the current Maharashtra Assembly, of which

15 belong to the BJP, six of the Eknath Shinde-Shiv Sena, nine of the UBT Shiv Sena, four of the Congress and one each of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and Samajwadi Party (SP).

Under the BMC's special policy, Guardian Ministers – Maharashtra has Guardian Ministers for each of the 36 districts who oversee its planning and development; Mumbai has two – are authorised to clear proposals from MLAs seeking funds for development work in their constituencies, and forward the cleared proposals to the BMC, which would then disburse the funds. Until this policy came into place, there was no provision for legislators to withdraw money from the civic body's corpus.

Following the BMC resolution, funding requests by MLAs were cleared by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and the two Guardian Ministers of Mumbai: Mangal Prabhat Lodha (Mumbai Suburbs – 26 Assembly seats) and Deepak Kesarkar (Mumbai City – 10 Assembly seats). Following the approval of the CM and the Ministers, the BMC started disbursing the funds.

Documents accessed by *The Indian Express* show that in 11 cases, fund requests from Opposition MLAs to Guardian Ministers were yet to be cleared and forwarded to the BMC. Letters written by Opposition MLAs reveal that in some cases, the requests for funds were sent to the ministers as early as March 2023.

On the other hand, records show, requests from MLAs belonging to the BJP and Shiv Sena were cleared by the Chief Minister and the two Guardian Ministers, with some being forwarded to the BMC in a little over a week. Four MLAs – three Sena and one BJP – wrote directly to the Chief Minister, while the others wrote to the Guardian Ministers.

And when it came to his own

EXPLAINED

Funding process, its flaws

WHILE ELECTIONS to the BMC have not been held because of a pending case in the Supreme Court on OBC reservation in local bodies, the civic body's process to approve disbursement of funds to MLAs for development work in their areas raises two critical issues. One, if Guardian Ministers of ruling alliance do not clear proposals by Opposition MLAs, then the upgrade of civic infrastructure in key areas like Dharavi

constituency, Guardian Minister Lodha went directly to the BMC and got funds. On June 23, 2023, Lodha, the BJP MLA from Malabar Hill, sent a letter to Chahal seeking Rs 30 crore. In less than a week, on June 28, the civic body cleared an initial disbursement of Rs 24 crore (80 per cent of funds sought).

The 21 ruling MLAs who got funds promptly cleared

Among the other cases where members of the ruling alliance sought and got funds include:

■ On May 11, 2023, BJP's Mulund MLA, Mihir Kotecha, wrote to Guardian Minister Lodha seeking Rs 26.34 crore for carrying out civic works. On May 22, Lodha wrote to Administrator Chahal directing him to immediately disburse Rs 26 crore to the MLA. The BMC approved the funds, saying the remaining 20 per cent would be given once the work began.

■ On May 9, Atul Bhatkalkar, BJP's Kandivali MLA, wrote to CM Shinde, Deputy CM Devendra Fadnis and minister Lodha, seeking Rs 24.27 crore. On May 26, Lodha

(Congress MLA Varsha Gaikwad) or Jogeshwari (Shiv Sena Uddhav B Thackeray MLA Ravindra Waikar) suffers. Two, at a time when political lines are blurred in the state with both Shiv Sena and NCP witnessing a split, and nearly 80 MLAs switching sides over the last 18 months, there exists the possibility of the ruling alliance dangling the carrot of funds to lure legislators towards its side.

wrote to Chahal and asked him to immediately make the funds available. On June 2, the BMC wrote to the local ward office, giving a go-ahead for the fund.

■ On July 18, Sena's Dadar MLA Sada Saravankar wrote to minister Kesarkar seeking Rs 35 crore. On August 7, the BMC approved Rs 28 crore and said the remaining amount would be sent in due time.

■ On July 18, Kesarkar cleared a proposal by Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar, seeking Rs 35.85 crore. The BMC approved the transfer of Rs 28 crore on August 7.

The RTI documents showed that minister Kesarkar cleared the proposals almost the same day MLAs wrote to him.

Opposition MLAs, meanwhile, continue to wait

Over the past two months, *The Indian Express* reached out to each of the 15 Opposition MLAs; as many as 11 have confirmed they had written to their respective Guardian Minister seeking funds from the BMC, but haven't received thus far.

Of the remaining four MLAs, the sole NCP MLA, Nawab Malik,

was in jail in a case of money laundering and released on bail on medical grounds. The other three – UBT Sena's Aditya Thackeray, Prakash Phaterpekar and Rutuja Latke – haven't written to the Guardian Ministers seeking funds.

■ On June 23 last year, Ravindra Waikar, Sena UBT legislator from Jogeshwari, wrote to Lodha seeking Rs 16 crore, citing a slew of civic infrastructure works such as road widening and nullah repair that needed to be carried out in his constituency. On August 26, Waikar wrote to CM Shinde complaining that he was yet to receive the funds from the civic body. He wrote that despite writing to minister Lodha, "not a Rupee has been allotted" to his constituency, while "15 MLAs of the ruling alliance have received the funds in their ward offices".

The same day, in a separate letter to Chahal, he reminded the Administrator about his request for funds and mentioned that the lack of funds have led to deterioration of the existing civic infrastructure in his ward.

■ On February 26, 2023, Sena UBT MLA from Sewri, Ajay Chaudhuri, wrote to Kesarkar seeking Rs 68.75 crore for a slew of infrastructure works that had to be taken up in 62 municipal beats of the constituency. However, Kesarkar's office is yet to clear the proposal.

■ Dharavi MLA and Congress's Mumbai chief Varsha Gaikwad wrote to Kesarkar in March 2023 seeking Rs 26.51 crore. However, the BMC is yet to disburse the fund.

■ Samajwadi Party's Bhiwandi MLA Rais Shaikh wrote to Chahal and CM Shinde on August 3, 2023, seeking Rs 4.6 crore for civic works in Byculla, of which he was corporator until March 2022. However, Shaikh is yet to receive the funds.

No pending requests: Guardian Minister

& are investigating the case," said India's Consulate General in Atlanta on X.

Vivek's body was brought home by a cousin who also stayed in Lithonia and cremated the same day. "I met Vivek in the morning of January 16. When I reached the spot, the police had taken away the body and the assailant," said the cousin.

Another family member said, "We regret sending him to the US. Initially, there was a plan for Vivek to join his sister in New Zealand, but he later changed his mind and pursued MBA at Alabama University in 2022."

After finishing class 10 at DAV Public School, Derabassi, Vivek completed senior secondary education at a private institute in Sector 34, Chandigarh. Then he did B.Tech in Computer Science from Chandigarh

University.

People in Bhagwanpur fondly remember Vivek. "You will not find a single person in the entire village who will speak bad of him. He was a loving young man. Apart from excelling in studies, he would assist his family with agricultural work," said Sanjeev Kumar, a villager.

Vivek's father owns 25 acres of agricultural land. A distant relative said, "His parents were in the process of choosing a match for him."

Bhagwanpur sarpanch Charan Singh said the village has nearly 230 houses and 1,100 registered voters. "In recent times, around a dozen people from our community have gone abroad to countries such as Canada, Australia, Dubai, and the UK for study and work purposes," he said.



PROCEDURE AT DEVIANCE WITH PRINCIPLES OF NATURAL JUSTICE: COURT

HC grants relief to two SAU students, sets aside expulsion over indiscipline

MALAVIKA PRASAD
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

NOTING THAT the procedure followed by South Asian University (SAU) to expel two students was “at deviance with the principles of natural justice”, the Delhi High Court Tuesday set aside orders passed by the varsity against two PhD scholars over alleged acts of indiscipline.

Petitioners Umesh Joshi and Bhim Raj had moved a petition challenging orders issued by the varsity on November 25, 2022 “expelling” them and “declaring them out of bounds with immediate effect”. The action against the two was with respect to participating in a protest regarding stipends for students.

A single-judge bench of Justice C Hari Shankar observed



In 2022, the SUA had expelled the two students for taking part in a protest regarding stipends for varsity scholars. Archive

that the facts of the case and issues involved were “largely identical” to those which were considered by the court in a plea moved by another SAU student, Apoorva YK.

In that case, Justice Shankar had quashed two orders, observ-

ing that the procedure adopted by the varsity to consider Apoorva’s case was a “sham with a pre-determined intent to expel the student”.

“It is clear that the procedure followed by the SAU in the present case is even more at deviance

with the principles of natural justice and rules, regulations, bye laws governing SAU than the procedure which was followed by SAU in Apoorva YK (case),” Justice Shankar said Tuesday.

The court further said while in Apoorva’s case, the university had at least issued a show-cause notice to her, no such notice was sent out before the expulsion decision was issued to Joshi and Raj. The court said the decision in Apoorva’s case would apply in the present case as well.

Raj, a Dalit PhD student, later bagged a scholarship to pursue an MPhil in Law at Oxford University. Joshi, meanwhile, was supposed to submit his thesis by June, 2023, but was expelled before that, following which he approached the HC against the decision.

Justice Shankar said that as per the principle of “audi alteram

partem”, a party has to be given an opportunity of hearing before a decision against it is taken.

“It is fundamental to principles of natural justice, that before the decision to punish the student was taken, the student ought to have been given an opportunity to represent against the proposed decision. Taking a decision to expel the student first and thereafter, inviting the student to represent against the decision is as good as presenting the student with a fait accompli...” the HC said, after noting that following the expulsion, the varsity constituted a High-Powered Committee which is stated to have granted an opportunity of hearing to the petitioners.

After receiving recommendations from the committee, the varsity rejected representations made by petitioners against the expulsion orders.

WHAT POLICE PROBE FOUND

Woman who ‘duped’ 5-star hotel had lone bank account, with Rs 41

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

TWO WEEKS ago, a 37-year-old woman was arrested for allegedly cheating a five-star hotel in Aerocity. It was alleged that the spa and other facilities at the hotel, costing Rs 5-7 lakh by staying on the premises around the New Year and not paying bills. She had also used the hotel, costing Rs 2.11 lakh.

During investigation, though, the Delhi Police have found that the woman has only Rs 41 in her bank account. Officials have found only one bank account in her name and it has no money, said police.

The woman, Jhansi Rani

Samuel, hails from Andhra Pradesh and had come to Delhi alone to celebrate New Year. On January 13, she was about to leave the premises of Pullman Hotel when she was stopped by the staff after they found that she had given false information for the bills, police said.

According to police, they are yet to confirm if she is a lawyer or posed as one.

“She has been changing her statements. She also told one of the investigators that she is a doctor. She then said she has lived in New York. We don’t know what to believe. We have asked local staff at her hometown to approach her family and provide us details of her job and parents/spouse,” said an officer. Samuel told police that she

was married a few years ago but has been divorced for a while now.

Police said Samuel stayed at the hotel for 15 days without paying bills and even manhandled staffers when they tried to stop her from leaving the premises. The hotel then called the police to “control” the situation.

Police found she used a fake identity card under the name Isha Dave, said officers.

The hotel staff also alleged that the accused used a bank’s UPI app to show transactions which never took place. Police suspect she used a fake mobile application or forged the bills.

Samuel has been booked under sections of cheating, cheating by impersonation, and forgery.

CM’s ‘MLA poaching’ claim: Delhi BJP files complaint

New Delhi: A BJP delegation on Tuesday filed a formal complaint against CM Arvind Kejriwal following his allegations last week that the “BJP was trying to poach AAP MLAs”. AAP is yet to issue a response on the matter.

On Saturday, Kejriwal had alleged he was on the “brink of be-

ing arrested in the liquor policy case as part of a BJP conspiracy to topple the AAP government in Delhi”, and that the “BJP was also attempting to contact AAP MLAs, urging them to switch sides in lieu of cash of up to Rs 25 crore”.

Terming the allegations frivolous, the BJP delegation de-

manded legal action against Kejriwal, AAP minister Atishi, and MLAs Durgesh Pathak and Dilip Pandey. Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said, “... this time we have decided that we will expose his lies; that is why we have submitted a complaint to the police commissioner.” ENS

UTTAR PRADESH UNIVERSITY OF MEDICAL SCIENCES
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BRIEFLY

MCD extends date to geotag properties

New Delhi: The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has extended the last date of geotagging of properties till February 29. On December 5, MCD had announced that residents of the national capital will have to compulsorily geotag their properties if they wish to apply for tax exemptions. It had earlier announced that all 1.5 million property owners will have to geotag their assets by January 31.

Delhi to get 5th old age home in Paschim Vihar

New Delhi: Destitute senior citizens in the Capital will soon have another roof over their heads as the construction of a fifth old age home in West Delhi's Paschim Vihar is almost complete and will soon be operational. CM Arvind Kejriwal has granted formal approval to the old age home, named 'Savitribai Phule Senior Citizen Home', and the file has been sent to the Lieutenant Governor for notification. Currently, the city's four old-age homes accommodate around 505 elderly citizens.

Kalkaji stage collapse: Two organisers held

New Delhi: Police Tuesday arrested two event organisers for their "negligence", which led to the death of a 45-year-old woman after a makeshift stage at a jagran collapsed in Southeast Delhi's Kalkaji Mandir on the intervening night of Saturday and Sunday. The two organisers — Satish Kumar (38) and Anuj Mittal (48) — have been arrested, said DCP (Southeast) Rajesh Deo. **ENS**

SEDITION CASE

Decide Sharjeel Imam's bail plea in February, HC tells trial court

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

THE DELHI High Court on Tuesday directed the trial court to decide by next month Sharjeel Imam's bail plea relating to the 2020 riots case involving allegations of sedition.

Imam, who was booked in 2020 under sections of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and sedition among other offences, had moved the trial court last year seeking statutory bail for completing half of the maximum sentence of seven years for the offences allegedly committed by him. Imam's plea before the trial court is next listed on February 7.

A division bench of Justice Suresh Kumar Kait and Justice Manoj Jain said, "...We direct the trial court to decide the applica-

MOST POLLUTED JANUARY SINCE 2018

Delhi's January weather report card: Unusually cold and highly polluted

MALLICA JOSHI

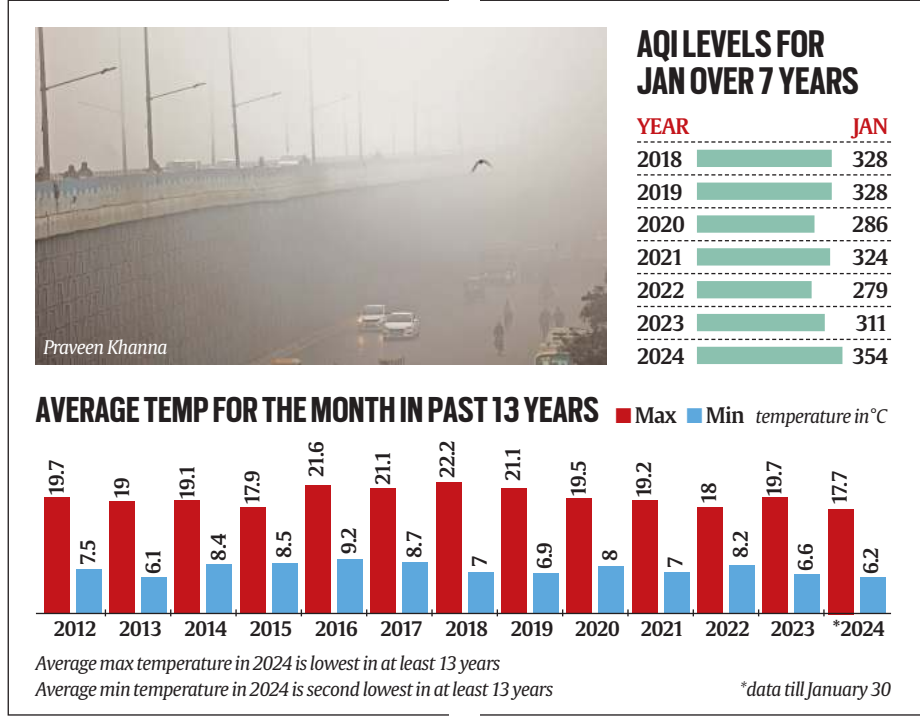
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

UNUSUALLY COLD and polluted — this is what January was for Delhiites this year. According to data on the national capital's air quality, this January has been the most polluted since 2018, with an average Air Quality Index (AQI) of around 354.

The city has also seen the coldest January days in at least 13 years, where the average maximum temperature was 17.7 degrees Celsius. The minimum temperature, meanwhile, was the second lowest in as many years, with an average morning temperature of 6.2 degrees Celsius.

According to the AQI data from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), before this year, the January of 2021 was the most polluted since 2018, with an average AQI of 324. This January has been significantly more polluted than the previous years (see box).

The city saw a total of three severely polluted days, with the highest AQI — 447 — being recorded on January 14. The number of very poor days was 26 while only one poor air qual-



ity day was recorded.

According to CPCB's parameters, AQI between zero and 50 is considered "good", 51 and 100 "satisfactory", 101 and 200 "moderate", 201 and 300 "poor", 301 and 400 "very poor", and

401 and 500 "severe".

It is not a coincidence that pollution has been high in a month where temperatures have been low. According to experts, there is a direct relationship between the two, because

colder days have a tendency to be more polluted.

"This is because with a dip in temperature, the mixing height drops. Mixing height can be described as the height above the surface of the earth, where pol-

lutants, such as particulate matter, can be dispersed. Higher mixing height means the concentration of pollutants in air decreases since there is more space for dispersion," a senior official of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

The second reason for the high AQI is lack of rain. The city has not experienced a single day with recorded rain, with only a few parts of the city seeing traces.

This is the second consecutive month that Delhi has had a 100% rain deficit. The city usually receives around 8 mm of rain in December and around 20 mm in January. "Delhi, alongside the rest of north and northwest India, has been under a long dry spell with many parts of the country still waiting for snow. Wind speed has also been low, even as fog has persisted for long hours. The meteorological conditions have been very unfavourable for dispersion of pollutants," a Delhi environment department official said.

Tuesday's AQI was recorded as 357 (very poor); not much improvement is expected on Wednesday either. Although, light rain on Wednesday night and Thursday is likely to bring an improvement in air quality.



REMEMBERING THE MARTYRS

Shots being fired from a cannon to mark Martyrs Day, at Connaught Place in New Delhi on Tuesday. Praveen Khanna

IN GREATER NOIDA

Secret meth lab running from house busted, 4 held

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

LAST YEAR, four men rented a "luxurious and lonely private" house at Alestonia Estate in Greater Noida's Chaii-3 and set about "cooking". The fact that the area was isolated meant no one got a whiff of what they were up to. Until this month, when police arrested them and busted their "secret meth lab".

The four men — Eze Uchenna James (49), Alitumolfedi Shedrack (28), Ezelbe Emeka Chibuzo from Nigeria, and Ivo Osita from Kenya — were arrested for allegedly manufacturing and supplying

fine-quality Methamphetamine, senior officers said. DCP (Dwarka) Ankit Kumar said raw material amounting to 20.5 kg, including 1 kg of pseudoephedrine, was recovered. Describing the 'lab', officers said it had three rooms filled with gas cylinders and other cooking items. Sophisticated equipment, including a heating mantle machine and high-quality face masks, was also recovered.

According to police, it was a tip-off on November 27 last year, received by the Dwarka unit's anti-narcotics cell, that alerted them about Uchenna's involvement in a drug syndicate. Accordingly, a trap was laid and he was arrested; almost 70 grams of



The men had rented a house to run their ops: Police. Express

fine-quality Methamphetamine was also recovered.

Officers said Uchenna had



Renovation project delayed due to disruptions in the supply of raw material, say officials. Archive

Delhi airport's key runway to remain closed until Feb 2

UPASIKA SINGHAL

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

DELHI AIRPORT'S second runway — runway 28/10 — will remain closed till February 2, officials said.

Under renovation since September last year, the runway was due to be reopened on December 15. After a series of postponements, it was supposed to open on January 30.

However, DIAL said that several hurdles came in the way of finishing the project on time. Sources said the airport had a compressed timeline to finish the project after the G-20 Summit in September and before Low Visibility Procedure kicked in on December 15.

However, due to pollution concerns, the Delhi government implemented the GRAP-IV norms which disrupted the raw material supply chain for civil works, *The Indian Express* had reported earlier this month. There was also a delay in supply of runway lights due to supply chain complexities. Additionally, National Highways Authority of India's (NHAI) cranes operating on the Dwarka Expressway on the Gurgaon side of Runway 3 (29R11L) presented a risk to low-flying aircrafts, especially in low-visibility conditions, said sources.

This caused further delays because even as take-offs could still take place in low-visibility conditions, it was near impossible to land due to the danger the cranes presented, the sources added.

According to DIAL sources, the cranes were removed a few days after the airport authority sent a letter to the NHAI repudiating its actions that "compelled Delhi airport to down-

grade runway 3 from CAT III compliant to CAT I compliant".

The Delhi airport has four runways.

Dense fog impacts visibility, flight ops

On Tuesday morning, dense fog descended upon Delhi's Palam and Safdarjung stations, severely impacting visibility and disrupting flight operations.

At 5.30 am, visibility plummeted to a mere 50 meters, causing significant delays and cancellations. Two flights were diverted to Jaipur between 2.30 am and 5.30 am, airport authorities said.

The dense fog resulted in the delay of 82 flights and cancellation of five at arrivals, noted Flightradar24. Departures were also significantly affected, with 222 flights delayed and nine cancellations reported.

Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL) posted on X saying, "While landings and take-offs continue at Delhi Airport, flights that are not CAT III compliant may get affected."

However, complaints against delays and cancellations have significantly dropped after January 14 and 15, when the airport reported 1,762 delayed flights and 288 cancelled flights across two days, officials said.

According to DIAL sources, this could be because the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) levied fines on Air India and SpiceJet airlines for not rostering trained pilots during heavy fog hours.

It then issued a directive to airlines that all CAT III trained pilots must be rostered during fog conditions, especially during early morning hours when the fog is at its heaviest.

PROJECT PLANNED NEAR UPCOMING NOIDA AIRPORT IN JEWAR

Boney Kapoor-backed firm beats T-Series, Akshay to win bid for Film City

DHEERAJ MISHRA

NOIDA, JANUARY 30

A FIRM backed by producer Boney Kapoor along with construction giant Bhutani Group have won the bid for the development of International Film City near the upcoming Noida Airport in Jewar, leaving behind a company backed by actor Akshay Kumar and production company T-Series.

Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development Authority (YEIDA) on Tuesday said out of the four shortlisted companies for the final round, Bayview Projects LLP has been selected as the winner on the basis of highest gross rev-

enue share to the authority.

YEIDA said that the company will provide it with 18% gross revenue share, which was the highest offer in the financial bid among the four companies.

Boney Kapoor is one of the designated partners of Bayview Projects LLP, which had submitted the bid along with the consortium of two other firms — Parmesh Construction Company Limited (Bhutani Group) and Noida Cyberpark Private Limited.

Besides, a company backed by Kumar — Supersonic Technobuild Private Limited, 04 Lions Films Private Limited (KC Bokadia), and Super Cassettes Industries Private Limited (T-Series) were among the finalists for the project.

However, Supersonic Technobuild could offer a gross revenue share of only 10.80% while T-series offered 5.27% and 04 Lions Films offered 15.12% to the authority.

Officials said that now the financial bid will be presented before the committee of secretaries following which it will be sent to the UP cabinet for final approval. After this, the Letter of Award will be issued to the highest bidder.

The Film City will come up in YEIDA's Sector-21, which is beside the Yamuna Expressway and around 4 km from the upcoming Noida International Airport in Jewar. Under the Phase-1 of the project, a total of 230 acres will be developed, which will include 75



Out of the 4 shortlisted firms for the final round, Bayview Projects LLP, has been selected as the winner on the basis of highest gross revenue share to the authority: YEIDA. Express

acres (33%) of commercial and 155 acres (67%) of industrial area. The estimated project cost is Rs 1,510 crore and the construction

period has been set at three years.

A total of 1,000 acres have been identified for the complete project, out of which 220 acres is

WHAT THE FILM CITY WILL HAVE

- Filming facilities, including those for dubbing, editing, VFX, and hosting film festivals and premieres
- Film institute
- Amusement park/family recreation centre
- Hotels and restaurants
- Shopping mall
- Serviced residences
- Commercial offices

for commercial use while 780 acres is for industrial use.

In a meeting held at the higher level in Lucknow in August 2023, it was decided that the Film City will be developed in a phased manner instead of the entire 1,000-acre area being developed in one go. Besides, the concession period, i.e. lease of the land, has been increased to 90 years. Earlier, it was 60 years with an option to renew it for another 30 years.

The project is set to have filming facilities, studios, a film institute, an amusement park/family recreation centre, hotels and restaurants, retail shops, a shopping mall, serviced residences and commercial offices besides other filming and supporting assets. The

Film City will also have facilities for music production, dubbing, editing, VFX and special effects, film festival and premiere arenas.

On September 29, 2023, the authority had issued a global e-tender for the third time to develop the Film City on Design, Build, Finance, Operate and Transfer (DBFOT) basis.

The first global tender for the Film City was floated in November, 2021. But due to no response from the bidders, the authority issued a second tender in October, 2022.

The deadline for this was extended up to February 14, 2023, followed by February 28, 2023, and then again to March 31, 2023, but no bid was received.



ATTIRE, SATIRE

ACTOR-TURNED-POLITICIAN AND BJP's Gorakhpur MP Ravi Kishan found himself in a tricky situation on Sunday. Commenting on the actor at a public gathering in Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath said that when Kishan was well-dressed on screen "he looked like a hero to the people, but what will happen if he acts in tattered clothes?" This triggered a roar of laughter from the audience. The actor too was seen laughing with Adityanath, who then went on to praise him for entertaining the audience with his speeches and for working hard for the development of Gorakhpur in coordination with the MLAs. The CM then quipped that he had advised the MP to act alone in movies and not take any MLA with him.

QUOTA QUANDARY

TWO DAYS after the University Grants Commission's draft guidelines on implementing reservation in higher education went viral on social media and caused an outcry, the document was taken down from UGC's official website. Although there's no official word on whether the draft has been withdrawn, sources said it has been taken down since the deadline for public feedback ended Monday. The draft had led to an uproar over its chapter on deservising reserved job positions in universities in exceptional cases. The government and the UGC later clarified that no quota posts in higher education would be opened to candidates from general category.

Chandigarh University Chancellor Satnam Sandhu nominated to RS

Mohali: President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday nominated Chandigarh University Chancellor Satnam Singh Sandhu for the Rajya Sabha. Sandhu, who started his career as a reporter with vernacular news daily, entered the education sector in the 2000s and opened an engineering college named Chandigarh Group of Colleges in Landran on the outskirts of Mohali in 2001 and founded Chandigarh University in 2012. The son of a farmer, Sandhu struggled to attain education but became one of India's leading educationists, a Union Home Ministry notification said. He is actively involved in large-scale community efforts to improve health and wellness.

'Neighbours need each other': EAM amid strained ties with Maldives

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, JANUARY 30

AMID THE recent tension between India and the Maldives, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday said "at the end of the day, neighbours need each other".

Speaking at the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Mumbai on 'India's role in the global stage' and on his recently published book — *Why Bharat Matters* — Jaishankar said, "Every country has problems in the neighbourhood... eventually they reach an understanding... It is in the nature of politics that we take strong stands, but diplomacy works differently."

To a question on the 'India Out' campaign in the Maldives, Jaishankar urged the audience to "trust" Indian diplomacy.

On the crisis in the Red Sea, the minister said that the Indian Navy has deployed 10 ships in that region. Sharing how INS



Foreign Minister S Jaishankar at IIM Mumbai, Tuesday. Express

Visakhapatnam extinguished a fire onboard a commercial oil tanker, the Union minister added that the Indian Navy rescued Pakistani and Iranian fishermen. "We will not be considered a responsible country when bad things are happening in the surrounding country and we say I have got nothing to do with this," he said.

Jaishankar spoke about how his new book connects various diplomacy lessons with the

Ramayana and urged the youth to take an interest in foreign policy. "In today's globalised world, foreign policy matters to all of you," he said.

When a student asked how an MBA-degree holder can really matter when it comes to foreign policy, Jaishankar said, "A large part of how the international economy will work is on how you build connections, businesses, logistics and supply chain management — how they work in real life, which is the

forte of your institute."

He also spoke about how the perception of India in the world is based on their experiences. Sharing how Indians heading global tech giants, banks etc will make the world think about it, he said, "Branding of the country is really important in geopolitics and networking."

Talking about the Israel-Gaza situation, the minister said, "What happened on October 7 was a terrorist attack (by Hamas against Israel). As a country which has experienced so much terrorism, it is important that we recognise and accept it." Adding that there are various aspects to this crisis and a viable solution should be found, Jaishankar also acknowledged the civilian casualties and said, "There has to be a sustainable humanitarian corridor."

Speaking about the common victim bonding among colonised countries in the global south, he said that India is looked at as one of these countries that shows strong development.

Muizzu should apologise to India, PM Modi: Maldives opposition party

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MALE, JANUARY 30

GASUJIM IBRAHIM, leader of the opposition Jumhoori Party, has urged Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu to formally apologise to India and Prime Minister Narendra Modi and seek "diplomatic reconciliation" to mend bilateral relations.

Ibrahim's demand referred to remarks by Muizzu — regarded as pro-China — earlier in the month referring to India as a bully without naming the country.

Amid a diplomatic row with India that erupted after derogatory social media posts by three of his ministers against Prime Minister Modi, President Muizzu on his return home after a five-day high-profile state visit to China on January 13 said, "We may be small but this doesn't give them the licence to bully us."

Incidentally, the demand comes a day after the main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) on Monday said it plans to submit a motion to impeach Muizzu.

Muizzu, 45, defeated India-friendly incumbent Ibrahim Mohamed Solih in the presidential runoff held last September.

Gasuim, while speaking with media after a meeting of the Jumhoori Party (JP), called on President Muizzu to formally apologise to India and Prime Minister Modi for the recent controversial remarks made during an interview, the Voice Of Maldives portal said.

Expressing concern over the comments, Gasuim urged President Muizzu to seek forgiveness from India for the indirect attacks made in the interview, the digital platform said.

Gasuim attributed those unwarranted remarks to former President Abdulla Yameen, who initiated the "India Out" campaign leading to tensions between Maldives and India, and pointed out that former President Ibrahim Solih, who was the president at that time, "delayed in opposing the campaign".

IMPEACHMENT RULES: GOVT MOVES COURT

Male: Even as the main opposition announced its plan to impeach Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu, the government has approached the Supreme Court over the recent amendment to Parliament's standing orders which makes the process of impeachment easier, according to media reports.

The Attorney General's Office filed the case on Sunday, the same day when clashes broke out in the House between pro-government MPs and opposition lawmakers following differences over the approval of four members of cabinet.

The main opposition MDP, which holds a majority in Parliament, amended Parliament's standing orders so that vacated seats aren't counted when determining the total number of MPs.

Parliament currently requires 54 votes to impeach President Muizzu, instead of the previous 58, as, according to the amendment, the total number of MPs is now 80, instead of 87.

PTI

Capital, tech boost from US can help India achieve goal of developed nation: Rajnath

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

THE "CAPITAL and technological know-how" from the US can help India to achieve its goal of becoming a developed country by 2047 and investments here can give American companies high returns and an avenue of de-risking, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Tuesday.

He was addressing a conference on 'Strengthening Indo-US Relationship in Amrit Kaal - Atmanirbhar Bharat' organised by Indo-American Chamber of Commerce (IACC) here.

The minister said the government has laid the groundwork for a strong and self-reliant new India, and the American investments can play a vital role in realising



Rajnath Singh at IACC meet in New Delhi, Tuesday. PTI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'Viksit Bharat'.

Calling it a win-win situation for both the countries, he noted that India's fast-growing economy, its demographic dividend, skilled workforce and huge domestic market guarantee high returns to American companies.

He said to deal with the challenges faced by the rules-based

international order and maintain strategic autonomy, it will be necessary for American businesses to de-risk by investing in India.

The conference was attended by US Ambassador to India Eric Garcetti and representatives of IACC, and was aimed at exploring ways to enhance bilateral trade, investments and collaboration in the context of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' initiative, which emphasises promoting domestic manufacturing.

Calling India and the US "natural partners", Singh said "we must move forward together in both business and strategic sectors amidst the current global geopolitical scenario". "India and the US support a free, open and rules-based international order. Due to this, there is a lot of alignment in our strategic interests," he said.

Two killed in heavy firing in Imphal West

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
IMPHAL, JANUARY 30

AT LEAST two persons from the Meitei community were killed and three injured on Tuesday in heavy firing in the Kadangband and Koutruk areas of Manipur's Imphal West district, close to the border with the Kuki-Zomi dominated Kangokpi district.

Sources said the gunfire started around 2.30 pm and lasted several hours.

The two deceased were identified as 25-year-old Meishnam Khaba from Bishnupur district, and 33-year-old Nongthombam Michael from Imphal East district. Of the three injured, one is reportedly BJP's former Manipur youth president Barish Sharma.

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UDAIPUR Cement Works Ltd. (UCWL) is a part of JK Organisation, which embodies a perfect blend of a rich legacy of over 100 years and a modern work culture. JK Organisation is contributing to national growth with its presence in the sectors — tyre, paper, cement, automotive transmission system, agri-genetics, dairy products and education, etc. It has been in the cement business for over four decades and distinguishes itself based on its innovative practices and initiatives aimed at customer satisfaction.

The well-known brand continues to push the boundaries and tap the immense potential for development in the country's infrastructure and construction sectors while continuing to be a resilient performer despite the constantly evolving challenges of the cement sector.

The Company has integrated cement manufacturing unit with an installed cement production capacity of 2.2 million tons per annum (MTPA) and with the ongoing expansion plan, it will ramp up to 4.7 million tons per annum (MTPA). UCWL manufactures world-class cement under the brand name — Platinum Heavy Duty Cement, which is made using the latest superior PSD Technology & Platinum Supremo cement which is known as a roof specialist. It provides several benefits to consumers, including 10% more volume, high initial strength, superior workability and fast setting. Furthermore, UCWL has a strong network of about 650 cement dealers spread in the states of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh.

UCWL upholds the highest levels of system standards such as ISO Certification for Environment (14001), Occupational Health and Safety (45001), Energy (50001) and Quality Management (9001) Systems. Going beyond the general industry practice, the Company has also inventoried its carbon and water footprint as per ISO 14064-1 and ISO 14046.

Led by the Integrated Sustainable Development Policy for its system structures, UCWL has ingrained "Sustainable Development" as one of the key ethos of its daily business activities. The Company's working principles have been aligned to contribute to the Nation's commitment to meet the United Nations — Sustainable Development Goals (UN-SDGs). Some of the key sustainability initiatives of



Aggressively pushing for green energy, UCWL has attained 48% total renewable energy consumption of total electrical energy requirement in FY 22-23.

Mr. Shrivats Singhania
Director and CEO,
Udaipur Cement Works
Limited

the Company have been highlighted below.

Product decarbonization and reducing carbon footprint

The transportation of raw materials and finished goods and cement production, are the main sources of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions resulting from UCWL's activities. Hence, its primary focus is to produce goods with minimal carbon footprint. Differentiating the Company's offering with low-carbon products is a major pillar of its decarbonization roadmap. Its climate change opportunities assessment has highlighted products and services as the most significant opportunity. The Company's cement product portfolio includes low-clinker content products, prepared using materials like flyash, slag, limestone, chemical gypsum and pozzolana. These products reduce carbon footprint and minimize energy and raw material consumption in cement manufacturing. The Company has a product-mix of 73% blended cement against total cement production.



To understand its emissions and develop effective mitigation strategies, the Company conducts comprehensive assessments based on the recommendations of the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD).

By addressing prioritized areas, the Company aims to proactively reduce its environmental impact and contribute to a sustainable and resilient future.

The installation of a 6-kilometer-long Over the Land Belt Conveyor (OLBC) helps

UCWL UDAIPUR CEMENT WORKS LIMITED

zero waste to landfill, zero effluent discharge, and reduced water usage, which aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals while encompassing the promotion of labour rights, human rights, and fighting corruption. To combat climate change, the Company is transitioning to alternative fuels and raw materials. It is also implementing solar and waste heat recovery systems (WHRS). UCWL has a 6 MW Waste Heat Recovery Power Plant and 15.5

MW Solar Power Plants (incl. Floating Solar). Through co-processing, the Company utilizes various industrial wastes as direct replacements for virgin raw materials, minimizing environmental risks. 27% of its sourced raw materials (Flyash, Gypsum, and Slag) are industrial waste materials and effectively replace the need for an equivalent amount of virgin natural resources in cement production.

Circular economy

The Company is committed to the principles of the circular economy by minimizing, reusing, recycling, and recovering materials and energy. It has taken initiatives to conserve natural resources, reduce CO2 emissions, and effectively manage waste. All hazardous waste generated from auxiliary processes, such as used oil and grease, are recycled by recyclers approved by the Central and State Pollution Control Boards. Furthermore, the Company has also obtained authorization to co-process the waste and by-products of other industries to minimize potentially unscientific disposal. Solid organic waste is transformed into compost and vermicompost, which are high in nutrients and utilized in horticulture as manure. Domestic wastewater is treated in the Company's Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs), and the treated water is utilized for plantation and greenbelt creation.

Water positivity

Being a resource-responsible corporate, the Company has done considerable work in water conservation and stands almost 3.6 times water positive, wherein it has saved about 4.11 lakh tons of virgin natural resources by replacing them with other industrial waste-derived raw materials in the process.

Corporate Social Responsibility and strengthening engagement with customers and supply chain

UCWL proactively invests in nurturing its social and relationship capital, which is deeply ingrained in the way it conducts its business by fostering trust and goodwill and creating opportunities for all stakeholders.

The Company's approach to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is based on designing and delivering stakeholder-specific need-based projects, tracking of impact through project-based key performance indicators (KPIs) and partnering with like-minded organizations for resource leveraging and knowledge sharing.



Alongside prioritizing product quality, customer satisfaction and innovation, UCWL emphasizes sustainable growth and a developmental framework for creating a better tomorrow.

Mr. Naveen Sharma
Whole Time Director, Udaipur
Cement Works Limited.

With a total of over 70,000 CSR beneficiaries, UCWL's CSR projects are creating opportunities, promoting sustainable development, and uplifting the quality of life for individuals and families through multiple projects in the thematic areas of Education, Health and Sanitation, Livelihoods and Skilling, Rural Infrastructure Development and Environmental Conservations.

Strong ethical and responsible governance

UCWL governance performance is grounded in an effective board composition, transparent ownership structure and a commitment to regulatory disclosures. The comprehensive code of conduct policy extends to suppliers, reinforcing ethical practices throughout the supply chain. Additionally, the Company has robust policies addressing biodiversity, sustainable sourcing, water management, climate impact management and a host of other issues related to ESG and Sustainability.

6 GOVT & POLITICS



Prashant Kishor: 'Will quit politics if JDU gets more seats'

PK predicts less than 20 seats for JDU in Assembly polls next year

SANTOSH SINGH
PATNA, JANUARY 30

REACTING TO the latest power-shift in Bihar, poll strategist Prashant Kishor, who previously planned CM Nitish Kumar's election campaign, Tuesday predicted that Kumar's JD(U) won't be able to win more than 20 seats in the next Assembly election as people in the state were "full of anger".

He said Kumar's decision to side with the BJP was driven by fear that JD(U)'s tally of seats won't cross five if it remained in Mahagathbandhan with the Congress, Left parties and RJD.

"Today, I am making another prediction — if his party is not reduced to less than 20 seats in 2025 polls in any alliance, I will quit politics," Kishor, colloquially known as PK, told reporters during his padyatra in Begusarai.

Kishor, who heads the Jan Suraj campaign, was Kumar's strategist in 2015 when the Mahagathbandhan won 178 seats in the 243-seat House. In 2018, he joined JD(U) and became its vice-president only to be expelled shortly after he criticised the party's decision to back the Citizenship Amendment Act.

Commenting on the JD(U) chief's U-turn, Kishor said it had angered the people of Bihar who would "avenge it".

"If there is one leader against whom people are full of anger, it is Nitish Kumar... Nitish Kumar might well be thinking that he was very smart, but the truth remains that he was full of guile. He had been trying to befool the 13 crore people of Bihar who would avenge this in the next Assembly elections," he said.

Asked to comment on Kishor's remarks, JD(U) spokesperson Neeraj Kumar told *The Indian Express*: "We can understand his desperation after we came back to NDA. Let him first prove himself in politics."

ATRI MITRA
PURNEA, JANUARY 30

ON THE second day of his Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Bihar, Congress MP Rahul Gandhi broke his silence on JD(U) supremo Nitish Kumar, saying that his return to the BJP-led NDA was prompted by the fact that he did not want to carry out a caste survey. Claiming that as allies, they had forced the Chief Minister's hand, Rahul said "we don't need Nitish Kumar".

Two days after Nitish's U-turn to the NDA on Sunday dealt a body blow to the Opposition's INDIA alliance, Rahul said at the Mahagathbandhan mega rally here in Bihar: "*Hum aapko samjhaate hain Nitishji kahan fanse* (I will explain to you how Nitishji got trapped). We told him that you have to do a caste survey, we can't let you off on that. He was forced to do the caste survey. Then he came under pressure from the other side because the BJP did not want a caste count. *Nitishji beech mein fans gaye* (Nitishji got caught in the middle). Then the BJP showed him a way and he went there. This (a caste census) is our responsibility, and we will im-



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in Purnea, Bihar. Partha Paul

plement it."

The Congress leader added that it was clear now that, apply a little pressure, and "Nitish makes a U-turn". The caste survey confirmed the Yadavs as the largest single group in Bihar, and EBCs as the largest social constituency, in what was seen as a boost to both the RJD and JD(U)'s political planks.

The Congress, RJD and Left put up a show of strength at

Purnea, which was held as part of Rahul's Yatra.

While Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge was expected to attend, he could not make it in time and a recorded speech of his was played. Apart from Rahul, the Congress leaders present included former Chhattisgarh CM Bhupesh Baghel, Jairam Ramesh, Kanhaiya Kumar, Imran Pratapgari, as well as state unit

leaders Akhilesh Singh, Tariq Anwar, Shakeel Ahmed and Ranjita Ranjan.

Among the Left leaders, CPI (M-L) general secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya, whose party has a good presence in Bihar, was among the senior-most names.

"Every day, our Constitution is being attacked. We have to stay together and fight against this," he said.

As ED questions Tejashwi, top RJD leaders skip Cong rally

SANTOSH SINGH
PATNA, JANUARY 30

FORMER BIHAR deputy Chief Minister and RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav appeared before the Enforcement Directorate on Tuesday for questioning in connection with the central agency's money laundering probe into the alleged land-for-jobs scam.

Tejashwi arrived at the ED office in Patna on Tuesday morning, a day after his father, former CM Lalu Prasad, was questioned for over nine hours in connection with the same case.

The RJD said the case was part of the Centre's "sustained political vendetta" against Opposition parties, and also questioned the timing of the ED's move, as it came amid Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's yatra, which is currently in its Bihar leg.

Top RJD leaders decided to stay put in Patna in view of the ED's questioning of Lalu and Tejashwi, and skipped Rahul's rally in Purnia. At the rally, the RJD was represented by its MP Ashfaq Karim.

RJD's Rajya Sabha MPs Misa Bharati and Manoj Kumar Jha, as well as its former ministers Sameer Kumar Mahaseth and Ramanand Yadav, were at the ED office amid Tejashwi's questioning. They were also joined there by several RJD workers. "The ED's questioning is nothing but an act of political vendetta. There has been a lack of transparency in the ED's questioning method, as we are not getting information on the duration of questioning. But one can see the overwhelming public reaction against it. The NDA government has started the political vendetta onslaught, and someone will end it," Jha told reporters.

Nitish-BJP govt to seek trust vote on Feb 10

Patna: The new NDA government in Bihar led by CM Nitish Kumar will seek a trust vote in the assembly on February 10, according to a notification issued on Tuesday.

The government will seek the trust vote on the first day of the Budget session after the customary address by Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar to both Houses of the legislature, the notification said.

Kumar took oath as chief minister of Bihar for a record ninth time on Sunday after a dramatic volte-face, ditching the INDIA grouping, and forming the new government with BJP. PTI

As Mamata intensifies attack on Congress, Adhir fires fresh salvo

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, JANUARY 30

SIGNALLING THE widening rift with INDIA bloc partners — Congress and CPI(M) — West Bengal CM on Tuesday urged people to unite under her party, the TMC, banner to defeat what she called the Congress-CPI(M)-BJP nexus in the state.

Banerjee, who held a padyatra in Chopra and Islampur, days after Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's yatra passed through the same towns of West Bengal, said: "It is the TMC that is fighting for the rights of the people of



Mamata Banerjee in South Dinajpur on Tuesday. PTI

the state. We must unite to defeat the Congress-CPI(M)-BJP nexus in Bengal."

Banerjee's remarks against

Congress and CPI(M) came on a day when West Bengal Congress chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury fired a fresh salvo at the TMC accusing it of "creating hurdles" in the Yatra's way in Bengal and vowing to continue raising corruption issues.

Rahul's Yatra is set to reenter West Bengal on Wednesday via Malda. "If there is theft in West Bengal, shall I say it is not happening?... Can't we call people involved in corruption corrupt," Chowdhury, who has been accused by the TMC of straining the ties between the two parties, told mediapersons in Murshidabad.

Foreign Secy calls on Bhutan King, PM; talks on boosting 'unique ties'

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

FOREIGN SECRETARY Vinay Mohan Kwatra on Tuesday called on Bhutan King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and discussed ways to further deepen the "unique ties of friendship" between the two nations.

Kwatra is on a three-day trip since Monday, in the first high-level visit from India after the formation of a new government under People's Democratic Party (PDP) leader Tshering Tobgay.

"An honour to receive the audience from His Majesty the King of Bhutan and benefit from his guidance on ways to further deepen the India-Bhutan unique ties of friendship," he posted on X.

On Monday, Kwatra called on PM Tobgay at his office. During the meeting, they discussed various areas of cooperation between Bhutan and India.



Foreign Secy Vinay Mohan Kwatra with Bhutan King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck. X/@Indiainbhutan

Tobgay also hosted a dinner for the Foreign Secretary and his delegation at his residence.

Kwatra's visit comes against the backdrop of China and Bhutan looking at an expeditious resolution of their festering boundary row that could have implications for India's security interests.

SP blindsides Cong, names 16 candidates for Lok Sabha polls

FIRST LIST, SECOND SURPRISE	
DIMPLE YADAV MAINPURI Akhilesh Yadav's wife, she won the bypoll from here in 2022 after the death of party founder Mulayam Singh Yadav.	RAJA RAM PAL AKBARPUR A former BSP MP.
AKSHAY YADAV FIROZABAD Son of the SP chief's uncle and RS MP Ram Gopal Yadav.	LALJI VERMA AMBEDKAR NAGAR A top Kurmi leader who left BSP for SP in 2022.
DHARMENDRA YADAV BADAUN A cousin of Akhilesh's, he lost Azamgarh in 2022.	Gorakhpur (Bhojpur actor Kaajal Nishad); Banda (Shivshankar Singh Patel); Farukhabad (Naval Kishore Shukla); Kheri (Utkarsh Verma); Faizabad (Awadhesh Prasad); Basti (Ram Prasad Chaudhary); Etah (Devesh Shukla); Sambhal (Shafiqur Rahman Barq); Lucknow (Ravidas Mehrotra); Dhaurahra (Anand Bhadauriya)
ANU TANDON UNNAO Former Congress MP from Unnao.	

Cong leader says 'cheated', SP leader responds: 'No one was kept in dark'

ASAD REHMAN & LALMANI VERMA
LUCKNOW, NEW DELHI, JAN 30

THREE DAYS after the Samajwadi Party (SP) announced that it had allotted 11 seats in Uttar Pradesh to the Congress for the Lok Sabha elections, the Akhilesh Yadav-led party on Tuesday announced candidates for 16 Lok Sabha seats, taking the Congress by surprise. With this, the SP became the first major political party to announce candidates for the parliamentary elections.

Many state Congress leaders said this was the SP's "pressure tactic" to get their party to agree to its seat-sharing offer and that the announcement made without informing their leadership had blindsided it. While SP leaders insist that Akhilesh has already "finalised" seat-sharing, the Congress claims talks are still on.

Responding to the SP move, a senior Congress leader said, "At least four of these seats were supposed to go to us and the SP has blindsided us by announcing candidates without keeping

us in the loop. The SP doesn't seem interested in defeating the BJP. Our central leadership will decide what will be done next."

The Congress functionary said Kheri, Ayodhya, Lucknow, and Farukhabad for which the SP announced candidates were supposed to go to his party. "You should ask the SP leadership why they have cheated us like this," said the leader.

"I would not like to comment on the decision of the SP to announce seats. It is up to the central leadership to comment on it." AICC general secretary Avinash Pande, the UP in-charge, told *The Indian Express*.

Defending his party's decision, SP national spokesperson Rajendra Choudhary said that "no one has been kept in the dark".

He said, "The announcement has been done because the party's candidates will need time to prepare for the elections." Former SP MLC and national spokesperson Udaiveer Singh told, "Seat-sharing talks with the Congress are still ongoing and if they can give us candidates who can win seats in the state, we will give it to them."

Corruption perceptions index: India at 93 among 180 countries

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

INDIA ranked 93 out of 180 countries on the corruption perceptions index (CPI) for 2023, according to the latest report released by Transparency International.

The index, which lists countries by their perceived levels of public sector corruption, ranked Denmark at the top, followed by Finland, New Zealand and Norway.

The index uses a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean. In 2023, India's overall score was 39 while in 2022, it was 40. India's rank in 2023 was 85. In the Asian region, Singapore ranked at the top, scoring 83 and occupying the fifth slot.

"India (39) shows score fluctuations small enough that no firm conclusions can be drawn on any significant change. However, ahead of the elections,

"... [A]head of elections, India sees further narrowing of civic space, including through the passage of a (telecom) Bill that could be a 'grave threat' to fundamental rights..."

REPORT BY TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL

India sees further narrowing of civic space, including through the passage of a (telecommunication) Bill that could be a 'grave threat' to fundamental rights," the report said.

While western Europe and the European Union remained the top-scoring regions, its regional average score dropped to 65 this year, as checks and balances weakened and political integrity eroded, the report said.

In South Asia, both Pakistan (rank 133) and Sri Lanka (rank 115) are grappling with their re-

spective debt burdens and ensuing political instability, it said.

"However, the two countries have strong judicial oversight, which is helping to keep the government in check. The Supreme Court of Pakistan strengthened citizens' right to information by expanding this right under Article 19A of its Constitution to previously restricted institutions," it said.

Noting that China (rank 76) has made headlines with its aggressive anti-corruption crackdown by punishing more than 3.7 million public officials for graft over the last decade, the report said the country's heavy reliance on punishment rather than institutional checks on power raises doubts over the long-term effectiveness of such anti-corruption measures.

The bottom of the index included Myanmar (162), Afghanistan (162) and North Korea (172). At rank 180 was Somalia with the lowest score of 11.

Tamil star 'Thalapathy' Vijay set to launch party, eye on 2026 TN Assembly polls

ARUN JANARDHANAN
CHENNAI, JANUARY 30

TAMIL FILM superstar Vijay is poised to take the plunge into politics, becoming the latest addition to Tamil Nadu's cinema-politics landscape, sources indicated on Tuesday. The actor plans to register his yet-unnamed political party in New Delhi in the first week of February.

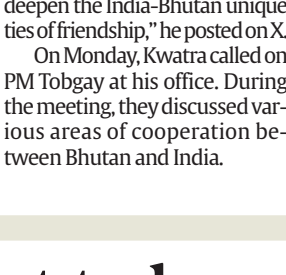
Sources close to the actor said the party's registration was imminent, setting the stage for Vijay's potential debut in the 2026 Assembly polls, rather than contesting the coming Lok Sabha

elections. Sources said the actor's registered fan group Vijay Makkal Iyakkam, which engages in many social welfare activities, is being converted into a full-fledged political party. The reach of the party, according to people close to the actor, is expected to extend beyond Tamil Nadu given his strong and organised fan base in Kerala and Karnataka.

Insiders said the party's formation was in a phase of meticulous preparation at the moment. "More administrative work is happening now, collecting Aadhar cards, voter IDs, and affidavits from over 100 people declaring they are not associated

with any other political outfits, to be submitted to the Election Commission in Delhi sometime around next week," said a source close to the actor.

In the Tamil film industry, Vijay, popularly referred to by his fans as Thalapathy (Commander), is often regarded as second only to Rajinikanth in terms of his mass appeal and has long been perceived as a shy figure, an image at odds with his on-screen action-hero persona. His imminent foray into politics is a significant departure from his characteristic reticence, signalling a new chapter in his career. Vijay will join a long list of



Superstar Vijay. Instagram/@actorVijay

actor-turned-politicians in Tamil Nadu that includes M G Ramachandran, popularly known as MGR, Sivaji Ganesan, Jayalalithaa, the late Captain Vijayakanth, and Kamal Haasan.

EXPLAINED

New role: Caution and hope

VIJAY, AS popular as film stars of the stature of MGR or Rajinikanth, commands a fandom much above Kamal Hassan's or even the late Captain Vijayakanth's. Many politicians, thus, are cautious of his foray into politics, although others anticipate it to boost alternative voices in the state.

