



Rohit has earned right to walk away on his own terms: Clarke



Pak begins its two-year tenure as non-permanent member of UNSC

Shraddha Kapoor hits bed at 11 on New Year's eve; Tabu calls it 'false'



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MARKET	
SENSEX	NIFTY
78507.41	23742.90
368.40	98.10
GOLD	SILVER
76,893.00	87,550.00
0.00	-28.00

WEATHER	
Sunrise	7:14 AM
Sunset	5:36 PM
Moonrise	9:17 AM
Moonset	8:04 PM
Today's Prediction	
Maximum	21°C
Minimum	9°C
Tomorrow's Prediction	
23°C	10°C

Government extends two crop insurance schemes till 2025-26

The decision will help in risk coverage of crops from non-preventable natural calamities for farmers across the country till 2025-26.

A decision in this regard was taken in the meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

New Delhi
The Centre on Wednesday extended two crop insurance schemes PMFBY and RWB-CIS for one more year till 2025-26 and also created a separate Rs 824.77 crore fund for technology infusion in the implementation of flagship schemes.

Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) and Restructured Weather Based Crop Insurance Scheme (RWB-CIS) have been extended to align it with the 15th Finance Commission period.

A decision in this regard was taken in the meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"The schemes have received positive response from the farmers and therefore, the allocation for PMFBY and RWB-CIS has been enhanced," Information and Broadcasting Minister Ash-



wini Vaishnav told reporters.

Asked about the on-going farmer agitation in Punjab and why the government is unable to convince them, Vaishnav said, "If you would have moved around during Hary-

ana elections, farmers gave great feedback on 'Andolan' versus real welfare 'good to farmers', you would have yourself seen."

The total outlay for PMFBY and RWB-CIS has been enhanced to Rs 69,515.71 crore for 2021-

22 to 2025-26, higher from Rs 66,550 crore for 2020-21 to 2024-25.

For the targeted infusion of technology in the implementation of the crop insurance schemes, the minister said the Cabinet also approved the creation of a

separate Fund for Innovation and Technology (FIAT) with a corpus of Rs 824.77 crore.

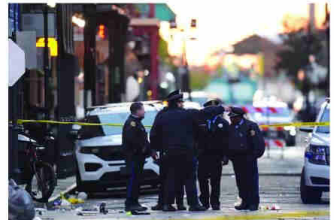
It will help in the use of technology for faster assessment of crop damage, claim settlement and lesser disputes. It will also help in using digital technologies for easier enrolment and greater coverage, Vaishnav said.

In a statement, the agriculture ministry said the fund will be utilised towards funding technological initiatives under the scheme namely, YES-TECH, WINDS, etc as well as research and development studies.

Yield Estimation System using Technology (YES-TECH) uses remote sensing technology for yield estimation with a minimum 30 per cent weightage to technology-based yield estimates.

Nine major states are currently implementing, including Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. CONTD ON PAGE-2

10 dead, 30 injured after car plows into crowd in US



New Orleans

A vehicle raced into a crowd of New Orleans revellers early on New Year's Day, killing 10 people and injuring 30 others in what the FBI is investigating as an "act of terrorism".

The driver of the vehicle was killed in a fire-fight with police following the attack around 3:15 am Wednesday along Bourbon Street in the city's bustling French Quarter, the FBI said.

After the vehicle came to a stop, the driver emerged from the truck and open fire on responding officers, New Orleans police said. Officers returned fire, striking and killing the driver, police said.

Two officers were shot

and are in stable condition, police said.

At a news conference, New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell described the killings as a "terrorist attack" and the city's police chief said the act was clearly intentional.

Police Commissioner Anne Kirkpatrick said the driver was "hell-bent on creating the carnage and the damage that he did."

"It was very intentional behaviour. This man was trying to run over as many people as he could," Kirkpatrick said.

FBI Assistant Special Agent in Charge Alethea Duncan said officials were investigating the at least one suspected improvised explosive device at the scene.

CONTD ON PAGE-2

School enrolment fell by 37 lakh in 2023-24: Ministry

New Delhi
Enrolment in schools across India fell by 37 lakh in 2023-24 as compared to the previous year, Ministry of Education's UDISE data showed.

The Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) Plus is a data aggregation platform maintained by the education ministry to collate school education data from across the country.

While the number of enrolled students in 2022-23 was 25.17 crore, the figures for 2023-24 stood at 24.80 crore. The number of girl students dropped by 16 lakh during the period under review, while the number of boy students fell by 21 lakh.

The representation of minorities in total enrolment stood at around



20 per cent. Among the minorities, 79.6 per cent were Muslims, 10 per cent Christians, 6.9 per cent Sikhs, 2.2 per cent Buddhists, 1.3 per cent Jains, and 0.1 per cent Parsis.

At the national level, 26.9 per cent students registered in UDISE+ were from the general category, 18 per cent from Scheduled Caste, 9.9 per cent from Scheduled Tribe, and 45.2 per cent from the Other Backward Class category. Agency

GST kitty rises 7.3 pc to Rs 1.77 lakh cr in December

New Delhi
The gross GST collection rose 7.3 per cent year-on-year to Rs 1.77 lakh crore in December despite significant increase in both domestic and export refunds.

The Central GST collection stood at Rs 32,836 crore, State GST at Rs 40,499 crore, Integrated IGST at Rs 47,783 crore and Cess at Rs 11,471 crore, according to government data released on Wednesday.

The total Gross Goods and Services Tax (GST) revenue grew 7.3 per cent to Rs 1.77 lakh crore in December as compared to Rs 1.65 lakh crore in the same month a year ago, it said.

During the month under review, GST from domestic transactions grew 8.4 per cent to Rs 1.32 lakh crore, while revenues from tax on



imports rose about 4 per cent to Rs 44,268 crore.

In November, GST mop-up was Rs 1.82 lakh crore with 8.5 per cent annual growth. The highest-ever collection was in April 2024 at over Rs 2.10 lakh crore.

During the month, refunds worth Rs 22,490 crore were issued, registering 31 per cent increase over the year-ago period. After adjusting refunds, net GST collection increased by 3.3

per cent to Rs 1.54 lakh crore.

MS Mani, partner, Deloitte India said, "While the overall GST collections are showing a y-o-y increase of 8.6 per cent, it needs to be borne in mind that this is despite an increase of 13.5 per cent in respect of refunds, signifying the stability in GST collections and a good GST framework for refund processing."

The significant in-

India declares 2025 as defence year

New Delhi:
India on Wednesday declared 2025 as the year of defence reforms and that the aim will be to facilitate rolling out integrated theatre commands to bolster synergy among the three services and transform the military into a technologically-advanced combat-ready force.

The broader aim of the reforms planned by the defence ministry would be to make the defence acquisition procedures simpler and time-sensitive, ensure deeper collaboration among key stakeholders, break silos, eliminate inefficiencies and optimise utilisation of resources.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said the reforms would lay the foundation for "unprecedented" advancements in defence preparedness and ensure India's security amid challenges of the 21st century.

The defence ministry's aim on theatre commands assumes significance as it virtually indicated the plan to unveil the reform measure in 2025. Under the theatricalisation model, the government seeks to integrate the capabilities of the Army, Air Force and Navy and optimally utilise their resources for wars and operations. As per the theatricalisation plan, each of the theatre commands will have units of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force and all of them will work as a single entity looking after security challenges in a specified geographical territory.

At present, the Army, Navy and the Air Force have separate commands. Agency

Agra man kills mom, 4 sisters in Lucknow hotel room

Lucknow
A 24-year-old man from Agra took his mother and four sisters to a hotel here and allegedly killed them inside one of its rooms here on Wednesday and then shot a purported video in which he claimed he was forced to take this step due to "helplessness and despair" after "unimaginable atrocities" by people of the locality. Central Lucknow Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Raveena Tyagi said the incident took place at Hotel Sharanjeet in the busy Naka area of the city. "The



accused, identified as Mohammad Arshad (24), allegedly killed five members of his own family. Following the gruesome act, the local police promptly apprehended the accused from the crime scene," she said.

The deceased have been identified as Alia (9), Alshia (19), Aksa (16) and Rahmeen (18) -- all sisters of Arshad -- and his mother Asma, according to the police. The DCP said Arshad's family lived in Agra and preliminary inquiry has revealed that he took the step because of domestic disputes. The purported video surfaced on social

HIGHLIGHT

The accused, identified as Arshad (24), allegedly killed five members of his own family. Following the gruesome act, the local police promptly apprehended the accused from the crime scene, says Raveena Tyagi, DCP Central Lucknow

media shortly after the shocking incident came to light in which Arshad confessed to slitting the wrists and throats of his sisters and mother. Agency

India asks Pakistan to expedite release of Indian prisoners

New Delhi
India has called for the early release and repatriation of civilian prisoners, fishermen, and missing Indian defence personnel from Pakistan's custody. Pakistan has also been asked to expedite the release and repatriation of 183 Indian fishermen and civilian prisoners, who have completed their sentence.

The request came when India and Pakistan exchanged the lists of civilian prisoners and fishermen in each other's custody on Wednesday (January 1, 2025).

The lists were exchanged through diplomatic channels, simultane-



ously in New Delhi and Islamabad, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said. Such lists are exchanged every year on January 1 and on July 1 under the provisions of the bilateral Agreement on Consular Access 2008.

According to the MEA, India has shared the names of 981 civilian prisoners and 81 fishermen in its custody, who

HIGHLIGHT

In addition, Pakistan has been asked to provide immediate consular access to the 18 civilian prisoners and fishermen in Pakistan's custody, who are believed to be Indian, says the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

are Pakistani or are believed-to-be-Pakistani. Similarly, Pakistan has shared names of 49 civilian prisoners and 217 fishermen in its custody, who are Indian or are believed-to-be-Indian. Agency

Government extends two crop insurance schemes till 2025-26



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Other states are also being on-boarded experimentally. With the wider implementation of YES-TECH, Crop Cutting Experiments and related issues will be gradually phased out. Under YES-TECH, claim calculation and settlement have been done for 2023-24. Madhya Pradesh has adopted 100 per cent technology-based yield estimation.

Weather Information and Network Data Systems (WINDS) envisaged setting up Automatic Weather Stations (AWS) at the block level and Automatic Rain Gauges (ARGs) at the panchayat level.

Under WINDS, a five-times increase in current network density is envisaged to develop hyper-local weather data. Under the initiative, only data rental costs are payable by central and state governments. Nine major states are in the process of implementing WINDS, including Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Puducherry, while other states have also expressed willingness to implement.

WINDS could not be implemented by States during 2023-24 due to various background preparatory and planning work required before tendering. Accordingly, the Union Cabinet has approved 2024-25 as the first year of implementation of WINDS compared to 2023-24 earlier to give benefit to state governments with higher central fund sharing in a 90:10 ratio.

According to the ministry, all efforts are made and will continue to be made to saturate all farmers of north-eastern states on priority. To this extent, the centre shares 90 per cent of premium subsidy with north-eastern states.

However, due to the scheme being a voluntary and low gross cropped area in north-eastern states, flexibility has been given to avoid surrender of funds and for reallocation in other development projects and schemes with fund requirements.

In terms of policies issued, PMFBY is the country's largest insurance scheme and third-largest in terms of total premiums. About 23 states and Union territories are implementing it.

PMFBY and RWBIS offer financial assistance to farmers suffering from crop loss or damage caused by various unforeseen events.

PMFBY covers crop losses based on yield risk, while RWBIS focuses on weather-related risks.

Naxalism nearing its end says Maharashtra CM as 11 Maoists surrender in Gadchiroli

A total of 11 Naxalites, including senior cadre Vimla Chandra Sidam alias Tarakka, surrendered on Wednesday before Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis in Gadchiroli.

These Maoists, carrying a collective bounty of Rs 1.03 crore, were involved in launching attacks on security personnel.

Most prominent among the surrendered Maoists is Dandekaranya Zonal Committee Member Vimla Chandra Sidam alias Tarakka who had been involved in the Naxalism movement for the last 38 years.

Fadnavis also felicitated C-60 commandos and officers for bravery in anti-Naxal operations.

He said Maharashtra will soon become free of Naxal menace given the rise in the number of Maoists laying down their arms and the movement failing to attract recruits.

Gadchiroli Police almost eradicated Naxal activities in Gadchiroli district. North Gadchiroli is now free of Maoist activities, and south Gadchiroli will soon become free from Naxals," he said.

The chief minister also said that many dreaded Naxals were either neutralised or arrested in the past years. He said Maoist cadres are dissociated themselves from the movement as they have realised its hollow ideology. "They are convinced that they will get justice



only through the Constitutional institutions," the chief minister said, adding that Maoism is on the wane as India is taking giant strides in development.

Earlier in the day, Fadnavis told reporters that the dominance of Naxalites in remote areas of Gadchiroli district was waning and that the Naxalism is nearing its end.

The government has started the process to make Gadchiroli the "first district" by eliminating the dominance of Maoists, he said.

Gadchiroli is often referred to as the last district of Maharashtra as it is on the state's eastern border.

Fadnavis inaugurated the 32-km-long Gatta-Gardewada-Wangetur road and bus services of the Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) on the Wangetur-Gatta-Aheri route in the dis-

He said Maharashtra will soon become free of Naxal menace given the rise in the number of Maoists laying down their arms and the movement failing to attract recruits.

trict during his visit. Gadchiroli is not the last, but "first district" for the government (on the priority list), the chief minister said.

The road link inaugurated today will connect Maharashtra directly to Chhattisgarh, he said.

Besides, the part dominated by Naxalites is being liberated with people getting the MSRTC bus services after 75 years of independence, he said.

Fadnavis hailed the Gadchiroli police for their work against Naxalism.

He said people no more support Naxalites and not a single person is now willing to join the outlawed movement which is "very significant".

The chief minister conducted an aerial review of the Gatta-Gardewa-

da-Todgatta-Wangetur road and the Tadguda bridge.

"The state government has been trying to transform Gadchiroli over the last ten years to bring the common man into the mainstream and uproot Naxalism from this district," Fadnavis told a gathering after inaugurating various departments of Lloyds Metals And Energy Ltd at Kon-sari.

He said Maoists have failed to recruit even a single cadre in Gadchiroli in the last four years thanks to the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah and the combined efforts of Gadchiroli Police and the local administration.

The chief minister said 20,000 employment opportunities will be generated in Gadchiroli district in mining-related ventures.

An airport will come up in Gadchiroli in the near future and waterways connecting Gadchiroli ports will also be surveyed, he added.

Centre approves Rs 200 crore for Unity Mall project in Chhattisgarh

Raipur: The central government has approved Rs 200 crore for the Chhattisgarh government for the Unity Mall project in the state, an official said on Wednesday.

The Unity Mall is being established to promote 'One district, one product (ODOP)' model in the state and to promote the sale of local products, he said.

The central government has approved Rs 200 crore for the establishment of Unity Mall in the state, out of which Rs 100 crore have been provided to the state in advance under capex (capital expenditure), the official said.

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai said, "The establishment of Unity Mall will encourage local handicraftsmen, weavers and self-help groups, and create new employment opportunities. Display and sale of products in the mall will encourage handicraftsmen and benefit small entrepreneurs, craftsmen and weavers of the state. It will act as a 'one stop market place' for the promotion and sale of local products."

Unity Mall is a revolutionary step for the development of the poor, youth, farmers and women power of the state. It will take the state's economy to new heights as well as promote employment generation at the local level. It will also encourage 'Make in India' and national unity, he said.

"The Chhattisgarh government considers topics like national integration and 'Make in India' along with the development of the people of the state as its priority. Important local products of all other states will also be displayed and sold at the Unity Mall. This will strengthen national unity and increase economic and cultural exchange between different states," he said.

10 dead, 30 injured after car plows into crowd in US

The area is known as one of the largest New Year's Eve destinations. Crowds in the city were ballooning in anticipation of Wednesday night's Sugar Bowl college football playoff game at the nearby Superdome between Georgia and Notre Dame.

Kirkpatrick said police officers would work to ensure safety at the Sugar Bowl, indicating that the game would go on as scheduled.

Kevin Garcia, 22, told CNN that he saw a truck slamming into people on a sidewalk and heard gunshots. "A body came flying at me," he said. "Whit Davis told the network that he heard people yelling and running to the back as he was leaving a nightclub. "When they finally let us out of the club, police waved us where to walk and were telling us to get out of the area fast. I saw a few dead bodies they couldn't even cover up and tons of people receiving first aid," said Davis, 22.

The injured were taken to five hospitals, the city's emergency preparedness department said.

New SOPs to regulate air traffic during foggy conditions

New Delhi: The Ministry of Civil Aviation has advised airlines to sensitize their Operations Control Centers (OCCs) and war-room representatives to ensure better coordination during adverse weather conditions, particularly fog.

This initiative focuses on improving real-time decision-making by ensuring airline staff understand on-ground airport operations, enabling more effective responses to flight delays or cancellations.

The Airports Authority of India (AAI) has implemented new Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for efficient Wide Area Traffic Management. These SOPs aim to regulate air traffic effectively at fog-affected airports, as well as at origin or destination airports.

All stakeholders, including Air Traffic Control (ATC), Airport Operations Control Centers (AOCC), Collaborative Air Traffic Flow Man-

agement (CATFM), and Airline OCCs, have been instructed to ensure close and real-time coordination.

To prepare for the fog season, the Ministry of Civil Aviation conducted a series of consultations over the past two months with airlines, airport operators, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS), the AAI, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), and the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF).

The Ministry emphasized the importance of seamless collaboration among stakeholders, including security agencies, to effectively address fog-related challenges. These initiatives align with the Minister for Civil Aviation's vision of promoting "Ease of Flying" by reducing delays and ensuring a smoother travel experience for passengers, especially during weather disruptions like fog.

Bike & phone bought with stolen money auctioned in Bulandshahr; Money given to the victim

Bulandshahr: Bulandshahr police-administration has set a new example by taking a historic step under Section 107(1) of the Indian

Penal Code (IPC), where the goods bought by the criminal with stolen money were auctioned and the money was returned to the victim.

On Wednesday, the victim was happy when he received the cheque from Bulandshahr DM CP Singh and SSP Shlok Kumar.

Bulandshahr SSP Shlok Kumar said that on September 2, businessman Harsh Agarwal of Secunderabad town of Bulandshahr had his servants, Mohsin, Sandeep and Anuj, steal Rs 5 lakh from his shop. The criminals bought new KTM bike and mobile phones etc. with the stolen money.

Police considered the incident as a challenge and arrested the accused, and confiscated



the stolen goods from the criminals and started the auction process. SSP said that the bike and mobile were auctioned for a total of Rs 2,17,900. The money received in the auction was handed over to the victim.

District Magistrate Chandraprakash Singh and SSP themselves handed over the money received

from the auction to the victim Harsh Agarwal.

On this occasion, SDM Santosh Jagram, CO Purnima Singh and Kotwal Ravi Ratna Singh were also present.

District Magistrate Chandraprakash Singh said that this is the first case in the country, where goods purchased from stolen money were auctioned and the money

was given to the victim. He said, "This step is an effective effort to speed up the judicial process and provide relief to the victims."

On the orders of the DM, the auction process was completed publicly under the leadership of the Sub-District Magistrate and the Area Magistrate. The bike was auctioned for Rs 2,01,000 and the mobile for Rs 16,900. This entire process was completed under the orders of CJM Bulandshahr and under the direction of DM.

This case will become an example of speeding up the judicial process and ensuring the rights of the victims.

Usually in such cases, the victim gets compensation only after a long battle in the court, but this step of the Bulandshahr administration has proved that honesty and efforts in the right direction can bring positive change in the society, he said.

Maharashtra govt forms SIT to probe Beed sarpanch murder case

Mumbai: The Maharashtra government on Wednesday formed a 10-member Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the murder of Massajog sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh, officials said.

The SIT will be headed by Crime Investigation Department's (CID) Deputy Inspector General Basavraj Teli, said an order issued by the state Home department.

Deshmukh, sarpanch of Massajog village in Kej taluk of Beed district, was abducted and brutally killed on December 9, allegedly for opposing an extortion bid by some persons who had demanded money from a windmill company.

The village residents on Wednesday morning staged 'jal samadhi' agitation focusing the arrest of the three absconding accused in the murder case.

The protest, during which some 40 men and women stood waist-deep in a lake, was called off after two hours, as district Superintendent of Police Navanagar Kanwat visited the village and assured

them that police will leave no stone unturned to nab the accused.

Earlier, the government had handed over the probe of the murder and the related cases of extortion and an assault on a security guard to the CID.

Out of the six accused in the murder case, the police have so far arrested Pratik Ghule, Jayram Chate and Mahesh Kedar, while Sudarshan Ghule, Sudhir Sangle and Krushna Andhare are at large.

Walmik Karad, a close aide of minister and NCP leader Dhananjay Munde, was on Tuesday sent in 14-day custody of the CID after he surrendered in Pune in the extortion case registered at the Kej police station.

A police official said medicines required for Karad were being provided to him. During the recently-held winter session of the Maharashtra legislature, the opposition had alleged that Karad was the "mastermind" of the murder, though he claimed that he was being accused falsely for political vendetta.

Contractor death: BJP claims suicide note has Minister Priyank Kharge's name

Bengaluru: The BJP leader Chala-vadi Narayanaswamy on Wednesday charged that Minister "Priyank Kharge's name is found at three places" in the suicide note written by contractor Sachin Panchal but Chief Minister Siddaramiah defended the minister for want of evidence.

Narayanaswamy, Leader of Opposition in the Karnataka Legislative Council, said the Chief Minister has been saying that Kharge's name is not mentioned in the suicide note written by contractor Sachin Panchal, which was wrong.

"Minister Priyank Kharge's name is mentioned at three places in the seven-page suicide note. You demand documents. Here is the one. What else should we produce?" Narayanaswamy told reporters here.

Chief Minister said there was no document to prove and hence the question of removing Priyank Kharge would not arise, Narayanaswamy noted. "We know that you don't have the guts to



remove him because the Minister's father Mallikarjun Kharge is the Congress president. If you touch Priyank then he would uproot you. You are afraid of losing power: You are glued to your chief ministerial position," the BJP leader alleged.

He said everyone was initially doubting the seven-page suicide note written by Panchal but now the FSL report has confirmed that the letter was written by the civil contractor himself.

It is confirmed that this suicide note is not fake but the original one, Narayanaswamy said adding that the government has to answer to Panchal's suicide.

The BJP leader said there is a threat to Panchal's family and, especially five sisters of Panchal. He also alleged that Panchal suicide case has a honey trap angle too. He reiterated BJP's demand for a CBI probe in the case.

Panchal died by suicide by lying before a moving

train in Bidar district. In his suicide note, he alleged that Raju Kapanur pestered him for rupees one crore, a charge which Kapanur has denied.

Panchal also alleged that Kapanur hired contract killers to eliminate BJP MLA Basavaraj Matimud and, two other top BJP leaders in Kalaburagi and a Lingayat pontiff.

The BJP alleged that Kapanur is Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister Priyank Kharge's close aide.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Cold day in Delhi for third successive day

New Delhi
Delhi reeled from cold day conditions for the third consecutive day on Wednesday, with the maximum temperature settling 4.3 notches below normal at 15 degrees Celsius.

However, the intensity was slightly lower compared to Tuesday, according to the Met office.

The minimum temperature was recorded at 7.4 degrees Celsius — slightly higher than the seasonal average but nearly two notches lower than Tuesday.

The relative humidity stood at 84 per cent at 5:30 pm while the morning witnessed shallow fog.

For Wednesday, The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has predicted cold day conditions at isolated places and dense fog in some areas.

A "cold day" is when the minimum temperature is under 10 degrees Celsius and the highest or lowest temperature is at least 4.5 degrees lower than what is considered normal for a specific period.

In a related development, air quality data was unavailable on the Central Pollution Control Board's website and the Sameer app, which provides hourly Air Quality Index (AQI) levels, till evening.

Businessman dies by suicide, family alleges harassment by wife in-laws

■ The family members of the deceased, identified as Puneet Khurana, have alleged harassment by his wife and in-laws, police said in a statement. Investigators said the allegations are yet to be verified.

New Delhi
A 40-year-old bakery owner allegedly died by suicide by hanging himself from a ceiling fan at his residence in Model Town area of northwest Delhi, an official said on Wednesday.

The family members of the deceased, identified as Puneet Khurana, have alleged harassment by his wife and in-laws, police said in a statement. Investigators said the allegations are yet to be verified.

There was no immediate reaction from the Puneet's wife and in-laws.

"Khurana's father Trilok Nath has produced his (Puneet's) mobile phone and other related articles... (which) were taken in police possession. The body will be handed over to the family members after post-mortem," Northwest Delhi Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Bisham Singh said.

The DCP further stated that the incident was reported around 4.18 pm on Tuesday in Kalyan Vihar of Model Town.

"Soon after receiving information, a team was immediately dispatched to the



location. They found Puneet unresponsive on his bed with a ligature mark around his neck, indicating death by hanging," the officer said, adding that further investigation is underway.

The DCP said the team also learned that the victim had recorded a video before his death. The victim's mobile phone has been taken under possession and ACP Rohit Gupta from Model Town is leading the investigation. The teams are verifying all the allegations made by the victim's family members.

Puneet's father levelled allegations against the deceased's wife and in-laws. He said they used to threaten him almost every day over financial and property issues.

While talking to reporters, Puneet's father levelled allegations against the deceased's wife and in-laws. He said they used to threaten him almost every day over financial and property issues.

The clip also has references to the cafe, which had been closed some time ago.

During the argument, the woman can be heard questioning why the man had called her at 3 am.

"Why are you calling me at 3 am? You have disagreed

me and my family on multiple occasions. We did so much for you," she said.

In response, the man dismisses her grievances, saying, "All of this doesn't matter anymore. Just tell me what you want."

The argument continued as the man and the woman debated the sharing of social media account passwords. The woman also used abusive language.

Puneet's family members and friends have alleged that his social media account has been hacked. The allegation is being verified, the police said.

Some of his friends said Puneet was under acute pressure as his wife and in-laws were threatening him and his family members.

"Yesterday he called us and asked us to sit somewhere. He was very stressed as he was continuously getting threats from his in-laws. He was also under stress as they were threatening his parents too. This is the only reason he took such an extreme step," his friends told the reporters.

Sources said the police may call Puneet's wife and her family members for questioning.

Delhi Police books 35 bikers under 'Operation Bullet Raja'



New Delhi
The Delhi Police have booked 35 motorcycle riders under their "Operation Bullet Raja," a focused crackdown on bikers creating a nuisance with modified silencers and stunt performances, in the Jania Nagar area of southeast Delhi, an official said on Wednesday.

"The operation started on the evening of December 31 and ended in the early hours of January 1," Deputy Commissioner of Police (South-east) Ravi Kumar Singh said.

Gally modified silencers that emitted thunderous noises and engaging in dangerous stunts, often in high-traffic areas, said the DCP.

Multiple offenders were counselled on the risks and consequences of their actions, turning the operation into an opportunity for both awareness and enforcement, he added.

According to the police, they also detained 673 individuals, seized 131 vehicles and booked 93 people under the Excise Act for illegal activities on New Year's Eve.

The DDA, which owns the floodplains, will select sites near metro stations on both banks of the river where the installations will be set up, without encroaching on or concretising the floodplain, the statement said.

Delhi witnesses traffic jams on New Year's Day

New Delhi
Several roads in Delhi were jam-packed and long queues formed at key metro stations as huge crowds thronged to India Gate, Connaught Place and religious places across the national capital on New Year's Day.

The C-Hexagon at India Gate saw a massive crowd gathering on Kartavya Path, leading to traffic congestion in the area.

Other key spots attracting large crowds included Bangla Sahib Gurdwara, Prachin Hanuman Mandir at Connaught Place, Akshardham Mandir, Jhandewalan Mandir, Khattu Shyam Mandir on GT Road and the Jagannath Temple in South Delhi.

Deepali Verma, a resident of north Delhi, said she came to Hanuman Mandir to seek blessings.

"I wish everyone a very happy New Year filled with peace and prosperity. I have come here along with my husband and son to offer prayers at the temple and seek Lord Hanuman's blessings," Verma said.

According to a police officer, their main focus was on India Gate, Ashoka Road, Hanuman Mandir and Connaught Place.

"We have deployed personnel across 11 roads at India Gate's C-Hexagon. Auto-rickshaws are not being allowed to park on C-Hexagon, and visitors have been asked to stay within the India Gate premises to minimize traffic disruptions," the officer explained.

The crowd is expected to increase in the evening, another officer said. Kajal, a resident of Machkar Village who visited Qutub Minar with her family on New Year's Day, expressed her frustration after waiting for over an hour to get entry tickets.

"After waiting for so long, all our excitement has faded. We're now questioning why we even came here. The crowd this time is much larger than before," she said.

Sayed Ameer, who travelled from Hyderabad to visit Delhi on New Year's Day, shared his experience of visiting Qutub Minar.

Kejriwal writes to RSS chief, slamming BJP 'scared of poll defeat' says Sachdeva

New Delhi
AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal has written a letter to RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, alleging distribution of money and deletion of names of Purvanchali and Dalit voters by the BJP ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls.

The BJP has hit back at Kejriwal, saying his letter to Bhagwat is a reflection of his "political frustration" and "fear of defeat" in the polls due next month.

The war of words between the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Delhi has heated up, with prominent leaders from both sides trading barbs on various issues.

Kejriwal has sought Bhagwat's clarification on reports that the Rashtriya Swamsevaka Sangh (RSS) will campaign for the BJP in the Delhi election.

"There have been media reports suggesting that the RSS will campaign for votes for the BJP in the Delhi elections. Is this true? Before this, people wish to know whether the RSS endorses the recent wrongful actions taken by the BJP," he has written in his letter to Bhagwat. The AAP convener has raised several questions in his letter dated December 30, asking if the RSS supports money being "openly distributed" by BJP leaders to "buy" votes and "large-scale" deletion of names of Purvanchali and Dalit voters by the saffron party.

This is the second letter written by Kejriwal to Bhagwat in recent months. In a previous letter to the RSS chief in September, the former Delhi chief minister had trained guns at Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP, questioning the AAP and Kejriwal of helping illegal Rohingya Muslims and Bangladeshis stay in Delhi with documents and money, to use them as vote banks in elections.

The polls to the 70-member Delhi Assembly are due in February.

Kejriwal has alleged that efforts are being made for mass deletion of votes of people, including Purvanchalis, Dalits and slum dwellers, and asked Bhagwat whether the BJP is not "weakening" the country's democracy in this manner.

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva has hit back at Kejriwal, saying he is "creating drama since Delhi people seek answers from him over his lies, opportunism and failure to meet their hopes of development and reforms".

Sachdeva has asked Kejriwal whether he sought Bhagwat's permission before receiving funds from "dubious entities" in the United States and Canada, and enrolling illegal Rohingya Muslims and Bangladeshis as voters in Delhi.

Delhi LG directs DDA to survey sites for developing ropeways across Yamuna

New Delhi
Delhi Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena on Wednesday directed the DDA to begin the process of surveying and identifying potential sites for the development of ropeways/cableways across the Yamuna, a statement from Raj Niwas said.

The LG has instructed the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) to submit a preliminary report on this matter within a month, it added.

Once operational, the project will run at fixed hours from morning until night, with cable cars that can carry approximately 50 passengers each across the Yamuna.

The DDA, which owns the floodplains, will select sites near metro stations on both banks of the river where the installations will be set up, without encroaching on or concretising the floodplain, the statement said.

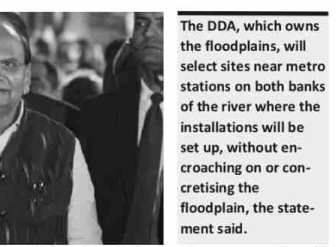
The LG asked officials to ensure that the sites are selected with walkable distances from metro/DTC nodes.

He emphasised that this project will not only encourage the use of public transport, which does not cause vehicular emissions, but will also encourage people to walk even during their busy daily schedules.

The cableways/ropeways are designed to provide an alternative, non-polluting mode of transport across the river, reducing reliance on buses, autos, and private vehicles that contribute to air pollution. This will also reduce traffic on roads and bridges, the statement added.

Additionally, the project will provide closer routes to residential and work areas, ensuring that people do not have to take long circuitous routes. This will lead to lesser traffic, lesser pollution and saving of travel time, it stated.

It should be noted that even in sites like Baansera and Asita, developed by the DDA on Yamuna floodplains, the parking areas are located far from the main park areas, encouraging people to walk in the greens and promoting physical fitness, the statement added.



Delhi Police issue over 4 500 challans for traffic violations on New Year's Eve

New Delhi
Delhi Police issued over 4,500 challans, including 558 for drunk driving on New Year's Eve which was 34 per cent higher than the previous year, officials said on Wednesday.

Special Commissioner of Police (traffic) Ajay Choudhary said that no fatal accident took place during the New Year's celebration this year.

"We had deployed elaborate arrangements for smooth conduct and regulation of traffic on the New Year's Eve throughout the city. The checking was also intensified across the national capital," he said.

According to official data, a total of 558 motorists were prosecuted for drunk driving this year, while 416 motorists were prosecuted in 2023, 318 in 2022, 25 in 2021, 19 in 2020 and 299 in 2019.

Additional Commissioner of Police (traffic head-quarters) Satyvir Katara said that on Tuesday, special drive has been carried



"We had deployed elaborate arrangements for smooth conduct and regulation of traffic on the New Year's Eve throughout the city. The checking was also intensified across the national capital," he said.

for wrong side, 35 for triple riding, and 648 for without helmet," Katara said.

Additional Commissioner of Police (Traffic Zone-2) Dinesh Kumar Gupta said, "In addition to deploying personnel, we have placed caricatures at various locations to emphasise the importance of not drinking and driving, ensuring the safety of both motorists and pedestrians. Our officers were also actively working to maintain smooth traffic flow, alongside enforcing necessary legal actions."

Apart from this, the police have also issued 1,698

BJP planning to demolish places of worship in Delhi says CM Atishi party hits back

New Delhi
Delhi Chief Minister Atishi accused the BJP on Wednesday of planning to demolish Hindu temples and a Buddhist site in various areas of the city, even as the saffron party refuted the charge, alleging that she is trying to "disturb" communal harmony by making such a statement.

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva demanded that the chief minister withdraw her statement and warned that she would be held responsible if any untoward incident happens.

The accusation comes amid an intense political battle between the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls due in February.

Atishi wrote to Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena on Tuesday, claiming that a "Religious Committee" under him, at its meeting on November 22, ordered the demolition of six religious structures, including Hindu temples and a Buddhist worship place, in different parts



the move and they are gearing up for demolishing the places of worship.

Hitting back at the AAP leader, Sachdeva, in a statement, said the Religious Committee is chaired by the Delhi home minister and he reports both to the chief minister and the LG.

The BJP leader demanded that Atishi clarify whether the home department under her government has made any such recommendation.

"By making a statement about demolition of temples, the chief minister has tried to disturb the communal harmony of Delhi," he said.

The LG's office rebutted the charge, accusing Atishi of indulging in "cheap politics", and claimed that no place of worship is being demolished as no file in this regard has been received by it.

Addressing a press conference on Wednesday, Atishi termed the rebuttal "a complete lie" and showed a copy of the minutes of the Religious Committee's meeting.

"The file of the committee's order was sent to the BJP-led Centre's representative, the LG. The LG has given his approval to the decision," she claimed.

The chief minister said the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), district magistrates' offices and police have been informed about

PUBLIC NOTICE
CLIENTS TEK CHAND & HIS WIFE MAGANWATI BOTH R/O C-110, LAL BAGH, LONI GHAZIABAD, U.P. severe all relations & disowned/debarred their son ISHWAR SINGH @ LUCKY AND DAUGHTER-IN-LAW ANJALI from all movable/immovable property & assets due to their misbehavior/Disobedience. Anybody dealing with them shall do at their own risk.

BJP MPs submit proposal to Gadkari for 4 projects to reduce traffic pollution in Delhi

■ All seven MPs from Delhi called on Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari on Wednesday and presented a memorandum proposing four new projects aimed at reducing pollution, congestion, and traffic jams in the national capital.

New Delhi
All seven MPs from Delhi called on Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari on Wednesday and presented a memorandum proposing four new projects aimed at reducing pollution, congestion, and traffic jams in the national capital.

Union Minister of State for Road Transport and Highways Harsh Malhotra, who is the MP from East Delhi, later addressed a press conference to share the details of the memorandum and its proposals. He said the measures proposed would not only ease commuting for the resi-



Malhotra highlighted the adverse impact of rising

pollution with the residents of Delhi forced to breathe in toxic air, and the loss of time and fuel due to traffic congestion. He informed that the BJP MPs from Delhi collectively devised and proposed the four major reform projects to Union Minister Nitin Gadkari.

Sharing details of the proposed projects, the minister said they include a proposed tunnel from Shiv Murti to Nelson Mandela, which would reduce travel time to just 7-8 minutes.

The second project he mentioned is to connect the Delhi-Amritsar-Katra Expressway to KMP Expressway, which would al-

low travelers heading to Katra or Amritsar to bypass Delhi and directly access the airport or Gurgaon.

The minister mentioned connecting Urban Extension Road-2 (UER) with Delhi-Dehradun Expressway, which is expected to provide a direct route for vehicles traveling from Delhi to Uttar Pradesh and Noida without entering the city.

Lastly, he mentioned the proposal on extension of UER-2 near Alipur, connecting it with Delhi-Dehradun Expressway near Tronica City, which would offer an alternative route for vehicles heading to Uttar Pradesh, avoiding

entry into Delhi.

Malhotra said the Union minister assured them of considering the proposals and an appropriate action to be taken soon. He added that under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Minister Gadkari's leadership, 55,000 km of national highways have been constructed in the past decade.

All the MPs, including Manoj Tiwari, Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, Yogendra Chandola, Praveen Khandhwal, Kamaljeet Schrawat, and Bansuri Dehradun Expressway, along with Vice Chairman of New Delhi Municipal Council Kuljit Chahal were present during the press conference.

Noida Authority launches group housing plot scheme

Noida
 The Noida Authority has announced the launch of the group housing plot scheme in sector-151 on the occasion of New Year 2025.

Under this scheme, two new plots located in sector-151 will be allotted. This time the Noida Authority has laid down a new condition for plot allotment. Now builders will have to make full payment within 90 days for plot allotment, otherwise allotment will not be done.

Earlier, builders used to get eight years to make payment, but keeping in mind the problem of pending payments and delay, this new rule has been implemented.

In sector-151, the authority had already marked the place for six plots. Out of these, three plots were included in October and now a plan is being brought for two new plots. These plots will be of 20,000 square meter and about two thousand flats can be built on them.

Allotment of these plots will also be done under the new rules, for which a brochure is being prepared.

Plots of some other sectors can also be included under this scheme. The Noida Authority has decided to allot these plots, which will lead to more residential development in the area and provide living facilities for the increasing population of the city.

This scheme will motivate builders to work faster and complete their projects on time. This initiative of Noida Authority will boost residential projects in the city as well as accelerate urban development.

Couple found hanging inside home in north Delhi suicide suspected

New Delhi
 In a suspected case of suicide, a couple was found hanging inside their home in Sunder Colony in north Delhi on Wednesday, police said.

The deceased, identified as Nitesh (32) and his 28-year-old wife, got married five years ago and are survived by their four-year-old son, Deputy Commissioner of Police (North), Raja Bantia, said.

A PCR call was received at the Wazirabad police station at 3:45 am on Wednesday,



They lived on the first floor

of a four-storey building. Nitesh's parents live on the ground floor, Bantia said.

"When the child woke up in the middle of night and saw his parents hanging, he rushed to his grandparents who brought the bodies down," the DCP said.

No external injury marks were found on the bodies, the officer said, adding that police did not find any suicide note from the spot.

Police have seized the mobile phones of the couple after sending their bodies for autopsy, the DCP said.

CJI Sanjiv Khanna chief guest at first Lokpal Day event on January 16

New Delhi
 Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna will be chief guest at the first Lokpal Day event on January 16, an official statement issued on Wednesday said.

The Lokpal of India in its meeting held on March 14, 2024, resolved that January 16 every year will be observed as the "Lokpal Day", it said.

"The first such commemorative of the Lokpal day is scheduled on January 16, 2025, in the auspicious presence of the Chief Justice of India San-



ary 16, 2025, in the auspicious presence of the Chief Justice of India San-

jay Khanna as the chief guest at Zorawar auditorium, Manekshaw Centre," read the Lokpal statement.

The event would have CJI Khanna addressing the gathering on the role and functions of the ombudsman and the way forward besides the felicitations of attorney general of India R Venkatramani, former Supreme Court Judge Justice N Santosh Hegde and Padma Bhushan Anna

Hazare.

The program is scheduled to begin at around 6 pm with the arrival of the CJI and judges of the Supreme Court, chief justices and judges of the high courts, executive chairpersons and member secretary of the legal services authority, Lokayuktas and Upalokayuktas of states, secretaries of government of India, heads of investigating agencies and law officers, among others.

Delhi court acquits 3 men of robbery charges

New Delhi
 A court here has acquitted three men who allegedly hit a man on his head with a pistol butt while robbing his motorcycle and mobile phone in 2019, saying the victim had turned hostile and failed to identify the alleged assailants.

Additional Sessions Judge Geetanjali was hearing the case against the three accused against whom the Shaheen Bagh police station had registered a case for causing hurt while committing robbery.

In an order dated December 24, the judge noted that when the victim was asked to identify the accused in the court, he said none of them was present.

"He was declared hostile by the State and cross-examined by the additional public prosecutor (APP). Despite best efforts by the APP, he (victim) has denied the material suggestion that he is intentionally not identifying the accused persons since he has been won over by them," the judge said.

The court said as the complainant did not support the prosecution's case, the three accused were entitled to the benefit of the doubt.

It acquitted them, saying the prosecution has failed to prove its case beyond reasonable doubt that it was accused Aadil Khan, Faez Ismail and Mohammad Umair who robbed complainant Syed Mohammad Fuzail of his mobile phone and motorcycle at gunpoint, or injured him, and fled the spot.

According to the FIR, the trio robbed the complainant near the Okhla Vihar metro station and also hit him on his head with the butt of a country-made pistol around 1 am on April 5, 2019.

Delhi HC orders treatment for HIV positive transwoman with no identity proof

New Delhi
 The Delhi High Court has directed Lok Nayak Hospital in the national capital to treat a HIV positive transwoman without demanding an identity proof.

Justice Sanjeev Narula issued notice to the Delhi government and the Centre on her plea and issued directions towards her rehabilitation and shelter.

"Issue notice... By way of this order a direction is issued to respondent number 4 (Lok Nayak Hospital, New Delhi) to examine the petitioner and in case she would need any treatment,



the same be provided to her forthwith, notwithstanding the petitioner's lack of identification documents," the court said on December 24.

The petitioner said she was abducted by a trafficker when she was a minor and sexually abused, and the doctors at Lok Nayak Hospital suggested her admission to undergo treatment.

The court further directed the Centre to inform if she could be provided any skill training for her rehabilitation and asked the authorities concerned to find her a suitable shelter keeping in mind her health condition and the dipping mercury levels in Delhi.

The petitioner had approached several NGOs seeking shelter but faced rejection due to no official identity proof.

The court would hear the matter on January 9.

Delhi rings in 2025 with poor air quality and chilly weather

New Delhi
 The national capital ushered in 2025 with cold weather and polluted air. On Wednesday, the Air Quality Index (AQI) was recorded at 299 at 8 am, placing it in the "poor" category, while the minimum temperature dipped to 7.4°C, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

Delhi experienced cold day conditions for the third consecutive day. The minimum temperature was recorded at 7.4°C at Safdarjung and 7°C at Palam. A

"cold day" is declared when the minimum temperature falls below 10°C, while a "cold wave" occurs when the mercury drops below 4°C.

The maximum temperature in the city was 15°C at Safdarjung and 12.8°C at Palam, IMD reported.

The weather department predicts dense fog and cold day conditions will persist across parts of northwest and central India for the next two days, with conditions likely to improve thereafter. A wet spell is also expected over the Western Hi-

malayan Region during the coming week and over the plains of northwest India on January 5-6.

Low visibility due to dense fog reduced the minimum visibility at Palam airport to 100 meters at 5:30 a.m. However, no flight delays were reported, as most flights are equipped with CAT III systems that enable safe landings during poor visibility.

Meanwhile, rail services were affected, with at least 22 trains running behind schedule due to the foggy conditions.

AAP MLA claims BJP, Cong conspiring to demolish Malviya Nagar slum

New Delhi
 AAP on Wednesday alleged that the BJP and the Congress were conspiring to demolish a slum in the Indira Camp area of south Delhi's Malviya Nagar.

AAP's Malviya Nagar MLA Somnath Bharti said in a press conference that he had no knowledge of any "demolition exercise" in his assembly segment and neither did the local councillor.

"Yet, the Congress candidate was present at the site," he claimed.

Reacting to the allegation, the BJP's Delhi unit spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor hit out at Bharti and said he had lost political relevance.

There was no immediate reaction from the Congress on the charges.

AAP legislator Bharti said in the press conference, "In my constituency's Indira Camp, an incident occurred that exposed the BJP's real face. It (BJP) launched a 'Jhugri Pravus Yojana', claiming to empathise with residents, but later sent bulldozers to demolish their homes."

He also claimed that the



Lok Sabha elections as a nominee of the AAP-Congress alliance, was accusing the Congress' assembly candidate who had worked with him during the parliamentary polls campaign.

"The three-time MLA from Malviya Nagar has lost political relevance due to his behaviour," the statement quoted Kapoor as saying.

He also claimed that AAP leaders, including party supremo Arvind Kejriwal, were facing growing challenges ahead of the assembly elections, due to in February. Kapoor alleged that, instead of focusing on governance and development, AAP leaders were trying to distract voters.

Vijender Gupta writes to CVC alleging financial irregularities in Delhi Jal Board

New Delhi
 Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Vijender Gupta on Wednesday wrote to the Central Vigilance Commission alleging financial irregularities in the Delhi Jal Board.

In his letter addressed to the central vigilance commissioner, he accused the Aam Aadmi Party government of ignoring a letter from the Chief Vigilance Officer (CVO) and stated that this clearly indicates a "massive corruption" scandal in the DJB.

Claiming that the Delhi Chief Secretary prepared a report on financial irregularities in DJB, Gupta said he filed a complaint with the CVC on 5th September, 2024, seeking an investigation into the matter.

He said acting on the complaint, the CVC forwarded it to Delhi's CVO, Dharmendra, who is also the Chief Secretary, on 13th September, 2024, directing him to conduct an investigation and submit a report.

"Consequently, the CVO



wrote to the DJB CEO on 14th October, 2024, instructing them to investigate and submit a report. Despite this, DJB took no action, prompting the CVO to send a reminder on 6th November, 2024, for a swift response. However, no report has been received yet, forcing another reminder to the DJB CEO," Gupta said.

Attacking the AAP government, he said, "despite two months passing, the government neither took the matter seriously nor

Claiming that the Delhi Chief Secretary prepared a report on financial irregularities in DJB, Gupta said he filed a complaint with the CVC on 5th September, 2024, seeking an investigation into the matter.

hidden in his office and avoided presenting it in the Assembly, knowing it would expose their financial wrongdoings," Gupta said.

According to the report, from 2015 to 2024, Rs 28,500 crore was allotted to DJB for various projects, but there is no record of how this money was spent, he claimed.

Gupta demanded strict action against those involved in this "massive corruption".

Haryana Punjab continue to reel under intense cold

Chandigarh: Haryana and Punjab continued to be in the grip of severe cold, with maximum temperatures hovering well below normal limits in the two states.

Fog also reduced visibility early in the morning at some places in the two states.

Piercing cold prevailed in Chandigarh during the day with the city recording maximum temperature of 11.3 degrees Celsius, seven notches below normal, according to the local Met office.

In Haryana, severe cold prevailed during the day at most places.

The maximum temperature in Ambala was 11.5 degrees Celsius, Hissar 12.3 degrees Celsius, Narnaul 13.5 degrees Celsius, Rohtak 12.6 degrees Celsius, Kurukshetra 13.7 and Gurugram recorded a high of 12.7 degrees Celsius.

In Punjab, cold wave swept Mohali and Amritsar, which recorded respective maximums of 11.7 degrees Celsius and 12.2 degrees Celsius.

Ludhiana also shivered under biting cold during the day registering a high of 13.4 degrees Celsius while Patiala also braved the chill, recording a high of 14 degrees Celsius.

Gurdaspur recorded a high of 13.5 degrees Celsius while Ferozepur shivered at a high of 12.3 degrees Celsius.

Haryana notifies 9 PHE services under Right to Service Act, sets deadlines

Chandigarh: The Haryana government has notified nine services of the Public Health Engineering (PHE) Department under the Right to Service Act, 2014, and established specific deadlines for their delivery.

According to a notification issued by Chief Secretary Dr Vivek Joshi, the issuance of duplicate water/sewer bills, sanctioning of water supply and sewerage connections in both rural and urban areas, and addressing issues such as water leakage, overflowing pipes, blocked sewerage, and overflowing manholes must be completed within seven days.

Similarly, the restoration of water supply due to minor issues (e.g. faults in pumping machinery, electric wiring, or distribution systems) must be completed within three days.

Restoration of water supply due to major issues (e.g. shortage of raw water, transformer burnout, or faults in LT/HT lines) must be resolved within six days, while a 10-day deadline applies to more complex problems.

The restoration of broken streets to motorable conditions, including pipeline installation after excavation, must be completed within 30 days. The notification emphasises the government's commitment to timely service delivery under the PHE Department's mandate.

Punjab govt team meets Dallewala protesting farmers at Khanauri

Chandigarh: Punjab government on Wednesday continued with its efforts to persuade farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewala to take medical aid, with former additional DGP Jaskaran Singh saying discussions in this regard were also held with farmer leaders.

Over the past few days, a state government's team led by Jaskaran Singh has made several attempts to convince Dallewala, whose indefinite hunger strike completed 37 days today, to take medical help, but so far he has refused.

Earlier, the apex court gave the Punjab government time until December 31 to persuade Dallewala to shift to a hospital, granting the state the liberty to seek logistical support from the Centre, if necessary.

On Tuesday, a vacation bench of Justices Surya Kant and Sudhanshu Dhulia took note of a plea moved by Punjab government seeking an additional three days to comply with SC's December 20 order.

The top court had posted the matter on



January 2 for the compliance of its order on shifting of Dallewala to a hospital.

The Punjab government had informed the vacation bench that Dallewala agreed for medical aid given the Centre accepted his proposal to hold talks.

On December 28, the top court came down heavily on the Punjab government for not moving Dallewala to a hospital even as it doubted the intention of the agitating farmers for resisting availability of medical aid to their sep-

tuagenarian leader.

On December 20, the apex court put the onus on Punjab government officials and doctors to decide on Dallewala's hospitalisation.

Speaking to reporters on Wednesday evening after meeting Dallewala at the Khanauri border during the day, the retired Punjab Police officer Jaskaran Singh said, "we talked to him regarding his health. We had conducted his blood tests a few days back. We again appealed to him if he does not want to break his fast, at least

he should take medical aid".

Jaskaran Singh also held two rounds of meetings with farmer leaders.

When asked if there could be a meeting between the protesting farmers, Singh, was accompanied by Deputy Inspector General of Police Mandeep Singh Sidhu, said, "when anything is finalised, we will tell".

He, however, said discussions with farmer leaders on Wednesday "were held in a positive atmosphere".

"We have held a few

Manipur CM has admitted to failure of govt State Congress chief



Imphal: Manipur Congress president Keisham Meghachandra on Wednesday said Chief Minister N Biren Singh's apology for the ethnic conflict was an acknowledgment of the state government's failure.

Speaking on the sidelines of a programme, Keisham said, "By apologising to the people in a press conference, Singh has admitted to the failure of the double-engine government in the state."

Keisham said, "What will be the future course of action? I want to ask him what he is going to do. The violence and firing continue even today. Singh has said he is sorry and apologised to the people. The people of Manipur should think about the responsibility and accountability of

his statement." Singh on Tuesday apologised for the ethnic conflict in the state which claimed more than 250 lives and rendered thousands homeless and appealed to all communities to forget and forgive past mistakes and start afresh.

Addressing reporters, Singh said there has been relative peace in the state in the last three-four months, which gives him hope that normalcy will be restored in the new year.

"I want to say sorry for what happened in the state. Many people lost their loved ones and many had to leave their homes. I regret and want to apologise. But after seeing relative peace in the last 3-4 months, I hope that normalcy will be restored in the coming year."

PM presents a New Year's gift to farmers:Saini

Chandigarh:

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini has welcomed the farmer-friendly decisions made in the first Union Cabinet meeting of 2025, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Expressing his gratitude to him, the CM said that the thoughtful manner in which these decisions have been made for the welfare of farmers will directly benefit lakhs of farmers in Haryana.

Referring to the Union Cabinet's decisions as a New Year gift to the farmers from Prime Minister Modi, he said that these decisions will ensure the availability of DAP to farmers at affordable and subsidized rates. In addition, a budget allocation has been made to promote the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana and enhance technology, which will have a direct positive impact on farmers.

It may be mentioned here that during the Union Cabinet meeting chaired by the Prime Minister on Wednesday, the proposal from



the Department of Fertilizers to increase the one-time special package on DAP beyond the NBS subsidy by Rs 3,500 per metric ton was approved. This package, effective from January 1, 2025, until further orders, aims to ensure the continued availability of DAP to farmers at affordable rates. This decision will guarantee that farmers receive DAP at a subsidized, reasonable, and affordable price.

Besides this, the continuation of the Pradhan Mantri Fasal

Bima Yojana and the Restructured Weather-Based Crop Insurance Scheme were approved to continue till 2025-26, with a total outlay of Rs 69,515.71 crore from 2021-22 to 2025-26. This move will provide farmers across the country with coverage for crop risks caused by unavoidable natural disasters until 2025-26. Along with these measures, several other decisions aimed at the welfare of farmers were also taken by the Union Cabinet on Wednesday.

Job snatching continues in the new year as well: JR Thakur

Rajan Puncthi

MANDI: Former Chief Minister and leader of Opposition Jairam Thakur said that nothing has changed for Sukhu government even with the change of year. The government's process of snatching jobs continues in the new year as well. It is being known through news that full preparations have been made to remove hundreds of people from IGMC again. Will the government only snatch jobs from people for the entire 5 years or will it also do public welfare work that comes under the government's responsibility. The government's job is not to snatch jobs but to provide jobs. But this government is doing the best work only in the field of snatching jobs. Jairam said that before coming to power, Congress leaders had led a lot, standing at crossroads, they had guaranteed to provide one lakh jobs every year and 5 lakh jobs in 5 years. But after coming to power,



the Chief Minister has worked contrary to his guarantees and the government's responsibilities. More than 2 thousand institutions were closed, more than 1.5 lakh posts were abolished and more than 15 thousand people were fired from their jobs. The government has completed its 2-year term, yet the process of firing people from jobs is still going on. In such a situation,

the people of the state want to know whether the entire term of the government will be spent only in closing institutions and firing people from jobs or will the government also do some work to give jobs and public facilities to the people. The way the government has officially banned giving new jobs and opening new institutions at present, the situation does not seem to im-

prove in the future as well. The Chief Minister is requested to discharge the responsibilities of the government and work as a welfare state. Jairam Thakur said that the government takes decisions without thinking and in one stroke throws hundreds of people out of their jobs. Such a decision is unfortunate and full of insensitivity. While snatching people's jobs, the government should also remember the services rendered by such people. We should also think about the families of the outsourced employees working on very low wages, how will they survive? What will be the impact of the loss of jobs on the services provided by the employees? What kind of inconvenience will people have to face? If the government is not able to provide new employment to the people, then at least it should be kind enough to not snatch away the employment of those who are already employed.

New schemes of crop diversification to be introduced soon: CM Saini

Komal Ramola

Chandigarh: Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini, accompanied by his wife Smt. Suman Saini, offered prayers at the Mata Mansa Devi Temple in Panchkula on the occasion of the New Year. He also interacted with the devotees present at the temple.

Speaking to media persons on this occasion, the Chief Minister extended New Year greetings to the people of the state, expressing his hope that the year would bring economic and social prosperity to all citizens. He said that prosperity would touch every individual's life, and wished for the fulfillment of this aspiration.

The Chief Minister further stated that in 2025, Haryana will witness new heights of development. Reflecting on the progress made in 2024, he men-



tioned that significant work has been done to advance the state in various sectors. In line with the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Development India-2047, he assured that work will proceed rapidly in the coming year to make India a developed nation. Following this vision, development

efforts in Haryana will also accelerate, with the goal of making the state fully developed. The government is committed to this objective.

of the Sankalp Patra are being fulfilled continuously. The Chief Minister said that the BJP government has made several commitments

in its Sankalp Patra during the elections, and work is being done gradually to fulfill them. He added that significant progress has already been made in implementing many of these promises, and the remaining ones will also be completed soon.

Nayab Singh Saini mentioned that upon

forming the government, the first step was to provide jobs to 24,000 youth without kharchi-parchi. In addition, the government has introduced free dialysis facilities in all civil hospitals and medical colleges, benefiting lakhs of kidney patients across the state. He also highlighted the government's initiative in granting ownership rights to tenant farmers in Haryana.

Addressing the issue of farmers, Nayab Singh Saini informed that the Supreme Court has set up a committee to engage with the farmers, and this committee is in constant communication with them. He assured that the Haryana government is purchasing all crops from the state's farmers at the Minimum Support Price (MSP). A resolution has been

passed in the Vidhan Sabha to ensure the procurement of all crops at MSP.

The Chief Minister said that the government is working diligently under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. However, he pointed out that many political parties have exploited the issue of farmers for political gain without making any real decisions in their favour. He specifically mentioned the Aam Aadmi Party and Congress Party governments in states like Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Telangana, and Karnataka, accusing them of grinding their own axe in the name of farmers rather than ensuring their welfare.

Regarding the recent rains and hailstorms, the Chief Minister said that it has been decided to get

the farmers registered on the kshatipurti portal immediately so that proper compensation for the loss suffered by the farmers can be given on time. He added that over the past decade, the government has directly deposited Rs 13500 crores in farmers' accounts as compensation for various losses.

The Chief Minister said that the current government always stands by the farmers. He also shared plans to introduce new schemes aimed at promoting crop diversification. These initiatives will help farmers benefit more from natural farming practices, at a lower cost. Moreover, the government is working on providing incentives for the cultivation of crops other than paddy to alleviate water pressure and promote sustainable agriculture.

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By Dr Anil Singh
Editor, STAR Views

Shifting Narratives in Bangladesh: Domestic Turmoil, Geopolitical Shifts, and Implications for India and South Asia

Bangladesh, a nation born out of the vision of its founding father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, is currently witnessing a critical juncture in its political and social landscape. The rise in domestic violence, political polarization, external influences, and attempts to erase the legacy of Mujibur Rahman have created ripples that extend beyond its borders. These developments not only destabilize the internal fabric of Bangladesh but also have significant implications for India and the broader South Asian region. As Pakistan's growing influence in Bangladeshi politics resurfaces, India finds itself navigating a complex terrain, balancing its historical ties, strategic interests, and regional security concerns.



Recent years have witnessed the BNP's resurgence, accompanied by accusations of authoritarianism against the Awami League. Electoral processes have been contentious, with claims of rigging and suppression of dissent.

A precursor to larger societal changes, and rewriting history risks alienating the younger generation from their national identity. Such moves also embolden extremist elements within the country, threatening its secular fabric and posing a challenge to regional stability.

Impact: Bangladesh is a critical partner for India in terms of trade, connectivity, and regional integration. Political instability and policy shifts in Dhaka could disrupt economic cooperation, particularly in joint infrastructure projects.

sition itself as a reliable partner for development and security in South Asia.

Humanitarian Assistance: In case of domestic crises in Bangladesh, India should extend humanitarian aid, projecting itself as a responsible regional power.

India's Position: Balancing Realism and Idealism:

India's position vis-à-vis Bangladesh must be guided by a mix of realism and idealism. While pragmatism demands safeguarding national security and economic interests, idealism necessitates supporting democratic and secular values. India should adopt a firm but nuanced stance, making it clear that any external interference undermining regional stability will not be tolerated. At the same time, India must remain sensitive to Bangladesh's sovereignty and avoid perceptions of overreach.

Breaking Time Sudoku

What to do
Fill in the grid so that every row, every column, and every 3x3 box contains the digit 1 to 9. Every puzzle has only correct solution.

		3	1	4				5
	4		5	8				
8		9			7			
		2						6
	6					7		
	1						3	
			8			6		3
				2	6			9
6			5	4	8			

Solution, Sudoku

5	3	8	9	2	6	1	7	4
4	2	6	5	7	1	8	9	3
7	1	9	4	3	8	2	6	5
6	5	1	7	8	4	9	3	2
3	4	2	6	9	5	7	1	8
8	9	7	3	1	2	5	4	6
2	7	4	1	5	3	6	8	9
9	8	3	2	6	7	4	5	1
1	6	5	8	4	9	3	2	7

THE WISDOM TREE
BY SUVEEN KUMAR

Ever wonder how much someone misses you? Ever wonder how much someone thinks of you? Ever wonder how much someone wants you that means they will miss you. Sometimes people miss you because they don't seem to find someone to fill that gap, and sometimes people want you because they just want someone to fill that gap. Love is not defined by how much someone misses someone, it is defined by how you love them while you have them. You don't win by making someone miss you, you win by making someone thank you.

Missing doesn't define you as the source of love but the source of pain. When someone misses you like anything you hurt them like anything. Making someone miss is sin in disguise, act of unkind and process of emotional grind.

Moral: Missing someone has virtual love and real pain.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL UNREST IN BANGLADESH:

Bangladesh has long struggled with domestic violence, an issue deeply rooted in patriarchal norms, economic inequalities, and lack of awareness or enforcement of laws. Reports indicate an alarming rise in gender-based violence, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, economic challenges, and political instability. Women in rural and urban areas alike face discrimination, and the lack of robust legal frameworks or societal support systems perpetuates the cycle.

ERASURE OF SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN'S LEGACY:

One of the most concerning developments is the deliberate erasure of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's legacy from school textbooks and public discourse. Mujibur Rahman, revered as the architect of Bangladesh's independence, symbolizes the secular and progressive ideals upon which the nation was founded. However, efforts to downplay his contributions and replace them with narratives more aligned with conservative and Islamist ideologies are gaining traction.

IMPACT ON INDIA AND THE SUBCONTINENT:

Bangladesh's internal dynamics directly impact India due to their shared history, geography, and socio-economic ties. Several implications stand out:

Refugee Crisis: Any escalation in violence, whether domestic or political, risks creating a refugee influx into India, straining resources and triggering communal tensions in sensitive regions.

Geopolitical Competition: Pakistan's growing influence in Bangladesh, coupled with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects in the region, threatens to marginalize India's role. This shift would weaken India's traditional hegemony in South Asia and undermine its Act East Policy.

CONCLUSION:

Bangladesh's current trajectory—marked by domestic violence, political instability, external meddling, and the erosion of its foundational legacy—poses significant challenges for the region. For India, the stakes are high, ranging from security concerns to ideological shifts that could reshape South Asia's socio-political landscape. A stable, secular, and progressive Bangladesh aligns with India's vision for a harmonious neighborhood.

The government's response to this crisis has been largely inadequate, with insufficient resources allocated to protective mechanisms. This issue fuels broader social unrest, as marginalized communities find themselves increasingly alienated. Moreover, domestic violence is tied to the political dynamics of the country; authoritarian tendencies within the ruling government exacerbate the lack of accountability, creating a vacuum for justice.

POLITICAL INSTABILITY AND THE ROLE OF PAKISTAN:

Bangladesh's political landscape is deeply polarized, dominated by two major parties: the Awami League (AL) led by Sheikh Hasina and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) helmed by Khaleda Zia.

Geopolitical Competition: Pakistan's growing influence in Bangladesh, coupled with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects in the region, threatens to marginalize India's role. This shift would weaken India's traditional hegemony in South Asia and undermine its Act East Policy.

Erosion of Secularism: The Islamization of Bangladeshi politics and society could embolden similar movements within India, potentially destabilizing its secular and democratic ethos.

Border Security: Enhancing border management and intelligence-sharing mechanisms will be crucial to counter cross-border terrorism and illegal activities.

Economic Integration: India should deepen economic ties with Bangladesh by fast-tracking joint infrastructure projects, expanding trade agreements, and ensuring equitable benefits for both nations.

Trade and Economic

This shift not only undermines the historical ethos of Bangladesh but also paves the way for radicalization. Educational reforms are often

and liberalize the market for agricultural imports from developed countries. GM seeds privatize agriculture and thus pose a great threat to the quality of soil as well as the social status of India's farmers. India has been constantly targeted by the US at the international forum over research in the development of seeds suited to Indian soils.

Another example of a threat to India's sovereignty is through global terrorism. India has witnessed the 26/11 and Pathankot attacks by militants. India also faces insurgency activities from Naxals and militants in the Northeast from the Assam separatist movement demand-

ing Bodoland. These activities lead to loss of innocent lives and damage to government properties, which hinders the development of the country. We have to show unity against these activities to keep this dream alive. An example of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India's (TRAI) decision against Facebook for monopolizing the internet was due to strong unanimous rejection by the people of India.

About the Author
(Anil Singh, The writer is an Editor, STAR Views)



By Dr. Satyawan Saurabh

Come, let us take a pledge to build a developed India in the New Year

"At midnight, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom." This "Tryst with Destiny" speech by Jawaharlal Nehru was a symbol of the dream that our freedom fighters had fulfilled. It also gave us the vision of the next dream to be followed by the people of India.

Gandhi's vision of India was to promote the domestic industrialization for self-reliant development of our country. He was of the view that rural India is the backbone of India's development. If India has to develop, the rural sector must also develop equally. He also wanted India to be free from all social evils like poverty, unemployment,

and discrimination on the basis of caste, color, creed, and religion, and most importantly abolish untouchability against the lower castes (Dalits), whom he called 'Harijans'.

These philosophies reflect the social strata of the then-society of India. Even after 75 years of independence, we still find these social issues persisting in India. The preamble of our constitution specifies India as a sovereign, secular, democratic, and republic country. Let us see how we have fulfilled our dream as citizens of India to make this definition true. After 100 years of freedom struggle, we have been able to make this dream

come true. Even during the era of the Cold War, when the two superpowers, America and the Soviet Union, were making alliances to counter each other, we opted for non-alignment to not join any alliance to maintain our sovereignty. Although colonialism has been banned by the United Nations, the same thing as neo-colonialism is taking root in the international world.

Neocolonialism is defined as the indirect control of the policies of states by other states. Recently we have seen pressure by India and other underdeveloped countries like the US at the United Nations to introduce genetically modified (GM) seeds

TOP STORY

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About the Author
(Dr. Satyawan Saurabh, Post, freelance journalist and columnist)

SC to hear plea on farmer leader Dallewale's hospitalisation on Jan 2

New Delhi
The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on January 2 a plea seeking contempt action against Punjab government for not complying with directions to hospitalise farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewale, who has been on an indefinite fast for over a month.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan will hear the plea.

The Punjab government had informed the vacation bench that Dallewale agreed for medical aid given the Centre accepted his proposal to hold talks.

The top court had taken note of a plea moved by Punjab government seeking an additional three days to comply with SC's December 20 order.

Punjab advocate general Gurminder Singh informed the bench about the farmers' proposal to the Centre



on holding talks following which Dallewale would avail medical aid.

The bench had refrained from commenting on the negotiations or the law and order situation.

"If something happens, which is acceptable to both sides and all stakeholders concerned, we will be equal-

ly happy. At the moment, we are only concerned with the compliance of our orders. If you want more time, we in peculiar circumstances are inclined to grant you some time," it said.

The top court then posted the matter on January 2 for the compliance of its order on shifting of Dal-

wale to a hospital.

On December 28, the top court came down heavily on the Punjab government for not moving Dallewale to a hospital even as it doubted the intention of the agitating farmers for resisting availability of medical aid to their septuagenarian leader.

The Punjab government

said it faced huge resistance from the protesting farmers who had encircled Dallewale and prevented him from being taken to a hospital.

The top court blamed the Punjab government for allowing the situation to aggravate and not doing enough to contain the situation.

It had observed that farmer leaders who did not allow Dallewale to be taken to a hospital were involved in the criminal offence of abetment to suicide.

On December 20, the apex court put the onus on Punjab government officials and doctors to decide on Dallewale's hospitalisation. The court said Dallewale, 70, could be moved to the makeshift hospital set up within 700 metres of the protest site at Khanauri border point between Punjab and Haryana.

On December 19, the

bench referred to civil rights activist Irom Sharmila continuing her protest for more than a decade under medical supervision and asked the Punjab government to convince Dallewale for an examination. It had pulled up the state for not running medical tests on Dallewale.

Dallewal has been on an indefinite fast at the Khanauri border point between Punjab and Haryana since November 26 to press the Centre to accept the farmers' demands, including a legal guarantee of minimum support price for crops.

The farmers under the banner of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha have been camping at Shambhu and Khanauri border points between Punjab and Haryana since February 13, last year after their march to Delhi was stopped by the security forces.

May 2025 bring everyone new opportunities, success, endless joy: PM Modi

New Delhi
President Droupadi Murmu, Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge and other top leaders on Wednesday extended their new year greetings to the people and wished for everyone's health and prosperity.

In a post on X, Murmu said, "Wishing everyone a very Happy New Year! May the year 2025 bring joy, harmony and prosperity to all! On this occasion, let us renew our commitment to work together for creating a brighter, more inclusive and sustainable future for India and the world."

In his message, the vice-president said, "Warm greetings to all citizens as we enter 2025 - a momentous juncture in our republic's journey. This year marks our entry into the final quarter of our Constitution's centenary. Time for us to rededicate ourselves towards realising the vision of our Constitution makers while ad-



vancing towards 'Viksit Bharat' at 2047."

PM Modi, in his message on X, wrote: "Happy 2025! May this year bring everyone new opportunities, success and endless joy. May everybody be blessed with wonderful health and prosperity."

The Congress chief said: "As we enter 2025, let us reaffirm our commitment for inclusive progress, unity in diversity, social justice, equality and the protection of our Constitution with unwavering resolve. Wishing everyone a Happy New Year filled with hope, joy, and prosperity. Let there be peace and amity all around."

Shah Pushes Organic Farming: Quality Control, Fair Pricing Key

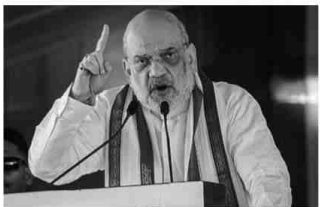
New Delhi
Cooperation Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday directed National Cooperative Organic Ltd (NCOL) to strengthen quality control and establish fair pricing for its 'Bharat Organics' brand as the government seeks to expand organic farming nationwide.

Shah urged Primary Agricultural Cooperative Societies (PACS) to integrate with the organic mission and called for mandatory quality testing of all products under the Bharat Organics label.

"Farmers should get a fair price for their organic produce so that they can be motivated towards promoting organic produce," Shah said during a review meeting with NCOL officials.

The ministry, along with NCOL, plans to collaborate with dairy cooperative Amul to establish pricing mechanisms for organic flour and pulses that would incentivise farmers to transition to organic farming methods.

Shah emphasised building a robust farm-to-consumer supply chain for authentic



The ministry, along with NCOL, plans to collaborate with dairy cooperative Amul to establish pricing mechanisms for organic flour and pulses that would incentivise farmers to transition to organic farming methods.

organic products, directing NCOL to implement batch-wise testing protocols to ensure product purity, an official statement said.

He also called for leveraging existing dairy networks, with plans to encourage farmers associated with Amul and the National Dairy Development Board to adopt organic farming practices.

The minister also pushed for increased promotion of organic products during upcoming festivals, anticipating heightened consumer demand with growing awareness.

Minister of State for Cooperatives Muralidhar Mohol, Cooperation Secretary Ashish Kumar Bhutani, NCOL Chairman and Managing Director Minesh Shah and NABARD Chairman Shaji KV were present at the meeting.

India's bio economy projected to reach USD 300 bn by 2030: Jitendra

New Delhi
Union minister Jitendra Singh on Wednesday said the country's biotechnology sector has experienced extraordinary growth, skyrocketing from a USD 10 billion industry in 2014 to over USD 130 billion in 2024, with projections to reach USD 300 billion by 2030.

In an exclusive interview to Doordarshan News, he exuded confidence that the year 2025 will witness India assuming a critical role in Global Biotechnology revolution and that India's set Biotechnology policy-BIO-Eg brought by Modi Govt 3.0 has already paved the way for it.

Pointing out that, "India is not only a leader in biotechnology but is now at the center of a global biotech boom, which will foster innovation, create jobs, and strengthen environmental commitments," the Minister highlighted India's significant strides in biotechnology and the nation's growing global leadership in Biotechnology.

Reflecting on the past decade of progress under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he emphasized the pivotal role of



biotechnology in India's future, particularly as the country continues to embrace innovation, technology-based interventions, and startups.

"Prime Minister Modi's vision has consistently prioritized innovation and technological advancement, driving India's evolution into a global biotechnology powerhouse," he said. He added that biotechnology is poised to be at the forefront of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, with India playing a central role.

Dr. Jitendra Singh highlighted the newly launched BIO-Eg (Biotechnology for Economy, Employment, and Environment) Policy, which was recently ap-

proved by the Union Cabinet under Prime Minister Modi's leadership. This forward-thinking policy marks a significant milestone for India's biotechnology sector, reinforcing its potential to shape the country's economy, employment landscape, and environmental sustainability in the years to come.

The Minister also underscored the fact that India currently accounts for 60% of global vaccine production and is home to the second-largest number of USFDA-approved manufacturing plants outside the United States. With growing investment opportunities across sectors such as Bio-Pharma, Bio-Agri, Bio-Industrial, Bio-Energy, Bio-

Services, and Med-Tech, India is emerging as a global leader in biotechnology.

He compared the ongoing "Bio-revolution" in India to the IT revolution driven by the West, highlighting that the country's rich natural and biodiversity resources are key to its biotechnology success. He also praised the efforts of Indian startups leveraging biotechnology to create innovative solutions such as non-human milk and other sustainable products.

The Union Minister recalled the launch of the Mission Suraksha initiative, which led to the development of indigenous DNA-based vaccines and the world's largest vaccination drive during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2024, India's biotechnology sector has also seen notable achievements, such as the development of the world's first HPV vaccine and the breakthrough creation of the indigenous antibiotic 'Nafithromycin,' which has proven effective in treating respiratory diseases. Furthermore, the Department of Biotechnology has successfully developed a gene therapy experiment

for Haemophilia.

Dr. Jitendra Singh also commended the collaboration between 14 institutes that had previously operated in silos, emphasizing the importance of a "whole of Science, whole of Government, and whole of Nation" approach. He highlighted ongoing initiatives such as the Deep Sea Mission, which Prime Minister Modi has referenced on multiple occasions, and the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (NRF), which was passed in 2024 and is set to foster innovation with a 60% contribution from the private sector. In 2024, the Indian government has already sanctioned 1000 crores to further accelerate innovation in biotechnology.

As Dr. Jitendra Singh concluded, "In the past, India would often take cues from other countries in terms of technology and innovation. Today, times have changed. Other countries are now looking to India for guidance and inspiration. India is proud to be leading the way, particularly in areas such as quantum technology, where the country is making significant strides with the Quantum Mission."

India lists theatre commands simpler defence procurement as priorities for 2025

New Delhi
India on Wednesday declared 2025 as the year of defence reforms and that the focus will be to roll out integrated theatre commands to boost tri-services synergy and ensure simpler and time-sensitive military procurement with a broader aim to transform the military into a technologically-advanced force.

The overall aim of the nine-point reforms planned by the defence ministry would be to ensure deeper collaboration among key stakeholders, break silos, eliminate inefficiencies and optimise utilisation of resources.

The reforms would lay the foundation for "unprecedented" advancements in defence preparedness and ensure India's security and sovereignty amidst challenges of 21st century, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said.

The defence ministry's aim on theatre commands assumes significance as it virtually indicated a resolve to unveil the ambitious reform measure in 2025.

Under the theatreisation model, the government seeks



to integrate the capabilities of the Army, the Air Force and the Navy and optimally utilise their resources for wars and operations.

As per the theatreisation plan, each of the theatre commands will have units of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force and all of them will work as a single entity looking after security challenges in a specified geographical territory.

At present, the Army, Navy and the Air Force have separate commands.

The decision on observing 2025 as year of reforms and the broad objectives under it were finalised at a high-level meeting chaired by Singh. It was attended by all the secretaries of the defence ministry.

One of the nine points listed by the ministry following the deliberations was to take initiative to instil a "sense of pride" in Indian culture and ideas, fostering confidence in achieving global standards through indigenous capabilities, while imbibing best practices from modern militaries that suit the nation's conditions.

"The 'year of reforms' will be a momentous step in modernisation journey of the armed forces," Singh said.

The defence ministry said the focus in 2025 will also be on new domains such as cyber and space, emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, machine learning, hypersonic and robotics.

the ongoing and future reforms, it was unanimously decided to observe 2025 as the 'year of reforms', it said in a statement.

The reforms would aim at transforming the armed forces into a technologically-advanced combat-ready force capable of multi-domain integrated operations, the ministry added.

The Singh-led meeting held that the reforms should aim to further bolster jointness and integration initiatives and facilitate establishment of the integrated theatre commands, it said.

During the deliberations, it was decided that the reforms should focus on new domains such as cyber and space, and emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, machine learning, hypersonic and robotics.

It was agreed that associated tactics, techniques and procedures required to win future wars should also be developed.

The meeting also called for developing a shared understanding of operational requirements and joint operational capabilities through inter-service cooperation and training.

India's greenhouse gas emissions fell 7.93 pc in 2020: Govt report

New Delhi
India's total greenhouse gas emissions in 2020 declined by 7.93 per cent compared to 2019, while its GDP emission intensity fell 36 per cent between 2005 and 2020, according to new data submitted to the UN climate change office.

In its fourth Biennial Update Report (BUR-4) submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) on December 30, India said its total greenhouse gas emissions - excluding land use, land-use change, and forestry (LULUCF) - amounted to 2,959 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (MtCO₂e) and 2,437 MtCO₂e including LULUCF.

Total national emissions (including LULUCF) have decreased by 7.93 per cent with respect to 2019 and increased by 98.34 per cent since 1994," according to the report.

"India has progressively continued decoupling economic growth from greenhouse gas emissions. Between 2005 and 2020, India's gross domestic prod-



uct (GDP) emission intensity reduced by 36 per cent," it said.

Biennial Update Reports (BURs) are submitted by developing countries to the UNFCCC every two years. They provide updates on greenhouse gas emissions, progress on climate actions, and needs for support in mitigation, adaptation and capacity building.

Emission intensity refers to the total amount of greenhouse gases emitted per unit of GDP.

According to the report, the main contributors to India's total greenhouse gas emissions were CO₂ generated from burning fossil fuels, methane from livestock and increasing aluminium and cement

Modi gov't stands with farmers like protective shield: Shah

New Delhi
The Narendra Modi government stands with farmers like a protective shield and it has reiterated this resolve on the very first day of 2025, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Wednesday.

Shah's comments came after the Union Cabinet announced a one-time package to subsidise key fertiliser DAP at the cost of up to Rs 3,850 crore and approved a one-year extension of two crop-insurance schemes.

The LULUCF sector remained net sink during the 2020 inventory period. Considering total emissions and removals, India's net national emissions in 2020 were 24,36,656 gigagrams of carbon dioxide equivalent (GgCO₂e).

The energy sector contributed the most to overall emissions with 75.66 per cent, followed by the agriculture sector at 13.75 per cent, industrial processes and product use (IPPU) at 8.06 per cent and waste at 2.56 per cent.

India represents 18 per cent of the global population but its annual primary energy consumption per capita in 2022 was 25.4 gigajoules (GJ).

The Modi government stands with farmers like a protective shield and today, on the very first day of 2025, it has reiterated this resolve.

Sukhu urges affluent to voluntarily surrender power subsidy

HIPA to be renamed after Dr. Manmohan Singh: Sukhu

Shimla: Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvir Singh Sukhu on Wednesday voluntarily relinquished the subsidy on all five power connections registered in his name.

He also said that affluent citizens with multiple electricity connections should relinquish subsidies to support the development of the state.

Submitting the required documents to Himachal Pradesh State Electricity Board chairman Sanjay Gupta, Sukhu urged the well-off individuals in the state to follow suit by using the online portal of the board, or by calling helpline numbers 1192 or 1912, or by visiting their nearest electricity sub-division.

Addressing a press conference, the Chief Minister said all the Cabinet members and Congress MLAs in the state have agreed to forgo their subsidies following detailed discussions.

"The government spends Rs 2,200 crore annually on electricity subsidies and Rs 200 crore per month on salaries and pensions of electricity board employees. Subsidies should be reserved for the needy, and the well-off individuals must contribute towards building a fairer society," Sukhu said.

He also reiterated the state government's vision to make Himachal Pradesh self-reliant by making all possible efforts to reform the system.

Om Birla extends New Year greetings says students from Kota become leaders

Kota: Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla extended New Year greetings on Wednesday and said that the students who study here become leaders.

Addressing the media, the Bundi MP urged parents to send their children to study in Kota and assured better education and cultural upbringing. He said that the students who study here would be treated as sons and daughters of the Kota city.

He said that some misunderstandings might have spoiled the environment but Kota provides a safe environment for the students.

"New year with new commitment, new resolution and new ideas. We can contribute to the progress of the country by making collective efforts," Birla said.

Emphasising cleanliness, Birla also called upon collective efforts to keep the city and village clean and green.

He added that efforts are underway to highlight Hadoti as a tourist destination with smooth roads and train connectivity. He claimed that five tigers will soon be relocated to Ramgarh Visdhari Tiger Reserve and Mukundara Hills Tiger Reserve from Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh.

He added that Kota would soon have air connectivity and the works for a new airport are in progress, Birla added

Shimla: Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Thakur Singh Sukhu while presiding over the 50th anniversary celebrations of the Himachal Pradesh Institute of Public Administration (HIPA) in Shimla today announced to rename the institute after former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh. He praised Dr. Singh's policies for greatly helping the development of India and Himachal Pradesh and said that his efforts brought many benefits and recognition to the state.

On the occasion the Chief Minister also unveiled the coffee table book published by HIPA. The Chief Minister inaugurated the training programme for special educators at the Institute in which 80 teachers would take part and would continue till 3rd January. He said that this programme would equip teachers with modern technique for educating children with special needs and would offer alternative to traditional Braille method. As a part of inclusive



development the State the Chief Minister announced increase in the monthly pension for visually impaired children rising from Rs. 1500 to Rs. 4000 per month until the age of 27. He said that this change would be incorporated to the upcoming budget. He said that the State Government was taking important step to make visually impaired individuals self-reliant

and insure their rightful share in the resources of the State.

Thakur Sukhvir Singh Sukhu said that Himachal Pradesh generates annual income of Rs. 16000 crore while annual expenditure on salaries and pensions amounts to Rs. 27000 crores. He emphasize the need for sustainable financial roadmap and called for collective efforts and support

from all sections of the society so as to increase the state's income and secure a prosperous future for the people of the State. He said that over the past two years the present State Government has worked diligently to stabilize the derailed financial condition of the state for which employees and officials of the States have provided their immense support to the govern-

ment. Thakur Sukhvir Singh Sukhu said that all section of society have rightful share in the resources in the State and the government was making significant changes in the policies which would ensure equitable and overall development of the States. He said that strengthening the rural sector of the State has always been the top most priority for the State Government and many new initiatives would be introduced in the coming months.

The Chief Minister highlighted various schemes implemented by the Government including Mukhya Mantri Sukh Ashrya Yojna for the orphaned children, programmes for widows and measures to support single women. He said that these efforts reflect the commitment of state government for the well being of all sections of the society.

Man attempts self-immolation at SSP's office alleging harassment by police



Budaun (UP):

An e-rickshaw owner attempted self-immolation at the office of the senior superintendent of police in Uttar Pradesh's Budaun on Wednesday alleging police harassment and threats of false cases, officials said.

Gulfaam (32), a resident of Nai Sarai in the Kotwali Sadar area, set himself ablaze after dousing himself in oil. Cops present on the spot managed to extinguish the flames, but not before Gulfaam sustained severe burn injuries, officials said.

Speaking to reporters, Gulfaam alleged, "On December 30, Nihal, Munazir, Shakir and others snatched my e-rickshaw, mobile phone, and Rs 2,200. I filed a complaint at Kotwali Sadar, but no action was taken. Instead, I was threatened and left with no choice but to

take this step." Accusing the local circle officer (CO) of intimidation, Gulfaam claimed, "The CO threatened to frame me under a false charge involving 2 kg of contraband to send me to jail. Unable to endure the harassment and threats, I attempted self-immolation."

Refuting his claims, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Brishesh Kumar Singh said, "Gulfaam has been involved in disputes with his in-laws for the past two years, leading to the registration of multiple cases at Kotwali Sadar and Civil Lines police stations."

"On December 30, he allegedly entered his in-laws' house forcefully, prompting his sister-in-law to file a police complaint. Stressed over this case, he attempted self-immolation today."

27 IAS 45 IPS and 29 IFS officers promoted in Rajasthan

Jaipur: The Rajasthan government has issued orders to promote 27 IAS, 45 IPS and 29 IFS officers, according to a Department of Personnel order. The order released on Tuesday, PWD Principal Secretary Praveen Gupta and PHED Principal Secretary Bhaskar A Sawant have been promoted to the post of Additional Chief Secretary.

Chief Minister's Joint Secretary Sidharth Sihag has been promoted as Special Secretary while his wife Rukmini Riyar was promoted from junior pay scale to selection pay scale. Both are 2012-batch IAS officers.

Barmer Collector Tina Dabi, a 2016-batch IAS officer, and her sister Riya Dabi, a 2021-batch IAS officer have been promoted from senior pay scale to junior administrative pay scale. Jasmeet Singh Sandhu and his wife Artika Shukla have also been promoted from senior pay scale to junior administrative pay scale.

Ten IPS officers -- Anand Sharma, Gaurav Yadav, Bhuvan Bhanu Yadav, Prahlad



IPS officers Umesh Dutta, Navjyoti Gogoi and Lata Manoj Kumar have been promoted from Inspector General (IG) to Additional Director General.

Dr Ravi, Mamta Rahul, Kailashchand Vishnoi, Barhat Rahul Manhardan, Satyendra Kumar, Randhir Singh have been promoted as IG.

Ten IPS officers -- Anand Sharma, Gaurav Yadav, Bhuvan Bhanu Yadav, Prahlad

Singh Krishniya, Sharad Chaudhary, Rajan Dushyant, Shankar Dutt Sharma, Ram Murti Joshi, Arshad Ali, Alok Srivastava have been promoted to DIG rank.

Apart from this, 29 IFS have been promoted. CM's Principal OSD TJ Kavitha has been promoted from Chief Forest Conservator (CCF) to Additional Principal Chief Forest Conservator (APCCF) scale.

UP CM calls for road safety awareness drives in schools, colleges from January 6-10

Lucknow: On the first day of the New Year, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath convened a meeting of the UP State Road Safety Council, issuing crucial directives to all departments involved in road safety.

He emphasised that District Road Safety Committees, chaired by District Magistrates, must hold their meetings by January 5 without fail. Additionally, awareness programmes on road safety rules should be conducted in schools and colleges across the state from January 6 to 10.

The Chief Minister directed the deployment of additional PRD personnel and Home Guards to ensure an efficient traffic management system during the Mahakumbh.

Highlighting the alarming statistic of 1,000-26,000 deaths annually, he called it a severe loss to both the state and the nation, attributing such incidents largely to a lack of awareness.

He said, "Road Safety Mission should be implemented effectively



across all 75 districts, not limited to Lucknow. Monthly road safety meetings should also be held at the district level, chaired by the District Magistrate and attended by key officials such as the Superintendent of Police/Senior Superintendent of Police, Municipal Commissioner, RTO, PWD officers, District School Inspector, Basic Education Officer, and Chief Medical Officer. The state government will review the progress of these district-level initiatives every three months."

The Chief Minister instructed officials to identify districts and locations prone to accidents,

and also devise action plans to address the underlying causes and ensure their resolution. He underscored the need to prevent minors from operating e-rickshaws and other vehicles, streamline the registration process for e-rickshaws, and install mandatory signage on roads for the convenience of commuters.

Chief Minister Adityanath also called for a zero-tolerance policy toward overloading, directing officials to address this issue at the source. He noted that parked loaded vehicles on expressways and highways are a significant hazard and must

be promptly removed using cranes. He urged the promotion of safety standards such as the use of helmets and seat belts through targeted awareness campaigns.

The Chief Minister emphasised that licenses or permits of vehicles with repeated challans should be revoked, and this process must be integrated with FASTag for effective enforcement. He directed that hoardings promoting road safety awareness, issued by the departments of information, transport, and road safety, should be prominently displayed. He said, "These hoardings should be installed across all 75 districts, 350 thes, 1,500 police stations, and municipal bodies."

He added, "The public should be encouraged not to flee after witnessing an accident but to assist the injured by transporting them to the nearest hospital or trauma centre within the critical golden hour. Additionally, efforts should be made to minimise ambulance response times to save lives."

Diesel city buses to be phased out from Guwahati by 2026: Himanta

Guwahati: Flagger off 56 new electric AC buses, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said diesel city buses will be completely phased out from Guwahati by 2026 to contain air pollution.

He also inaugurated a newly constructed mini Inter-State Bus Terminal (ISBT) at Khanapara.

Speaking at the function, he announced that in a significant step towards a greener and sustainable Assam, the state government has decided a phase-wise replacement of diesel buses in Guwahati's public transport system with electric alternatives.

"By 2026, the diesel buses in Guwahati will entirely be phased out and we will add over 356 electric buses. Under PM e-Bus Sewa, 100 more buses will be added by 2026. The diesel buses will be phased out to help

Guwahati to become a green corridor," Sarma said.

He also said that Assam is now one of the top-performing states in digitising the transport system.

"Assam has secured the number one position in the country in terms of complete digitisation of the transport system," Sarma said.

This initiative has helped in reducing the involvement of middlemen and 90 per cent of the 'middlemen nexus' has been eliminated from Assam State Transport Corporation, he added.

The CM said that to streamline fitness certificate issuance, six vehicle fitness centres will be set up and the state government is planning motor driving institutes in every assembly constituency with the respective principals empowered to issue driving licenses.

Unprecedented rush of devotees at Ayodhya Varanasi on New Year Day

Ayodhya (UP):

The temple towns of Ayodhya and Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh on Wednesday witnessed an unprecedented rush of devotees on the first day of the New Year.

The Ram temple at Ayodhya was consecrated on January 22 last year.

According to local administration estimates, over two lakh devotees had already set up camps in Ayodhya on New Year Eve. On Wednesday morning, approximately three lakh more people arrived to pay homage to the deity of Ram Lalla.

The eagerness of devotees was palpable as they lined up for 'darshan' of the idol which was unveiled on Sunday on the first day of the year.

In Varanasi, a massive crowd of devotees



throughed the sacred premises of Baba Shri Kashi Vishwanath temple from 3 am on Wednesday. The rush continued till late evening as part of New Year celebrations.

The temple administration reported that by 4 pm, a whopping 3.5 lakh devotees had visited the temple to offer prayers and seek the

blessings of Baba Shri Kashi Vishwanath. In a statement, Ram Temple Trust general secretary Champat Rai said the entire world is celebrating the New Year according to the Gregorian calendar. The winter season coupled with a holiday break contributed to the high number of visitors, he explained.

With schools, courts and agricultural work closed for the season, he said "people often take vacations during this time".

"Increasingly, Ayodhya has become a prime destination for pilgrims instead of more traditional tourist spots like Goa, Nainital, Shimla or Mussoorie," Rai said.

The Ayodhya administration divided the city into multiple sectors and zones to regulate the large crowds. Heavy police presence was deployed to manage the surging crowds. Traffic restrictions were imposed and round-the-clock vehicle inspections were conducted, local officials said.

The increase in the number of devotees had begun a day earlier. By

Tuesday evening, more than two lakh pilgrims had already completed 'darshan'. Hotels, dharamshalas and homestays were fully booked as both local and outstation visitors poured into the town.

Similar scenes unfolded at the Hanuman-garhi temple, where the crowds remained steady from the early morning 'aarti' until the 'shayan aarti' in the evening.

To accommodate the massive influx, the administration had prepared 10 additional visitor galleries along the Ram Janmabhoomi path, expanding the number of darshan lines from 10 to 20. Special security measures were also enforced to ensure the safety of the devotees.

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Sheikh Hasina's extradition is one of several bilateral issues with India: Touthid

Dhaka: Deposed premier Sheikh Hasina's extradition is one of the several issues with India that Bangladesh would pursue while strong bilateral ties with Washington, Delhi and Beijing are priorities of the interim government, Foreign Affairs Adviser Touthid Hossain said on Wednesday.

Hasina, 77, has been living in India since August 5 when she fled the country following a massive student-led protest that toppled her 16-year regime.

Bangladesh-based International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) has issued arrest warrants for Hasina and several former Cabinet ministers, advisers, and military and civil officials for "crimes against humanity and genocide".

"This (Hasina's extradition) is one of the issues, but we have other issues of interest as well. We will pursue them simultaneously," Hossain told reporters while responding to a question.

Hossain said Dhaka's efforts to bring Hasina back from Delhi and to uplift ties with India will proceed in parallel. "I believe both will proceed simultaneously".

A former diplomat, Hossain, the de facto foreign minister in Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus' interim government, said that maintaining strong bilateral ties with the US, India, and China alongside addressing the Rohingya crisis would be key priorities for Bangladesh in 2025.

Pak begins its two-year tenure as non-permanent member of UNSC

Islamabad: Pakistan began its two-year tenure as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on Wednesday, with Ambassador Munir Akram saying that the Pakistani delegation will play an "active and constructive" role in addressing key challenges facing the world.

"Our presence will be felt in the Security Council," Ambassador Akram, Pakistan's top diplomat at the UN, told state-run APP (Associated Press of Pakistan) news agency.

Pakistan will sit in the Security Council for the 2025-26 term as a non-permanent member — the eighth time that the country has had a seat on the 15-member body's horseshoe table.

In June, Pakistan was elected to the council with a massive majority as a non-permanent member, polling 182 votes in the 193-member General Assembly — far more than the required



124 votes representing a two-thirds majority.

"We enter the council at a time of great geopolitical turbulence, intense competition between the two largest powers, raging wars in Europe, the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere and a sharply escalating and multi-dimensional arms race," Akram said. "As a responsible State

— the fifth largest by population — Pakistan will play an active and constructive role, in accordance with the UN Charter, to halt wars, promote the pacific settlement of disputes and contain the negative impacts of great power rivalries, the arms race, new weapons and domains of conflict as well as the spreading scourge

of terrorism," he said.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Ishaq Dar said that Pakistan begins its term as a non-permanent member of the UNSC with a rich legacy of experience and commitment to the principles and purposes of the UN Charter.

He was addressing a reception hosted at the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Foreign Office said in a statement.

The event was attended by the heads of resident missions of the UN Security Council Member States in Islamabad and senior officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Dar highlighted Pakistan's contributions to international peace and security, especially through its active role in UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding endeavours around the world.

Dar said that Pakistan looked forward to "seeking just and peaceful resolution of situations on the agenda of the UN Security Council".

"As a member of the council, Pakistan will continue to oppose the unilateral and illegal use or threat of force; combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations; and support effective UN peacekeeping, and peacebuilding efforts," he said.

PM Keir Starmer promises year of rebuilding Britain in 2025

London: Keir Starmer has pledged to make 2025 a year of rebuilding after Britain "voted for change" by electing a Labour Party-led government in last year's general election in his first New Year message as Prime Minister of the UK.

In a video message issued by 10 Downing Street on Tuesday night, the Labour leader acknowledged there was "much more to do" to make Britain a "nation that gets things done".

Starmer also promised more cash in the pockets of people as he struck a note of optimism for the year ahead.

"That is what we will be focusing on: a year of rebuilding. But also, rediscovering the great nation that we are, a nation that gets things done no matter how hard or tough the circumstances," said Starmer in the pre-recorded message.

He referenced the forthcoming 80th anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE) Day, which marked the end of hostilities during World War II on May 8, 1945.

"We will have time to

reflect on that this year, a chance, with the 80th anniversary of VE and VJ [Victory over Japan] Day, to cherish the greatest victories of this country and the greatest generation that achieved it. But that victory, and indeed the peace and the prosperity that followed, all rested on that same foundation we must rebuild today.

"The security of working people, that is the purpose of this government, the goal of our plan for change. And we will push it forward in 2025," he said.

Starmer is on holiday with his family, his first break since taking charge at Downing Street in July.

"We have a clear plan for change: 1.5 million new homes, restoring the dream of home ownership; children starting school, ready to learn; a more secure energy system; [NHS] waiting lists cut dramatically; immigration — reduced; neighbourhood police, tackling anti-social behaviour in every community; and more cash in your pocket, wherever you live... Here's to a year of changing Britain for the better," he concluded.

Ukraine halts transit of Russian gas to Europe after prewar deal expired

Kyiv: Ukraine on Wednesday halted Russian gas supplies to European customers through its pipeline network after a prewar transit deal expired at the end of last year.

Ukraine's energy minister, Herman Halushchenko, confirmed on Wednesday morning that Kyiv had stopped the transit "in the interest of national security." "This is a historic event.



Russia is losing markets and will incur financial losses. Europe has already decided to phase

out Russian gas, and (this) aligns with what Ukraine has done today," Halushchenko said in an update on the Telegram messaging app.

At a summit in Brussels last month, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy vowed that Kyiv would not allow Moscow to use the transit to earn "additional billions... on our blood, on the lives of our citizens." But he had briefly held open the possibility

of the gas flows continuing if payments to Russia were withheld until the war ends.

Russia's Gazprom said in a statement on Wednesday morning that it "has no technical and legal possibility" of sending gas through Ukraine, due to Kyiv's refusal to extend the deal.

Even as Russian troops and tanks moved into Ukraine in 2022, Russian natural gas

kept flowing through the country's pipeline network — set up when Ukraine and Russia were both part of the Soviet Union — to Europe, under a five-year agreement. Gazprom earned money from the gas and Ukraine collected transit fees.

Before the war, Russia supplied nearly 40 per cent of the European Union's pipeline natural gas. Gas flowed through four pipeline systems,

one through the Baltic Sea, one through Belarus and Poland, one through Ukraine and one under the Black Sea through Turkey to Bulgaria.

After the war started, Russia cut off most supplies through the Baltic and Belarus-Poland pipelines, citing disputes over a demand for payment in rubles. The Baltic pipeline was blown up in an act of sabotage, but details of the attack remain murky.

BUSINESS

FinMin Urges Banks & Insurance to Expedite Grievance Resolution

New Delhi: The Finance Ministry on Wednesday urged public sector banks (PSBs) and insurance companies to expedite the resolution of public grievances.

A meeting chaired by Financial Services Secretary M Nagaraju was held in which complainants, PSBs, public sector insurance companies (PSICs) and regulators participated.

The meeting, aimed to assess the quality of grievance redressal, reviewed 20 randomly selected public grievances resolved by PSBs and insurance companies to assess resolution quality, the finance ministry said in a statement.

At the outset, the Secretary reiterated the Prime Minister's direction given in the Pragati meeting held on December 26, that all the Senior officers at the level of Chairman/ MD/ ED

of PSBs/PSICs should review at least 20 cases to monitor quality of resolution of the resolved grievances every month.

During the review meeting, he observed that the majority of customers raised complaints due to genuine grievances against an organisation, and stressed that customer satisfaction is at the heart of the grievance redressal mechanism.

He also stressed that any laxity/negligence in grievance redressal is against the ethos of customer service and diminishes the reputation/brand value of the organisation and directed that public grievances be addressed sincerely and positively in a time-bound manner.

Nagaraju also underlined the need for technical and IT solutions to minimise repetitive complaints and increase efficiency.

Govt to Abide by SC Decision on Farmers' Protest: Chouhan

New Delhi: Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Wednesday said the government will abide by the Supreme Court's decision on the ongoing farmers protest at Punjab-Haryana border and will take steps accordingly.

When asked about holding a dialogue with the protesting farmers to the end of the logjam, the minister said, "Supreme Court jaise nirnay de raha hai, uske hisab se karyavahi hogi (The action will be taken as per the direction of the Supreme Court)".

While the protesting farmers have requested the Centre to hold a dialogue with them, the minister said the apex court is currently looking into the matter.

The minister further said he otherwise has been meeting various farm bodies on every



Tuesday and discussing their concerns.

"The minister's remarks come a day ahead of the Supreme Court is scheduled to hear a plea seeking contempt action against the Punjab government for not complying with directions to hospitalise farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who has been on an indefinite fast for over a month.

Dallewal has been on an indefinite fast at the Khanaur border between Punjab and Haryana since November 26 to press the Centre into accepting the agitating farmers' demands, including a legal guarantee of minimum support price (MSP) on crops.

Farmers under the banner of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (non-political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha have been camping at Shambhu and Khanaur border points between Punjab and Haryana since February 13 after their march to Delhi was stopped by the security forces.

On December 28, the Supreme Court came down heavily on the Punjab Government for not moving Dallewal

While the protesting farmers have requested the Centre to hold a dialogue with them, the minister said the apex court is currently looking into the matter.

to a hospital even as it doubted the intention of the agitating farmers for resisting medical aid for the septuagenarian.

The Punjab Government on December 31 informed the Supreme Court that Dallewal has agreed to accept medical aid given the Centre accepts his proposal to hold talks.

The Union Minister said he held a series of meetings with his ministry officials on Wednesday, the first day of the New Year, and set focused targets for achieving goals set for the agriculture sector till March 31.

UPI App Market Cap Deadline Extended to 2026

New Delhi: In a relief to major players like PhonePe and Google Pay, NPCI has extended the deadline for implementing a 30 per cent volume cap on third-party Unified Payments Interface (UPI) apps by another two years till December 31, 2026.

This is the third time that the NPCI has extended the deadline.

"Considering various factors, the timeline for compliance of bringing third party application providers (TPAPs) who are exceeding the vol-



ume cap, is extended two years ie till December 2026," NPCI said

in a circular issued on Tuesday. The National Pay-

ments Corporation of India (NPCI) had initially proposed a 30 per

cent cap on the volume of transactions that UPI apps can process back in November 2020, and had given time to the existing players to adhere to the volume cap in two years.

Currently, major TPAPs like Google Pay and PhonePe hold an 80 per cent share in UPI transactions.

NPCI runs the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) used for real-time payments between peers or at merchants' end while making purchases.

The cap of 30 per

cent will be calculated on the basis of the total volume of transactions processed in UPI during the preceding three months on a rolling basis, as per NPCI.

To achieve 30 per cent market share, the option would be to stop onboarding of new customers for those who have higher than 30 per cent market shares in UPI transactions.

Meanwhile, NPCI has lifted the limit from onboarding UPI users for the third-party app provider WhatsApp Pay

with immediate effect.

With this development, WhatsApp Pay can now extend UPI services to its entire user base in India. Previously, NPCI had permitted WhatsApp Pay to expand its UPI user base in a phased manner.

There was a cap of 100 million users which has been lifted by NPCI.

NPCI, an initiative of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Indian Banks' Association, is an umbrella organisation for operating retail payments and settlement systems in India (IBA).

India's Power Consumption Up 6% in December

New Delhi: India's power consumption rose nearly 6 per cent to 130.40 billion units (BU) in December as compared to the year-ago month.

In December 2023, power consumption was 123.17 BU, as per government data.

The highest supply in a day (peak power demand) also rose to 224.16 GW in December 2024 from 213.62 GW in the year-ago period.

The peak power demand touched an all-time high of about 250 GW in May 2024. The previous all-time high peak power demand of 243.27 GW was recorded in September 2023.

Earlier this year, the power ministry projected a peak power demand of 235 GW during the day and 225 GW during evening hours for May 2024 while 240 GW during daytime and 235 GW in the evening hours for June 2024.

The ministry had also estimated that peak power demand may hit 260 GW in the summer of 2024.

According to government estimates, peak power demand is expected to touch 270 GW in the summer of 2025.

Experts opined that power demand as well as consumption showed an improvement last month mainly due to increase in use of heating appliances like heater and geysers amid cold wave conditions.

They further said the growth of power demand as well as consumption will be more steady in January due to lower mercury levels especially in Northern India.

Cricket

Rohit Sharma has earned right to walk away on his own terms: Michael Clarke

Sydney
Former Australia captain Michael Clarke says India skipper Rohit Sharma has earned the right to walk away from Test cricket on his own terms notwithstanding his barren run with the bat Down Under.

Pressure has been gradually building on Rohit who is yet to play a knock of significance in the three Tests he has played so far in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. Another stalwart in the team, Virat Kohli, is also facing the heat for repeatedly falling to balls outside the off-stump in the series.

"You see that with a number of players - to some people the captaincy helps for others it doesn't. I certainly think he'll play at Sydney. I don't think they'll drop him. I think Rohit has earned the right and he's captain. When you are captain you get a little more leeway as well," Clarke told ESPN ahead of the fifth Test beginning here on Friday.

"But those numbers don't read great. But they'll allow Rohit to walk away on his own terms. No idea if Syd-



ny will be his last Test. I'm not sure what he is thinking, or what India's got coming up Test cricket wise.

"I'm not sure how Rohit feels captaincy wise, he's just had his second child so who knows what's going to happen there but I'll imagine he will certainly play in Sydney," he added.

Rohit averages 30.58 as captain but before that he scored runs at an average of 46.87.

Another former Australia captain Aaron Finch also weighed in on the debate. "The alarming thing for me is how well they played under Bumrah's captaincy in Perth (in first Test) and they

have come back here and looks like an unsettled line up since Rohit's come back in. But he's still a great player, he's a beautiful player to watch and I hope he gets some runs," said Finch.

Reddy a genius, must bat six
Clarke also feels that Nitish Kumar Reddy must bat higher up the order after smashing a hundred at number 8 at the MCG.

"Reddy, this young kid batting at number eight, is a genius. I think he has definitely got to bat seven if not six. He has been India's leading run-scorer, 21 years of age, unbelievable. He has been underrated in the entire series," Clarke told Beyond 23 Cricket Podcast.

"He has impressed everyone. He has not feared any Australian bowler. He has been patient when he has needed to be patient. He has batted with the tail extremely well. He has shown his intent. He bats, bowls and fields. This guy is a very good find for the Indian cricket team.

"I think he is good enough to bat at number six. So what a great option for India going into the last Test match," Clarke added.

India may have lost grip on BGT after poor shot selection on day 5 of MCG Test: Shastri

Sydney
Former India head coach Ravi Shastri has attributed the national team's defeat in the Boxing Day Test to "poor shot selection on either side of the middle session" on day five, a lapse that he believes cost the visitors both the game and their grip on the Border Gavaskar Trophy.

Shastri refrained from naming specific players but acknowledged that dismissals involving "two senior players and a youngster" would face intense scrutiny.

"It was amazing to see the Indian crowds having travelled from all parts of the globe to come experience Test cricket at its best at the 'G,'" Shastri wrote in a column for The Daily Telegraph.

"Unfortunately for them, some poor shot selection on either side of the middle session on the final day cost India the game. And probably has ensured that India may have lost their grip on the Border Gavaskar Trophy with one Test to go," he added.

Skipper Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, and Rishabh Pant have faced criticism

for their performances in the fourth Test, which Australia won by 184 runs to secure a 2-1 lead in the series.

India must win the final Test in Sydney to retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, while a draw or loss will see Australia reclaim the prestigious title for the first time since the 2014-15 series.

While Rohit and Kohli struggled to overcome technical and mental challenges, Pant's mis-timed pull to long-on triggered a dramatic second-innings collapse.

"There will be a few of other second-innings dismissals that will be scrutinised in India as well, involving two senior players and a youngster. Three very loose shots," Shastri noted.

He also highlighted the contrast in leadership performances by Rohit and his Australian counterpart Pat Cummins, who was adjudged player of the match.

While Cummins has performed exceptionally well by raising his standards over the course of the series, Rohit has been miserable and has produced under-par performances.

Bumrah eclipses Ashwin's rating-point record in latest ICC rankings



Dubai
India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah on Wednesday bettered spin stalwart Ravichandran Ashwin's all-time rating-point record by an Indian in the latest ICC rankings when he touched the 907-point mark.

Ashwin's highest rating was 904, achieved in December 2016.

The 907 ranking points also placed Bumrah as joint-17th in the all-time list with Derek Underwood of England.

Ahead of the Boxing Day Test in Melbourne last week, Bumrah had equalled the record (904) held by Ashwin in the ranking for bowlers.

However, another superb performance at the MCG, where he got nine wickets, albeit in a losing cause, helped him consolidate his lead as the No. 1 Test bowler in the recent update.

Australia skipper Pat Cummins earned 15 rating points following his six wickets at MCG to jump a place to No. 3.

He also secured a third place in the Test all-rounder rankings after he notched up 90 vital runs across two innings during Australia's 184-run win in the fourth Test.

Opener Yashasvi Jaiswal's 82-run first-innings knock in the Boxing Day Test saw him jump a spot to a career-best fourth with 854 rating points, while Nitish Kumar Reddy's maiden Test century leapfrogged him 20 places to 53rd in the Test batting rankings.

Konstas' audacious knock at MCG unlikely to become a blueprint: Carey

Sydney
Australian wicketkeeper-batter Alex Carey said on Wednesday that he was mesmerised by the way young opener Sam Konstas scored an audacious half-century in the Boxing Day Test against India but insisted that it was unlikely to become a "blueprint" for future matches.

Making his debut in front of a near sell-out crowd at the MCG on December 26, 19-year-old Konstas didn't show any nerves during his scintillating 60 off 65 balls, which was studded with two sixes off India's best bowler Jasprit Bumrah.

"I was a spectator that first session," Carey told reporters ahead of the fifth Test against India beginning at the SCG on Friday.

"I probably had the emotions of the 90,000 (spectators) that were there. At times I couldn't watch it, at times I was cheering," said Carey.

Konstas, who was handed the Test cap after Nathan McSweeney's unimpressive performance in the first three games, brought an ultra-aggressive approach to Australia's batting but Carey said he didn't expect the teenage opener to go all guns blazing in every match he plays.

"Just the energy he brought, it was something different. Probably wasn't expecting that amount of difference, but he played a style of cricket that was probably new to India as well.

"We'll wait and see how he plays out here (SCG). I don't think that's his blueprint every Test match, but to be able to throw a few punches early and get a bit of momentum for us, the opening partnership was probably just lacking that intensity," he added.

He said that while the opening pair in the first three Tests, Mc-



Sweeney and Usman Khawaja, had done a decent job in "tough situations", Konstas brought something new to the table.

"I thought Nathan and Usman got us through tough situations as well by facing lots of balls. Sam was able to score a little bit, so hopefully another opportunity in front of his home fans."

Carey also rejected talk of any animosity between Konstas and Virat Kohli after their brief physical altercation on the opening day of the Boxing Day Test, which led to the Indian stalwart coping a 20 per cent fine on his match fee.

Both players quickly turned around to glance at each other and engage in a heated exchange of words before Khawaja stepped in to separate them. The on-field umpires also had a word with the two.

"Not that I'm aware of... I think I saw a photo of them shaking hands and a little tap on the back. It's Test cricket. I'm not 100 per cent sure, but Sam didn't take it to heart," said Carey.

The Gambhir gambit Head coach's handling of India's transition raises eyebrows

Sydney
As Indian cricket deals with the fading form of its two stalwarts in captain Rohit Sharma and senior batter Virat Kohli, head coach Gautam Gambhir and his support staff's role in handling a team in transition has also come into focus.

The ongoing Border-Gavaskar Trophy has been a difficult rite for the side as it has struggled to get the right combination in the face of an aggressive and highly-driven Australian team. The visitors will be playing the must-win fifth and final Test here on Friday.

The on-field roller-coaster is causing some off-field issues as well with murmurs of unrest in the dressing room beginning to grow.

It is learnt that Gambhir is not on the same page with most of the players in the team and the communication isn't as good as it used to be during the time of Ravi Shastri and Rahul Dravid.

Skipper Rohit Sharma has maintained that he speaks individually to the players about selection issues. But after Gambhir took charge in July, Rohit, it is said, hasn't actually given clarity to some of the not-so-junior players about why they were being excluded at times from the side.

His own poor form hasn't helped Rohit's cause. But it is also reliably learnt that Gambhir, who is considered a more assertive person, hasn't earned a lot of confidence from the group of players, who aren't as old as Kohli or Rohit but are also not rookies like Harshit Rana or Nitish Reddy.

"There is a Test match to be played and then there is Champions Trophy. If the performance doesn't improve, even Gautam Gambhir's official position wouldn't be safe," a senior BCCI official said on conditions of anonymity.

Gambhir's equation with the selection committee is also not particularly clear



at this point.

There are players in the team, who are feeling insecure because of his proclivity to experiment with the playing eleven. In the ongoing BGT, a punt like Nitish Reddy has worked out brilliantly but the handling of Shubman Gill is still being debated.

BCCI secretary Jay Shah has now been elevated to the ICC chief's position and the Board will have his full-time successor only after January 12. Once that administrative stability is in place, the BCCI brass will have some thinking to do.

Till Shah was in-charge of BCCI, he called the shots. Former India seamer Roger Binny, who is the current president of the Board, hasn't been seen taking any policy related calls.

But if India's performance is not drastically better in the Champions Trophy in February-March, Gambhir will certainly have his wings clipped.

He was never BCCI's first choice (it was VVS Laxman) and some of the well-known overseas names didn't want to coach all three formats, so he was a compromise. Obviously, some other compulsions were also there," the official said.

Gambhir has already been asked a

few tough questions after the 0-3 defeat at home to New Zealand and if the Border-Gavaskar Trophy is also lost, it can all go downhill for the feisty former opener from Delhi's Old Rajinder Nagar.

Already there is a school of thought that Gambhir should only be given charge of the T20 team, a format in which he has been a successful captain and then mentor for both Kolkata Knight Riders and Lucknow Super-Giants.

One question that is being asked in the corridors of power is whether he has been able to offer any solutions to Virat Kohli with regards to his never-ending dismissals in the outside off-stump channel? By the look of things, the answer to that seems to be an emphatic no.

"Gautam, all his life, while playing in England and Australia, would dab the ball towards slip and gully. So, he knows exactly what Kohli's problem is. He has seen that as a player (in 2014) and as a commentator and now as a coach.

"If he knows what is wrong, he should tell him," a former India great, with the experience of more than 90 Tests, said.

"Support staff" for support staff
The BCCI mandarins are also keeping a tab on certain other developments about one of the key members of the support staff, who is being accompanied at all the venues by his personal assistant.

It is learnt that the person in question used to have FOP (Field of Play) access during the IPL, where he would stride into the playing arena after games in a franchise jersey.

In Australia, his presence in the box dedicated to BCCI members hasn't really been appreciated, according to a top source.

Mitchell Starc will push through the rib injury Carey

Sydney
Australian wicketkeeper-batter Alex Carey believes pace spearhead Mitchell Starc will "push through" the pain of a rib injury to play the fifth and final Test of the Border-Gavaskar series here beginning on Friday.

The 34-year-old left-hand quick's fitness remains the primary worry for the hosts after he battled through sore ribs from day three of the Boxing Day Test but still managed to bowl effectively with help from the team's physios.

"He'll be fine. He will push through," Carey told the media here on Wednesday.

The Australian selectors will likely take a call on Starc's fitness closer to the Test but Carey said he had no concerns whatsoever about his teammate's fitness.

"I've played with Starcy (Mitchell Starc) for a long time now and he's one of the toughest cricketers that I've played with. He'll grince and grab his

rib without a doubt at times but he'll be ready for the contest."

A victory or a draw in the fifth Test here is paramount for the hosts as it will help them regain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy for the first time since 2014-15.

However, if India win the game, they will retain the trophy, winning the series for a record-extending fifth straight time.

If Starc were to be rested, fellow pacer Jhye Richardson would likely be called in as his replacement.

The 28-year-old last played a Test in December 2021, taking five second-innings wickets in the pink-ball Ashes clash against England at the Adelaide Oval. Asked about the prospect of getting a call-up, Richardson told 'cricket.com.au' that he was not thinking too much about the selection.

"It's hard to think about that (prospect of playing the next Test). You can't spend too much energy wondering about what's going to happen with selections."

Sweeney looking to return to Test side once Khawaja calls it a day

Melbourne
A "devastating" omission after below-par performances in the Border-Gavaskar series notwithstanding, Australian opener Nathan McSweeney has not given up hope of returning to his country's Test setup, saying he would try his luck as a long-term replacement for Usman Khawaja once the batting stalwart retires.

McSweeney opened the innings with Khawaja in the first three Tests but a series of disappointing scores saw him being replaced by Sam Konstas in the Boxing Day Test with the 19-year-old making an immediate impact by scoring a blazing half-century.

Pakistan-origin cricketer Khawaja, 38, has reportedly indicated that the Ashes next summer could be his ideal swan-song, given the likes of Konstas and McSweeney are staking claim for the opener's slot.

"I'd love to (be back in the Test set-up), there's no doubt about that. USSie (Usman Khawaja) has been awesome, but when the opportunity comes -- or if it does -- I would love to do that," McSweeney was quoted as saying by



'Sydney Morning Herald'.

"I haven't had heaps of time to think about it, to be honest, it all kind of happened fairly quickly, and then I was back here playing T20 cricket (in Big Bash League)," said McSweeney, who was heartbroken after being dropped from the fourth Test here which Australia won to take a 2-1 lead in the five-match series.

McSweeney said he would speak to

the selectors to discuss his future, adding that he would be "flexible" about his batting position.

"Those conversations will be had, and I've got to work out and speak with the selectors about where my opportunity may come and what I need to do to get back there.

"I'm flexible to bat wherever and wherever I see my role to, hopefully, one day again play Test cricket," he

said.

McSweeney was thrust into the opener's role for the BGT Tests despite playing most of his domestic cricket at No.3 or No.4. He struggled against the average pace of Jasprit Bumrah, averaging just 14.40.

"I think what I've done really well over the last couple of years is trusting my game and being able to bat long periods of time where I've been able to make big runs," McSweeney said.

He said that Test debutant Konstas had made full use of the faith reposed by the selectors to make an impact in the Melbourne Test.

"It's quite a unique game, and it's very individual at times. You've got your own way to go about it, and he (Konstas) obviously did it really well in that first innings.

"I think I've been able to play spin pretty well here in Australia over the last few years. It's a fair bit different over there... (but) if I got the nod to go over there I'd feel really confident in my game against spin," said McSweeney, explaining he could be a good choice in the team to handle spin.



Look its tough and there is always going to be hype when you have a 19-year-old making debut because he is in rare company at his age. — Simon Katich

“I thought it was just a regulation wicket: Starc on KL Rahul dismissal



Not ruling out revival of Champions Trophy but we need to have space on calendar, says FIH

Rourkela
FIH President Dato Tayyab Ikram on Wednesday expressed his willingness to revive the prestigious Champions Trophy before highlighting the difficulty in scheduling the event on an already crowded international hockey calendar.

The Champions Trophy, which began as an annual event in 1978 and transitioned to a biennial format in 2014, was once regarded as one of hockey's most esteemed tournaments, only behind the World Cup and the Olympics.

The last edition was held in 2018 before the international federation discontinued the event.

"We are not ruling out that the Champions Trophy or a similar event might be reintroduced. But we need to look at the space (in the calendar)," Ikram said during a press conference.

He highlighted the demanding schedule of modern athletes and the importance of introducing "better and more exciting events" while considering their workload.

He also stressed the need to expand hockey's global reach and provide opportunities for nations beyond the top nine teams.

"We didn't have anything for second-



tier nations. After the top 9-10 nations, we have started the Nations Cup for the next 8 countries. My target for FIH is that the top 35 nations should be involved in FIH events, which has never happened in history."

He underscored the significance of bridging the gap between elite and

emerging hockey nations while acknowledging the challenges of an increasingly crowded calendar.

"So my target for FIH is that top 35 nations should be involved in FIH events, which has never happened in history. We have to bring those things forward. That's the only way to bridge

the gap. We have to engage other countries as well. So the problem will be that your calendar will be filled more," he added.

Speaking about the federation's flagship tournament, the Pro League, which has been ongoing since 2019, Ikram announced the launch of a new

project called "Pro League Connect," aimed at involving countries outside the top hockey nations.

"At the end of last year, I had a meeting with our events department and the Pro League team. We are launching a project called Pro League Connect," Ikram said without divulging much information about the project.

"It is important for us that not only the top nations are attached and relevant to the Pro League. We want the entire global hockey family to feel connected and make the Hockey Pro League more relevant for them."

"There will be some innovations, some more initiatives to make it better," he added.

The much-anticipated Hockey India League (HIL) made a triumphant return after a seven-year hiatus, earning high praise from FIH President.

"Hockey India League has a very special feature; it is different from other leagues. In a unique way, it is organized during a dedicated period of the FIH calendar, ensuring top athletes from around the world can participate."

Ikram emphasised that HIL goes beyond being just a hockey competition. "It is more than matches alone; it's a great initiative for global hockey," he said.

Erigaisi 4th Gukesh 5th in latest chess rankings



New Delhi
 Indian Grandmasters Arjun Erigaisi and World Champions D Gukesh retained their fourth and fifth spot respectively in the chess rankings released on Wednesday. Erigaisi, who became the second Indian after the legendary Viswanathan Anand and 16th worldwide to reach the gold-standard ELO rating of 2800, continues to have 2801 rating points for the fourth spot.

While 18-year-old Gukesh, who defeated Ding Liren of China to win the World Chess Championships title last month, is one place below Erigaisi at fifth with 2783 ratings.

Norwegian Magnus Carlsen continued to be at the top spot with 2831 ratings, followed by the American duo of Fabiano Caruana (2803) and Hikaru Nakamura (2802).

Anand is the third Indian in the top 10, occupying the 10th spot with an ELO rating of 2750.

Apart from Erigaisi, Gukesh and Anand six more Indians, including R Praggnandhaa (13th), Aravindh Chithambaram (23), Vidit Gujarathi (24), Pentala Harikrishna (36), Nihal Sarin (41st) and Raunak Sadhwani (48), feature in the top 50. In the women's section, newly-crowned Women's World Rapid Chess champion Koneru Humpy leads the Indian charge. Humpy is placed sixth with a rating of 2523 in the list led by four Chinese players.

Former world champion Hou Yifan tops the list with a 2633 ELO rating followed by Ju Wenjun (2561) at second, Tan Zhongyi (2561) at third and Lei Tingjie (2552) at fourth. Divya Deshmukh with a rating of 2490 is ranked 14th while Dronavalli Harika (2489) is two spots behind at 16th.

R Vaishali, who clinched a bronze in the women's section of the World Blitz Championship, is 19th with a rating of 2476.

In the junior men's section, Gukesh and Praggnandhaa occupy the top two spots.

Gauff and Fritz put U.S. in United Cup tennis semis



Perth
 Coco Gauff and Taylor Fritz powered the U.S., tournament winner two years ago, into the semifinals of the United Cup mixed teams tennis event on Wednesday.

In the first singles match in Perth, Gauff got the ball rolling for her team with a gritty 7-6 (4), 6-2 win over Zhang Shuai. Fritz then made sure of victory by edging a tight contest with Zhang Zhizhen 6-4, 6-4.

World No. 3-ranked Gauff said: "Shuai was playing amazing tennis out there. I was literally on the ground for most of the match. The harder I hit, the harder she was hitting."

"I felt like I couldn't get her on defense. She was playing so aggressive on me and I felt like I had to go more on my second serves, which brought in more double faults. But if I just put it in it was a return winner so I had to take my chances."

Kazakhstan also advanced to the semifinals with a 2-1 win over a German team playing without the injured world No. 2-ranked Alexander Zverev.

Zverev was a late scratch for Germany due to a biceps injury. He was scheduled to face Alexander Shevchenko but withdrew at the last minute with Kazakhstan leading the tie 1-0 after Elena Rybakina beat Laura Siegemund 6-3, 6-1.

Shevchenko beat Zverev's replacement, Daniel Masur, 6-7 (5), 6-2, 6-2 to clinch the tie for Kazakhstan while Zverev watched from the sidelines. Germany won the later mixed doubles.

Shevchenko took a medical timeout due to heat exhaustion while leading 1-0 in the second set. He came back from the break to dominate the rest of the match.

"It was a heat problem for sure," Shevchenko said. "I had a bit of a headache, my head was spinning. It

Vaishali clinches women's world blitz bronze as India sign off on a high

New York
 India's R Vaishali clinched a bronze in the women's section of the World Blitz Championship, capping another strong performance by the country's chess players after stalwart Koneru Humpy's title-winning show in the rapid event here.

Vaishali defeated China's Zhu Jiner 2.5-1.5 in the quarter-finals before losing to another Chinese opponent Ju Wenjun 0.5-2.5 in the semi-final.

In an event completely dominated by the Chinese, Ju Wenjun went on to snare the world title defeating compatriot Lei Tingjie 3.5-2.5.

Five-time world champion and International Chess Federation (FIDE) vice president Viswanathan Anand congratulated Vaishali for her efforts, saying it was a great way to end the year.

"Congratulations to Vaishali for taking bronze. Her qualification was truly a power packed performance. Our Waca Chess mentee (WestBridge Anand Chess Academy) has done us proud," Anand wrote on X.

"We are so happy to be supporting her and her chess. What a way to wrap up 2024. In 2021, we thought we would get stronger chess players but



here we have it a World Champion (Humpy) and a Bronze medalist (Vaishali)" he wrote.

In the 'Open' section, world number one Magnus Carlsen and Russia's Ian Nepomniachtch shared the Blitz title after three sudden-death games failed to produce a winner. This was the first time that the title was awarded to two players after Carlsen asked whether it could be shared given the deadlock.

"We were both tired, some will like it some will not," Carlsen said during a media interaction.

"We reached a point where it had been a long day. We played many

Kazakhstan is into the United Cup semifinals

Perth
 Kazakhstan has advanced to the United Cup mixed teams tennis tournament semifinals with a 2-1 win over a German team playing without the injured world No. 2-ranked Alexander Zverev.

Zverev was a late scratch for Germany on Wednesday due to a biceps injury. He was scheduled to face Alexander Shevchenko but withdrew at the last minute with Kazakhstan leading the tie 1-0 after Elena Rybakina beat Laura Siegemund 6-3, 6-1.

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"It was a heat problem for sure," Shevchenko said. "I had a bit of a headache, my head was spinning. It was a struggle this match. To play in this heat was so tough."

The United States played China on Wednesday night in the second quarterfinal in Perth. Coco Gauff and Taylor Fritz led the U.S. into the quarterfinals with a win in their final round-robin match on Tuesday.

Gabriela Dabrowski reveals she played through 2024 after breast cancer

London
 Former U.S. Open women's doubles champion Gabriela Dabrowski revealed on Tuesday she had played through 2024 after undergoing treatment for breast cancer. She delayed part of that treatment so she could compete at Wimbledon where she reached the doubles final.

"I know this will come as a shock to many, but I am OK and I will be OK," the 32-year-old Canadian said on social media. "Early detection saves lives. I am wholeheartedly agree with this."

Dabrowski, ranked third in women's doubles, said in an Instagram post that she received the diagnosis in April. She did not play that month and in May because of surgery, but returned to the courts in June.

Dabrowski said there was "a slight delay in further treatment" so she could compete at Wimbledon — where she and New Zealand's Erin Routliffe lost the final in July to Katerina Siniakova and Taylor Townsend — and the Paris Olympics, where she won the bronze medal in mixed doubles with Felix Auger-Aliassime.

Dabrowski said she had found a first lump in the second half of 2023 and was initially told not to worry about it.

"It all seems surreal," Dabrowski



Dabrowski, ranked third in women's doubles, said in an Instagram post that she received the diagnosis in April. She did not play that month and in May because of surgery, but returned to the courts in June.

wrote, saying she now has a "better grasp" of her treatment and side effects. "For a long time I wasn't ready to expose myself to the pos-

sible attention and questions I'd have gotten before. I wanted to figure everything out and handle things privately with only those closest to me in the loop."

Dabrowski and Routliffe won the WTA Finals at the end of this season. The pair also won the U.S. women's doubles title in 2023.

"My mindset shifted from I have to do this (play tennis) and not waste my skills' to I get to do this." Through this lens I find it so much easier to find joy in areas of my life I previously viewed as a heavy weight," she said.

Dabrowski ended her post by aiming an expletive at cancer, while adding "but also, thank you."



Shradha Kapoor hits bed at 11 on New Year's eve; Tabu calls it 'false'

Shradha Kapoor had totally different plans for New Year's as opposed to the ones

Year's eve instead of staying up late at night partying. The actress took to social media to reveal the same and asked her followers if they think it is true or false. Sharing pictures of herself in a

Meanwhile, on the acting front, she is basking in the success of her film 'Stree 2', which also features Rajkummar Rao, Pankaj Tripathi, Abhishek Banerjee and Aparshakti Khurana among others.

that her contemporaries in the film industry had. The actress shared that her plan included hitting the sack at 11 pm on New

Later before the clock struck 11, the Stree 2 star took to her Instagram stories to reshare the post and write, "Sahi jawaab- True. Shubb Raatri mai chali sone. Late ght vaale, tumko toh subha Mummy dekhegi"

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Meanwhile, on the acting front, she is basking in the success of her film 'Stree 2', which also features Rajkummar Rao, Pankaj Tripathi, Abhishek Banerjee and Aparshakti Khurana among others.

It was released on August 15, Independence Day 2024, alongside other big Hindi films such as Khel

Khel Mein and Vedaa.

The film has etched its name in cinematic history by becoming the highest-grossing Hindi film ever, surpassing the lifetime collections of Shah Rukh Khan's 'Jawan'. Directed by Amar Kaushik, 'Stree 2' has captivated audiences not only with its engaging storyline but also with star-studded cameos from Varun Dhawan and Akshay Kumar, both of whom have been praised for their contributions to the film.

Recently, at one of the media summits, Shradha shared that she got a lovely congratulatory wish from Tabu post 'Stree 2' success. "Tabu ma'am called me... She had most amazing things to say me on phone. She even sent me a personalised perfume with Stree written on it. She made me feel empowered and made me feel proud of myself," she shared.

'Unbothered, making money, growing': Malaika Arora shares her New Year 2025 resolution



It's that time of the year once again! As we welcome the New Year, many also draw up their resolutions and positive affirmations for the year ahead. Actress Malaika Arora welcomed the year on a happy note with resolutions she made for the New Year.

In her recent Instagram post wrapping up the year, Malaika shared a video of herself dancing. She also revealed her new year resolution. In the video, the actress can be seen dancing in a bathrobe around a room. Along with this, she wrote, "Scorpio 2025. Unbothered, Happy, Moisturised, Making Money, Focused. In my own lane, Positive Glowing, Growing".

Recently, Malaika reflected on the year gone by sharing a note that reflected her year. The note read, "I don't hate you, 2024, but you were a difficult year, full of challenges, changes, and learning. You showed me that life can change in the blink of an eye and taught me to trust myself more. But, above all, you made me understand that my health—whether physical, emotional, or mental—is what real-

ly matters. There are things I still can't understand, but I believe that with time, I will understand the reasons and purposes of everything that happened."

Malaika largely made news in 2024 for her break up with actor Arjun Kapoor. While the 'Singham Again' star openly declared his single status, Malaika said that she would not talk about her personal life in public.

During the promotions of 'Singham Again' in October, Arjun announced that he is single. When Malaika was asked about the same, she told ETimes, "I will never choose a public platform to talk about my personal life. So, whatever Arjun has said is entirely his prerogative."

The actress also made news for the demise of her stepfather Anil Mehta. As per reports, Anil jumped off the sixth floor of his Bandra residence. Malaika's parents divorced when she was 11 years old, and she moved to Chembur with her mother and sister Amrita Arora. Her mother, Joyce Polycarp, is a Malayali Christian, and Anil Mehta was a Punjabi, who worked in the Indian Merchant Navy.

Ayushmann Khurrana and Rashmika Mandanna's 'THAMA-kedaar' new year wish from sets of Thama



THAMA-ke-daar holidays. See you in 2025 #Diwali. They captioned the post. Sharing his happiness on joining the horror comedy universe, the 'Bala' star in a press note earlier said, "I'm excited that Dinesh Vijan feels this is the best time for me to enter his blockbuster horror comedy universe in and as 'Thama'. After Stree

2 became the all-time biggest Bollywood film in the history of Hindi cinema, I am thrilled to be part of this universe's legacy as it moves forward and also feel responsible for giving audiences a theatrical experience that they will remember for years to come."

"Munjia" fame director Aditya Sarpotdar is helming the film, while Dinesh Vijan and Amar Kaushik are the producers of Thama. The film is written by Niren Bhatt, Suresh Mathew and Arun Fulara.

Presented by Maddock Films, 'Thama' is set to be released in theatres on Diwali 2025 and will also feature Paresh Rawal and Nawazuddin Siddiqui.

2025 to play cupid for Fatima Sana Shaikh's on-screen life; actress set to star in multiple romantic dramas



Come 2025, Cupid's going to particularly favour Fatima Sana Shaikh, who has a string of romances—albeit only on the screen—in the pipeline. Apart from Anurag Basu's production, Metro... In Dino, Shaikh also has Ul Jalool Ishq, which pairs her along with Vijay Varma, and her maiden Dharmatic Entertainment venture that has her join hands with R Madhavan.

The last of this lot, a Vivek Soni-directed love saga that's tentatively titled Tharki, explores the tale of a couple with a significant age gap. Sources tell mid-day that Shaikh slips into the role of a teacher in this "concept-driven romance". "In the quirky, contemporary love story, she plays a Bengali woman in her 30s who meets a 40-something teacher belonging to a small north Indian town. Madhavan, who plays this part, meets Fatima on a dating app," shares the source, adding that the team recently wrapped up filming the Netflix offering in Kolkata over a 36-day schedule.

But before this venture makes its way to the audience, Shaikh will find herself training attention to Manish Malhotra's production, Ul Jalool Ishq, also starring Naseeruddin Shah and Sharib Hashmi. The "sweet and romantic drama," as the

insider describes it, is also set in a small town. "Fatima plays a simple but strong-headed woman in the romance drama alongside Vijay. It's a heartwarming film that is likely to bring a smile to the face." It is yet to be ascertained if Vibha Puri's directorial venture will enjoy a theatrical release or directly hit the web.

In her seven-year stint in Bollywood, Shaikh may have seemingly kept an arm's length from love sagas. But sources say the move was never intentional. Asserting that she is eager to explore light-hearted projects, a source adds, "Even though the upcoming films are all love stories, they are drastically different from one another. She is excited to explore characters of her own age."



New blood in Bollywood! Rasha Thadani, Ibrahim Ali Khan, Aryan Khan to make grand debut

Rasha Thadani, daughter of Raveena Tandon, is gearing up for her debut with Azaad, an action adventure film that is set in pre-independence India and hits the screens this month. For her first time in front of the camera, she has been guided by director Abhishek Kapoor, who has launched many faces in the past, including Sara Ali Khan in Kedarnath (2018) and Sushant Singh Rajput in Kai Po Che! (2013). Even before being Bollywood-bound, Rasha has been a fairly recognised face, courtesy her frequent public appearances with her star-mother and a strong following on Instagram.

Up next is Thadani's Azaad co-star and Ajay Devgn's nephew, Aaman Devgan. The young lad is often seen with his superstar-uncle and aunt



Kajol. Aaman finds support from Ajay not only off screen, but also on it, as the actor does a cameo in the action adventure. Considering Aaman has kept a low profile so far, it could work in his favour as the audience doesn't have any preconceived notion about him and will judge him

on screen. This year, we have another Khan on the block. The son of Saif Ali Khan and Amrita Singh, Ibrahim Ali Khan is the spitting image of his father. The latest star kid with acting aspirations seems to be following the tried-and-tested route—he worked as an as-

stant director on Karan Johar's Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani (2023), and then landed the lead role in Sarzameen, directed by Kayoze Irani and backed by Dharma Productions. What is encouraging is that he has already bagged his second project, Diler, a drama about a marathoner, which is produced by Dinesh Vijan.

In a film industry often driven by legacy, Aryan Khan's foray into Bollywood comes with a twist. The eldest son of Shah Rukh Khan has chosen not to follow in the superstar's footsteps, but to chart his own course behind the camera. An unconventional choice for a star kid? Absolutely! At a time when many in the bunch want to stand under the arc lights and enjoy the glamour that comes with being a movie star, Aryan's choice to debut in Bollywood as a writer-director is refreshing.