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Real Madrid star Vinícius Júnior wins FIFA Best men's player of the year award, while Barcelona's Aitana Bonmatí picks up the women's prize for the second time, **P 23**

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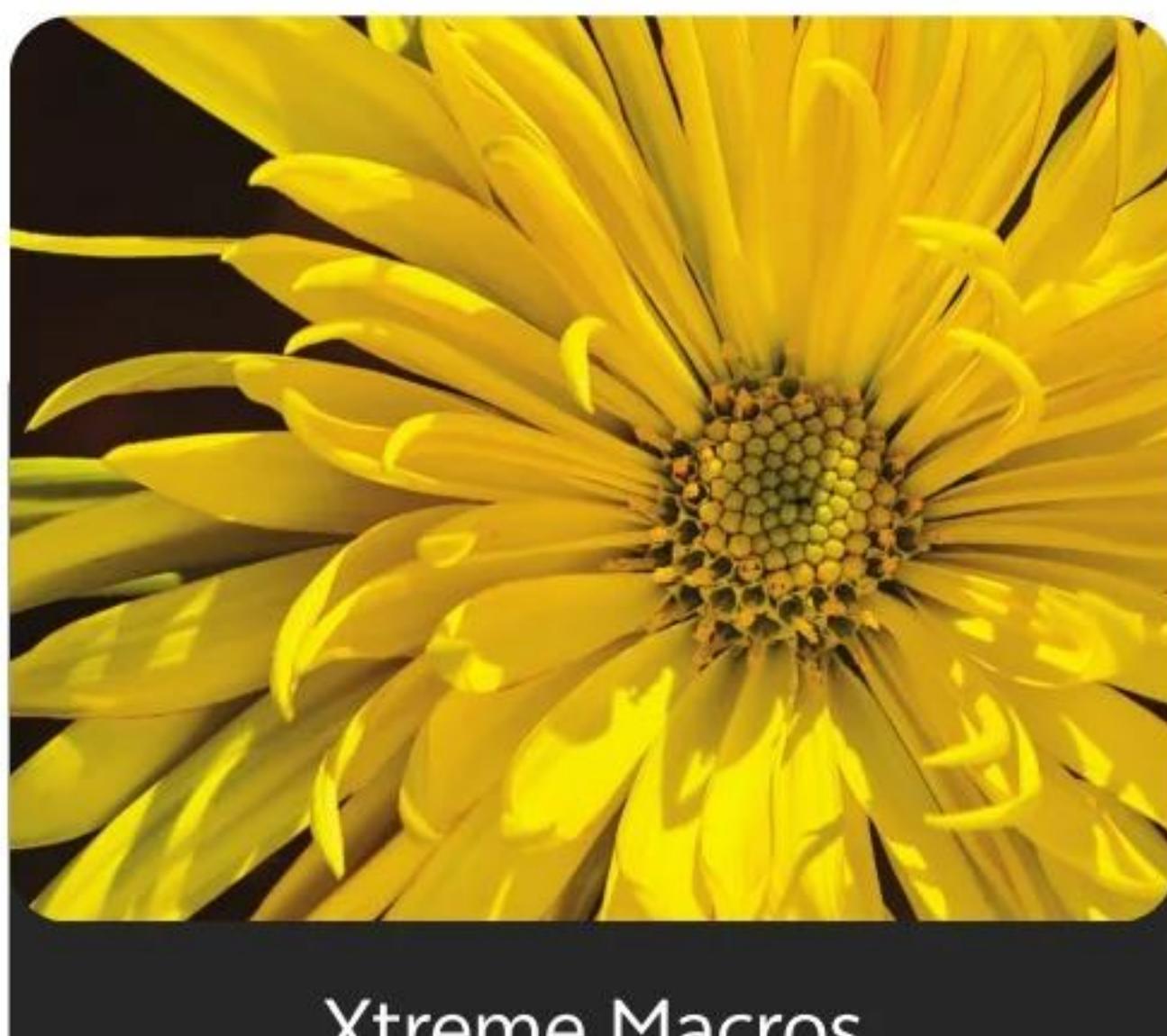
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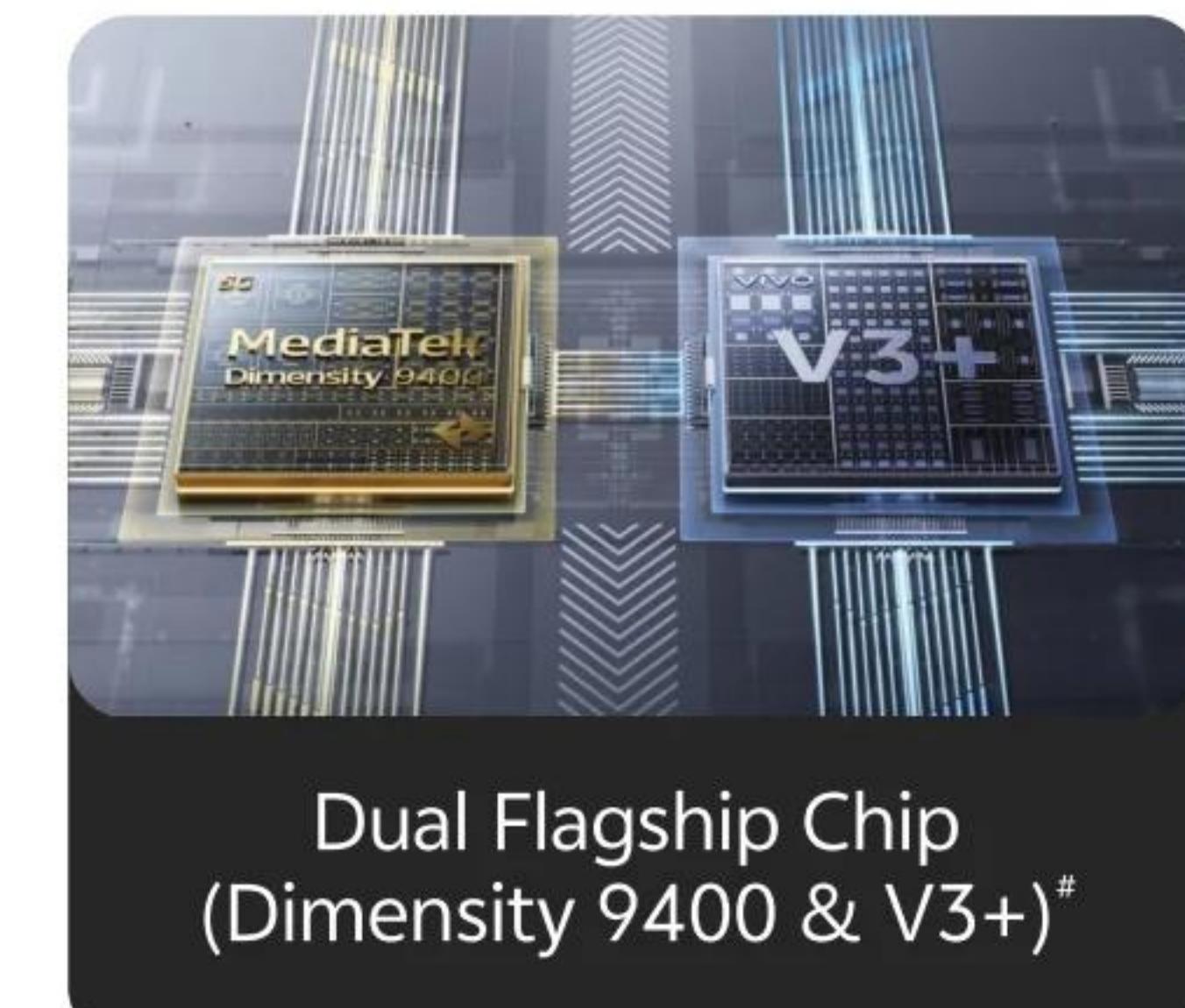
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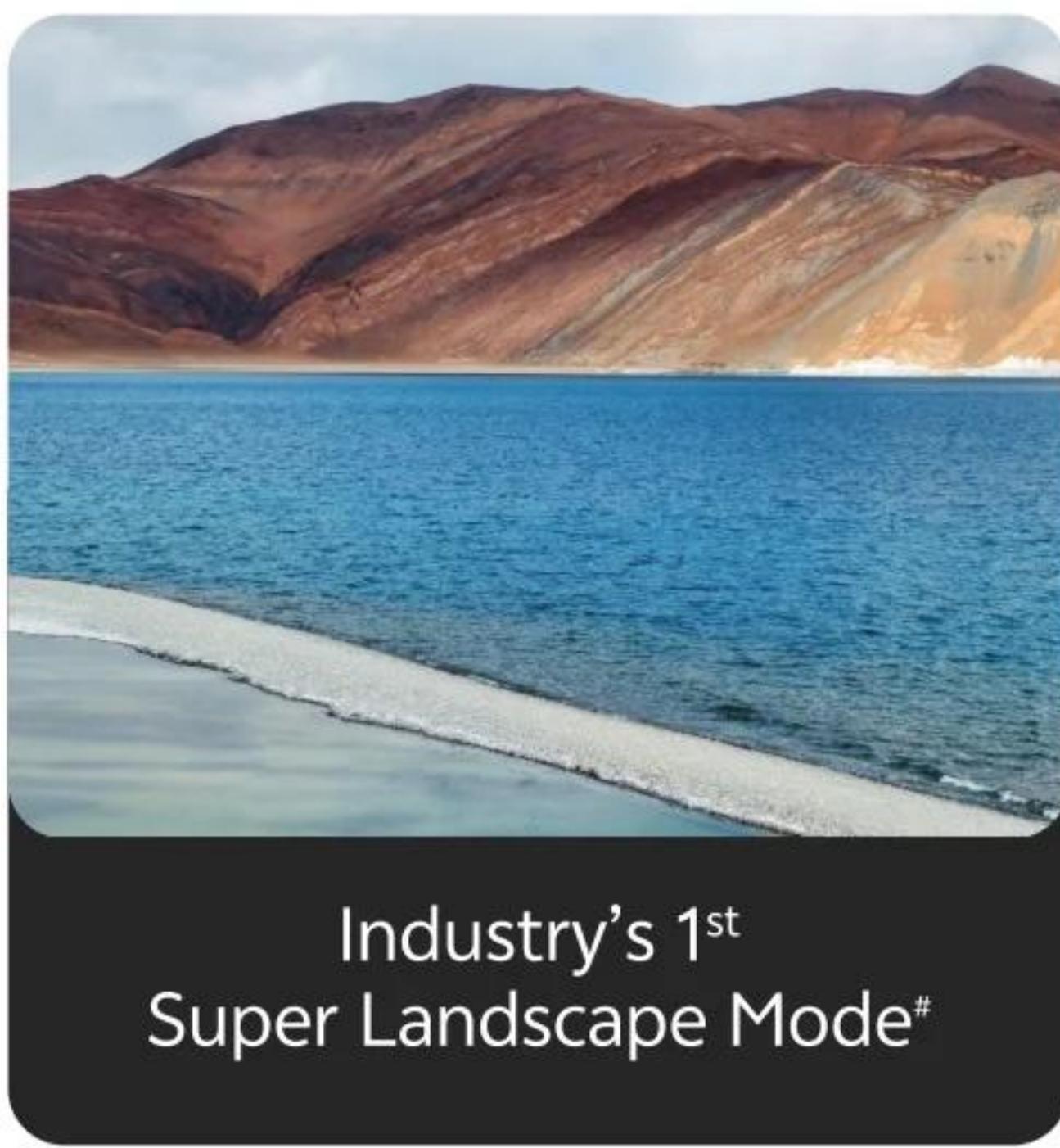
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TIMES GLOBAL

THE TIMES OF INDIA, NEW DELHI | THURSDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2024

ADVENTURE IS NOT OUTSIDE MAN; IT IS WITHIN – GEORGE ELIOT

'CREATIVE JUICES ARE STILL FLOWING': ELTON JOHN SAYS HE'LL CONTINUE MAKING NEW MUSIC DESPITE HIS FAILING EYESIGHT

NICOLE KIDMAN ALMOST CHOSE FARM LIFE OVER H'WOOD AFTER FIRST CHILD BIRTH IN 2008, SAYS MOM PURSUED HER TO KEEP ON WORKING

China has expanded its nuclear force: Pentagon

Beijing Has Added 100 Nuclear Warheads Since Last Year, Bringing Its Stockpile To Over 600, Says Report

Chris Buckley and John Ismay

China's nuclear arsenal and other elements of its armed forces have grown robustly despite anti-corruption investigations that have shaken the People's Liberation Army at its highest levels, the Pentagon said Wednesday.

China's navy "continues to develop into a global force, gradually extending its operational reach beyond East Asia," the defence department said in an annual report assessing Beijing's military strength. It said China also seemed to be exploring production of conventionally armed intercontinental ballistic missiles, which would give it another option — alongside its 135 or so nuclear long-range missiles — that could be used to threaten the US.

China doesn't disclose how many nuclear weapons it has. The Pentagon report estimates that it has added about 100 nuclear warheads since last year, bringing its stockpile to more than 600 by mid-2024. That is still much smaller than the arsenals of the US and Russia, but China appears to be on track to deploy over 1,000 warheads by 2030, the report said. Russia and the US each deploy 1,550 strategic N-weapons under a treaty that could expire in 2026.

The Pentagon report may feed into calls for the incoming



It said China also seemed to be exploring production of conventionally armed ICBM, which would give it another option — alongside its 135 or so nuclear long-range missiles — that could be used to threaten the US.

Trump administration to focus on China's rising military strength, even as the US grapples with Russia's war in Ukraine and turmoil in West Asia.

The Pentagon said China seemed to have finished constructing three missile fields with 320 launch silos in its northern deserts and had placed missiles in some of the silos.

Some of the graft may've involved the silos built for missiles, but any issues with compromised silos have probably been addressed, the report said. It did not say how US officials reached those conclusions.

Much of China's military planning is focused on Taiwan. Beijing has long said that they want to peacefully absorb Taiwan into China, but it also says that it may resort to war. But the report concluded that China remains some distance from being able to confidently consider invading, citing its urban warfare shortcomings. nvt

king bribes and selling military promotions. Last year, Xi abruptly replaced two commanders of the PLA's Rocket Force, which controls nearly all of China's nuclear missiles.

The advances reported by the Pentagon came despite recent corruption scandals in the Chinese military. In June, party leaders officially accused two recent Chinese defence ministers — Gen. Li Shangfu and Gen. Wei Fenghe — of ta-

nking bribes and selling military promotions. Last year, Xi abruptly replaced two commanders of the PLA's Rocket Force, which controls nearly all of China's nuclear missiles.

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Nasa's next crew of four was supposed to launch in Feb. But SpaceX needs more time to prepare the brand new capsule for liftoff. That launch is now scheduled for no earlier than late March.

NASA said it considered using a different SpaceX capsule to fly up the replacement crew in order to keep the flights on schedule. But it decided the best option was to wait for the new capsule to transport the next crew.

Nasa prefers to have overlapping crews at the space station for a smoother transition, according to officials. Most space station missions last six months, with a few reaching a full year. AP

The first rule redefines specialty occupation, offering more flexibility to employers. It clarifies that an occupation 'normally' requiring a bachelor's degree does not mean that it must 'always' require a bachelor's degree. It says that a position may qualify as a specialty occupation (a mandatory eligibility criterion) even if the employer accepts a range of qualifying degree fields, as long as there is a 'logical connection' between the degree and job duties. For instance, degrees in quantitative maths could suffice for roles in AI, provided employers justify

their relevance. Cyrus D Mehta, immigration attorney told TOI. "The need to show only a logical connection between the degree and duties rather than an 'exact correspondence' should resolve several concerns."

IT service and consultancy companies, which typically depute their H-1B workers to client sites, will also need to take into cognisance the new rule.

Mitch Wexler, partner at global immigration law firm Fragomen, said: "The regulation provides that when a H-1B worker is 'staffed' to a third party, the requirements of that third party (client), and not the

petitioner (sponsoring employer), would be considered most relevant when determining whether the position is a qualifying specialty occupation."

Regulatory changes are crucial for the Indian diaspora too. According to TOI's analysis, in FY 2023 (ended Sept 30, 2023), Indians were allotted 68,825 initial employment visas which was nearly 58% of the total allotment. Visa extensions were approved for 2.1 lakh Indians (79%) of the total extensions approved by USCIS.

In the second rule, deference to prior adjudications has been reinstated and codified.

India charges lot of tariff, will slap reciprocal tax, threatens Trump

Washington: US President-elect Donald Trump has reiterated his intention to impose reciprocal tariffs in retaliation for the high tariff imposed by India on import of certain American products. Trump made these remarks on Tuesday at a news conference at Mar-a-Lago and also said that India and Brazil were among countries that impose high tariffs on certain US products.



THEY TAX US. WE TAX THEM!

"The word reciprocal is important because if somebody charges us — India, we don't have to talk about our own — if India charges us 100%, do we charge them nothing for the same? You know, they send in a bicycle and we send them a bicycle. They charge us 100 and 200. India charges a lot. Brazil charges a lot. If they want to charge us, that's fine, but we're going to charge them the same thing," Trump said.

Responding to a question, his commerce secretary pick

During his election campaign in Oct, Trump has claimed that India imposes the highest tariffs on foreign products. But they do it with a smile. "Perhaps the most important element of my plan to make America extraordinarily wealthy again is reciprocity. It's a word that's very important in my plan because we generally don't charge tariffs. I started that process, it was so great, with the vans and the small trucks, etc." Trump had said in Oct.

In 2019, Trump has repeatedly claimed that India is a "tariff king" and imposes "tremendously high" tariffs on American products. nvt

The immediate impact is that the 97,556 Indian students currently participating in the Optional Practical Training Program (OPT) will stand to gain. There was an increase by 41% in OPT participation by Indians from the previous year, as per the latest Open Doors report for 2023-2024 academic year.

Foreign students on completion of their qualification are eligible for OPT of one year. Those hailing from the STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) field of study get an extra tenure of two years.

Several individuals undergoing OPT are sponsored for

their relevance. Cyrus D Mehta, immigration attorney told TOI. "The need to show only a logical connection between the degree and duties rather than an 'exact correspondence' should resolve several concerns."

IT service and consultancy companies, which typically depute their H-1B workers to client sites, will also need to take into cognisance the new rule.

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Paris: The Cour de Cassation, France's highest court, upheld on Wednesday former President Nicolas Sarkozy's conviction for corruption and influence peddling.

Sarkozy had appealed against the 2021 conviction for corruption and influence peddling, in which he had been handed a 3-year prison sentence. Two of the years were suspended and Sarkozy would wear an electronic monitoring bracelet instead of going to prison for the last year.

Patrice Spinosi, lawyer for Sarkozy, said the ex-president would appeal to the European Court for Human Rights to challenge the ruling.

"The challenge that I will be bringing to the European Court of Human Rights may,

alas, lead to a condemnation against France," wrote Sarkozy on X. "I want to once again state that I am clearly innocent," he added.

Spinosi added, Sarkozy would comply with the ruling which forces him to wear an electronic bracelet but would continue to use all legal means to prove his innocence. Sarkozy was found guilty by a lower court of trying to bribe a judge and of peddling influence in exchange for confidential information about a probe into his 2007 campaign finances. REUTERS

France highest court upholds Sarko corruption conviction

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Uzbek man confessed to killing Gen on orders of Ukraine's SBU: Russia

Moscow: Russia said on Wednesday it had detained an Uzbek man who had confessed to planting and detonating a bomb which killed a top general, Igor Kirillov, in Moscow on the instructions of Ukraine's SBU security service.

Kirillov, who was chief of Russia's Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Protection Troops, was killed outside his apartment building on Tuesday along with his assistant when a bomb attached to an electric scooter went off. Ukraine's SBU intelligence service took responsibility for the killing after Ukraine accused Kirillov of being responsible for the use of chemical weapons against Ukrainian troops — something Moscow denies.

Russia's Investigative Committee said in a statement on Wednesday that the unnamed



Moscow said it will raise the killing of Lt-Gen Kirillov at UNSC on Dec 20

suspect had told them he had come to Moscow to carry out an assignment for Ukraine's intelligence services. In a video published by the Baza news outlet, which is known to have sources in Russian law-enforcement circles, the suspect is seen sitting in a van describing his actions. It was not clear under what conditions he was speaking and Reuters could not immediately verify the video's authenticity.

Dressed in a winter coat, the suspect is shown saying he

had come to Moscow, bought an electric scooter, and received an improvised explosive device. He describes placing the device on the electric scooter and parking it outside the apartment block where Kirillov lived. Investigators cited him as saying he set up a surveillance camera in a hire car which, they said, was watched in the Ukrainian city of Dnipro by people who organised the killing. The suspect, who is thought to be 29, is shown saying he remotely detonated the device when Kirillov left the building. He says Ukraine had offered him \$100,000 and residency in a European country.

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Elon Musk denies media reports that Starlink service is allegedly being used by rebel outfits in Manipur, saying his 'sat beams are turned off over India', P 11

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Modi: Cong demand for Shah resignation mere 'theatrics'

'Cong, Ecosystem Spreading Lies As Shah Exposed Injustice To Bhim'

Akhilesh.Singh
@timesofindia.com

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday dismissed as "theatrics" Congress's demand for Amit Shah's resignation over his comments on B R Ambedkar and asserted that Congress and its "rotten ecosystem" are spreading falsehoods because the home minister exposed its misdeeds towards the Dalit icon, including Jawaharlal Nehru's personal role in getting him defeated twice in elections.

Speaking after Congress, based on an edited clip of Shah's Tuesday speech in Rajya Sabha, asked him to get the home minister to quit, the PM said, "Amit Shah ji exposed Congress's history of insulting Ambedkar and ignoring SC/ST communities. They are clearly stung and stunned by the facts he presented, which is why they are now indulging in theatrics. Sadly for them, people know the truth."

With Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha proceedings washed out on Wednesday due to disruptions, Modi took to X to hit



Indians have seen how one dynasty has humiliated SCs & STs, said Modi

back at Congress. "The list of Congress's sins towards Ambedkar includes: Getting him defeated in elections not once but twice. Pandit Nehru campaigning against him and making his loss a personal issue, denying him Bharat Ratna, and denying his portrait a place of pride in Parliament's Central Hall," he said.

"If Congress and its rotten ecosystem think their malicious lies can hide their misdeeds of several years, especially their insult towards Ambedkar, they are gravely mistaken. The people of India have seen time and again how one party, party led by one dy-

Ambedkar, saying it is because of the lead framer of the Constitution that "we are what we are", and listed the measures taken by his govt to fulfil Ambedkar's vision over the last decade.

"Take any sector—be it removing 25 crore people from poverty, strengthening the SC/ST Act, our govt's flagship programmes like Swachh Bharat, PM Awas Yojana, Jal Jeevan Mission, Ujjwala Yojana and more, each of them has touched the lives of the poor and marginalised. Our govt has worked to develop 'panchayat', the five iconic places associated with Ambedkar," the PM said. For decades, Modi said, there was a pending issue involving land for "Chaitanya Bhoomi", where Ambedkar was cremated. "Not only did our govt resolve the issue, I have gone to pray there as well," he added.

"We have also developed 26 Alipur Road in Delhi, where Ambedkar spent his last years. The house where he lived in London has also been acquired by the govt. When it comes to Ambedkar, our respect and reverence is absolute," he said.

Modi also positioned his govt as the real legatee of

nasty has indulged in every possible trick to obliterate the legacy of Ambedkar and humiliate SC/ST communities," the PM said, signalling his readiness to duel Congress over Ambedkar.

Soon, defence minister

Rajnath Singh and other members of the Cabinet, including I&B minister Ashwini Vaishnav and parliamentary affairs minister Kiren Rijiju, joined in the attack on Congress, accusing it of engaging in cheap politics to cover up their "past insults" to Ambedkar.

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