

**DENGUE WARNING SIGNS**

Many people with dengue can be cared for at home with adequate rest and hydration. But, if you experience any warning signs, go immediately to the nearest medical center.

**Watch out for dengue warning signs!**

A drop in body temperature accompanied by any of the following symptoms:

- Sudden and continuous fever above 102°F
- Persistent vomiting
- A sharp body temperature
- Disorientation
- Bleeding from gums or nose, blood in stool, urine or vomit
- Redness

If you have any of these symptoms, go to the nearest medical center IMMEDIATELY.

# JINDRAH IMAGES

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## Prime objective of school education is to ignite the intellectual capacity of children: LG

**JI NEWS SERVICE**  
JAMMU, DECEMBER 29

Lieutenant Governor Shri Manoj Sinha today attended the Annual Day function of Jammu Sanskriti School “Karmanya-The Power of Good Deeds”, at General Zorawar Singh Auditorium, Jammu University.

In his address, the Lieutenant Governor extended his felicitations to the school management, teachers and students on its annual day. Over the years, many eminent teachers and educationists have contributed to high reputation the Jammu Sanskriti School enjoys today. It is an occasion to remember all of them with gratitude, he said.

The Lieutenant Governor highlighted that the prime objective of school education is to ignite the intellectual capacity of



children.

“The future of a nation is decided in school campus. The overall goal of our education system is to provide unique opportunity to every unique personality so that they can create something new and contribute to nation building with their unique talent,” he said.

The Lieutenant Governor emphasized the role of teachers and educational institutions in developing a conducive environment to boost the confidence of

the students and motivate them to continue their quest to learn new skills.

“In today’s era of rapid change, when new technological advancements are taking place every day, only one skill will be relevant in the future and that is - Lifelong Learning Skill,” the Lieutenant Governor said.

He observed that the primary and secondary education is an interesting phase of positive change in a student’s life. He said, this is the time when

knowledge and influence around affects his mind and body.

Whatever a child learns in this impressionable age stays for long years. It is during this period when a child develops instincts to make decisions and the sense of understanding between good and bad, right and wrong. Our focus should be to develop primary and secondary education as per the needs of the modern world, he added.

On the occasion, the

Lieutenant Governor gave seven resolutions to the educational institutions across the UT of J&K to adopt new technologies in education, focus on both knowledge and values and to stimulate students’ intellectual capacity.

“The first resolution is to make the digital learning system interactive and encourage children to actively participate in the learning process. We must focus on one-to-one mentoring instead of information delivery, and offer field experience to students outside the classroom.

Teachers must share their life experiences with the students, encourage them for data interpretation and problem solving, and provide them with the freedom to explore new ideas. Our focus should also be on

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## After the snowfall: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah monitors restoration process



**JI NEWS SERVICE**  
SRINAGAR, DECEMBER 29

In the aftermath of the recent heavy snowfall, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Sunday chaired a comprehensive meeting with Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) and Deputy Commissioners (DCs) of the Kashmir Division via video conferencing.

The meeting was held at the Raabita Public Outreach Office to assess the ongoing restoration efforts

and review the status of essential services, including snow clearance, power and water supply, health facilities and other critical services.

During the meeting, MLAs across the party lines appreciated the efforts of CM-led Administration in swift response to snowfall, acknowledging the commitment of Government in times of weather adversaries.

Minister Javaid Ahmad Dar attended the meeting as legislator.

Advisor to the Chief Minister Nasir Aslam Wani, along with other senior officers, were present during the meeting.

At the outset, the Chief Minister sought feedback from MLAs across party lines regarding the restoration measures in their respective constituencies.

Discussions centered on snow clearance operations, the restoration of power and water supply and the provision of other essential services and

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## 60% terrorists killed by security forces in J&K in 2024 are Pakistanis: Army Officials



**AGENCIES**  
NEW DELHI, DEC 29

Notwithstanding the economic issues faced by it back home, the Pakistan Army is fully backing the terrorist infrastructure as 60 per cent of terrorists killed in Jammu and Kashmir this year were Pakistanis.

The local recruitment of terrorists in the Pakistan-sponsored terror groups is also very low as only four locals have

joined these groups this year, Army officials said.

In different encounters and operations, the security has been able to eliminate around 75 terrorists in different regions of the state including the Jammu region and the Kashmir valley along with the firefights that take place during infiltration attempts by terrorists on the Line of Control, they said. Notably, Pakistan has traditionally been seen

as a major source of recruits for these groups, they said. Notably, Pakistan has traditionally been seen as a major source of recruits for these groups, they said.

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## Maha Kumbh’s message is unity, banishment of hate from society: PM Modi

**AGENCIES**  
NEW DELHI, DEC 29

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday described the upcoming ‘Maha Kumbh’ as the “Maha Kumbh of unity” as he asked people to return from the grand religious congregation with a resolve to banish hate and division from the society.

Speaking in his monthly Mann ki Baat broadcast, Modi said, “Maha Kumbh ka sandesh ek ho pura desh (Message from the Maha Kumbh should be that the entire country must be united).”

He added, “Ganga ki aviral dhara, na bante samaj hamara” (Like the uninterrupted flow of Ganga, let our society remain one).

Noting the diversity of people visiting the mammoth congregation, which will be held in Prayagraj from January 13, he said



there is no other example of such a sight of unity in diversity.

“Maha Kumbh’s speciality lies not just in its vastness but also in its diversity,” he said.

The mega-religious event is held every 12 years.

Tens of millions of people congregate at the event, he said adding that saints, thousands of traditions, hundreds of sects and many akharas become its part.

“There is no discrimination anywhere. No one is big or small. Such a scene of unity in diversity will not be seen anywhere else in the world,” he said.

“It is also the Maha Kumbh of unity. This time’s Maha Kumbh will strengthen the mantra of Maha Kumbh of unity. When we participate in the Kumbh, let us bring along this resolve of unity with us. Let us also make a resolve to annihilate the feeling of division and

hatred in the society,” he added.

The prime minister said an AI chatbot will be deployed at the event for the first time, and the facility of digital navigation will help people reach different ghats, temples, and akharas of sadhus. Information related to the Maha Kumbh will be available in 11 Indian languages through the AI chatbot, he said.

Modi cited a WHO report to highlight an 80 per cent reduction in the number of malaria cases and deaths in the country between 2015 and 2023. “This is no mean achievement.”

In the tea gardens of Jorhat in Assam, malaria used to be a major cause of concern until four years ago but people’s participation in a movement against the mosquito-borne disease has curbed it,

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## Kashmir’s Gulmarg, Pahalgam reel under subzero temperatures



**JI NEWS SERVICE**  
SRINAGAR, DEC 29

Gulmarg and Pahalgam in Kashmir continued to experience severe subzero temperatures while the rest of the valley saw slight relief from the cold wave, officials said on Sunday.

Gulmarg, a tourist resort town known for skiing activities in north Kashmir, recorded a low of minus 8.0 degree Celsius, the Meteorological

department said. The base camp for annual Amarnath Yatra in south Kashmir, Pahalgam, registered a minimum of minus 8.5 degree Celsius, the department said.

In Srinagar the mercury dipped to minus 0.2 degrees Celsius on Saturday night – two degrees above the normal temperature for this time of the year, it added. Qazigund, the gateway town to

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## Katra remains shut for 5th day against ropeway project; BJP MLA joins protesters



**JI NEWS SERVICE**  
REASI/JAMMU, DEC 29

Katra, the base camp for the Vaishno Devi pilgrimage in Jammu and Kashmir, remained shut for the fifth consecutive day on Sunday in protest against a proposed ropeway project in the Trikuta hills, with BJP MLA Baldev Raj Sharma threatening to sit on a hunger strike if those detained are not released within 24 hours.

Meanwhile, five men continue to sit on a hunger

strike, demanding the release of those detained by police during earlier demonstrations in the holy town.

The Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Sangharsh Samiti, which has called for the shutdown, announced that all activities in Katra would remain suspended during the bandh.

Shops, restaurants and business establishments remained closed for the fifth day in Katra, and traffic was off the roads following the samiti’s call

for the protest. The bandh, which began on Wednesday, has disrupted normal life in the busy town of Katra, where thousands of pilgrims arrive daily to pay obeisance at the cave shrine of Vaishno Devi.

Sharma, who joined the protesters on Sunday, warned the administration of a chain hunger strike if the detained samiti members are not released within 24 hours.

“I will sit on a hunger strike with my people if the administration does not release those detained. The administration should immediately release them,” the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLA told the protesters.

He praised the unity shown by the people of Katra. “The residents of Katra have proven that we stand together in this fight. I thank youngsters and women for

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## Jammu-Srinagar highway reopens after day-long closure due to snowfall



**JI NEWS SERVICE**  
JAMMU, DEC 29

The 270-km Jammu-Srinagar highway was on Sunday reopened for vehicular traffic after a day-long closure due to heavy snowfall, allowing stranded vehicles to proceed to their respective destinations, officials said.

However, several other important inter-district routes, including

the Mughal Road, Sinthan Pass, Sonamarg-Kargil inter-UT road, and Bhandarwah-Chamba inter-state road, remained closed for vehicular traffic due to heavy snowfall.

“The highway has been reopened today following the clearance of snow accumulated on various stretches of the road,” a traffic official said. The stranded vehicles

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## Ex-PM Manmohan Singh’s ashes immersed in Yamuna river

**AGENCIES**  
NEW DELHI, DEC 29

The ashes of former prime minister Manmohan Singh were immersed in the Yamuna river near the Majnu ka Tila Gurdwara by members of his family following Sikh rituals.

The ashes were collected from the Nigambodh Ghat on Sunday morning by Singh’s family members and later taken to the ‘Asth Ghat’ on the Yamuna river bank near the gurdwara. Singh’s wife Gursharan Kaur, their three daughters – Upinder Singh, Daman Singh and Amrit Singh – along with other relatives were present at the immersion site.

As part of Sikh rituals, the family will hold an ‘Akhand Path’ at its official residence on 3, Motilal Nehru Marg on January 1.

A ‘bhog’ ceremony, ‘Antim Ardas’ and ‘kirtan’ would be held on January



3 at the Rakab Ganj Gurdwara near Parliament complex.

Singh passed away at AIIMS Delhi on December 26 due to age-related medical complications. He was 92.

The former prime minister, who ushered in an era of economic liberalisation in the 1990s, was accorded a state funeral at the Nigambodh Ghat

on Saturday. President Droupadi Murmu led the nation in paying last respects to the former prime minister.

“We all will always remember Manmohan Singh Ji’s service to the nation, his dedication and his simplicity,” the Congress said on its official X handle while sharing pictures of the immersion.

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## SMVDU hosts 8th Alumni Meet 2024



JNEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU, DEC 29

Shri Mata Vaishno Devi University (SMVDU) hosted the 8th Alumni Meet 2024 bringing together graduates to celebrate their enduring connection with their alma mater. The event, organized by the Office of International and Alumni Affairs, highlighted the university's commitment to fostering lifelong relationships with its alumni. The meet witnessed enthusiastic participation from alumni spanning multiple graduating batches. Former students, now excelling in various fields such as engineering, management, architecture, civil services gathered at the picturesque campus to reconnect with old friends, mentors, and the institution that shaped their future. Prof. Yugal Khajuria (Dean International and Alumni Affairs) welcomed the alumni and briefed about the various initiatives and schemes

being launched by the university in which alumni can actively participate. The event commenced with a formal inaugural session graced by Prof. Pragati Kumar (Vice-Chancellor of SMVDU) and other distinguished faculty members. In his keynote address, Prof. Kumar welcomed the alumni and emphasized their pivotal role in shaping the university's legacy and future. "Our alumni are our pride and our strongest ambassadors," Prof. Kumar stated. "Your achievements inspire our students, and your support propels SMVDU to greater heights." Prof. Balbir Singh (Dean, Academic Affairs) also emphasized on the role of alumni in shaping academic curriculum and mentorship of current students. Various notable alumni spoke at the occasion and provided their feedback. Alumni interacted with faculty, current students, and each other, sharing career insights and experiences. Vibrant

performances by SMVDU's current student cultural groups and alumni added a festive touch to the proceedings. The meet also hosted a group discussion in which Alumni participated on topics like "Bridging Academia and Industry" and "Building a Global Alumni Network." chaired by Prof. Yugal Khajuria (Dean, IAA) wherein various notable alumni such as Mr. Rahul Mahajan (JKAS), Mr. Rohit Saini (CEO, Wonder Homz), Mrs. Anisa Nabi (JKAS), Mrs. Ruchita Bakhshi (State Project Manager, Himayat Mission), Amit Sharma (AE, JKSPDC), Ar. Satyanshu (Assistant Professor) participated. The discussion also included groundwork for a more robust alumni network. The university announced initiatives to enhance alumni engagement, including an online alumni portal, mentorship programs for current students, and collaborative research opportunities.

The alumni pledged their support to further SMVDU's mission of academic excellence and global outreach. Moderated by Dr. Mir Irfan Ul Haq (Associate Dean, International and Alumni Affairs), the discussion was attended by Prof. Balbir Singh (Dean Academic Affairs, SMVDU), Dr. Sanjay Mohan, CEO TBIC SMVDU and Mr. B.K. Bhatia (TPO, SMVDU) and Dr. Rajiv Kumar (NSS Coordinator, SMVDU). Dr. Mir Irfan Ul Haq (Assoc. Dean, IAA) in the formal vote of thanks thanked all the alumni, student and NSS volunteers, university administration for their support. Dr. Irfan also informed that it was the first step towards reviving the alumni interaction at SMVDU and more such events are planned in the coming days. The event concluded with a gala dinner, where alumni shared anecdotes, celebrated milestones, and rekindled the SMVDU spirit.

## Safeguarding Young Athletes: Understanding and Preventing Heart Conditions- Dr Sushil

JNEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU, DEC 29

To strengthen their campaign further to aware masses about the ill effects of Cardiovascular Diseases Head Department of Cardiology GMCH Jammu Dr Sushil Sharma conducted a day long cardiac awareness cum health check up camp in collaboration with Sikh Unity Forum Poonch, Rahul Dravid Cricket Academy and Committee of Char Sahibzade at Sports Stadium to commemorate SAFAR-E-SHAHADAT CHAAR SAHIBZAADE, with more emphasis on Physical activity to reduce the cardiac mortality and morbidity.



nary artery development can restrict blood flow during exertion. He elaborated that Electrical abnormalities, such as long QT syndrome and Wolff-Parkinson-White (WPW) syndrome, disrupt the heart's normal rhythm, increasing the risk of life-threatening arrhythmias. Additionally, myocarditis, an inflammation of the heart muscle often caused by viral infections, can lead to sudden cardiac events, especially during intense physical activity. While these conditions may be asymptomatic, they may also manifest as warning signs, including chest pain, fainting, or palpitations during exercise. Participation in sports offers young athletes numerous physical, mental, and social benefits. However, underlying heart conditions can pose significant risks, potentially leading to serious outcomes like sudden cardiac arrest (SCA). While these events are rare, prevention and early detection are essential to ensuring the safety of young athletes.

He added that the first line of defense against heart-related issues in young athletes is a thorough pre participation screening. This involves a detailed medical history

and physical examination. The medical history should assess personal symptoms such as chest pain, fainting, or shortness of breath during exercise, as well as family history of cardiac diseases or sudden death. Physical examinations should include listening for heart murmurs, checking blood pressure, and assessing for any physical signs of cardiovascular issues. He said Dr Sushil Sharma in his concluding remarks told that preventing heart conditions in young athletes requires a multifaceted approach that includes comprehensive screening, education, access to life-saving equipment, and promotion of healthy habits. Heart conditions in young athletes, though rare, demand attention to ensure their safety during sports participation. Early detection and timely intervention not only save lives but also empower young athletes to pursue their passions with confidence and well-being. Ultimately, a proactive and collaborative approach among athletes, families, and medical professionals is key to safeguarding the health of the next generation of athletes.

Organizing Committee of the Camp Onkar Singh

Baghi ( President Sikh Unity Forum Poonch)), Adv Sunil Sharma ( President Bar Association Poonch ) Naresh Chander ( Ex- Councillor ) , Harcharan Singh Khalsa , Parvez Ahmad Afridi, Imran, Mohinder Singh ( Ex Councillor ) ,Balwinder Singh Baghi ( Chairman DGPC ) ,Parvinder Singh ( Ex Councillor ) , Matinder Pal Singh ( Hockey Coach ) , Hazara Singh , Jugal Kishore , Surjan Singh , Jatinder Pal Singh, Nirjyote Singh and Manmohan Singh ( Sonu) appreciated the efforts of Dr Sushil and his team for conducting cardiac awareness cum health check up camp in their area for welfare of the society .

Others Who were Part of this Camp includes Dr Parvez Khan ( CMO Poonch ) , Dr Shahbaz Khan, Dr Pallavi Sharma and Dr Amarpreet Singh. Paramedics and volunteers includes Rajkumar, Rahul Vaid, Rohit Nayyar, Vikas Kumar , Rajjinder Singh Gourav Sharma , Amnisha Datta , Paramveer Singh , Harsh Bali, Ritik Sharma , Shaida Parveen , Rubina , Basharat Anjum, Anil Sharma, Sumit Sharma , Ajit Pal Singh ,Vikram Sharma, Droub Sharma, Randhir Singh and Nirvair Singh Bali .

## Aryans Group expresses heartfelt condolences on the Demise of Former PM

JNEWS SERVICE  
MOHALI, DEC 29TH

Aryans Group of Colleges, Rajpura, Near Chandigarh expressed grief at the passing of the former PM Dr Manmohan Singh.

Dr. Anshu Kataria, Chair-



man, Aryans Group has met him few years back and got the chance to take guidance for education sector. He said its the immense loss for The education fraternity of Nation. Entire students and faculty of Aryans Grpup is mourning the loss of Singh

who served as India's Prime Minister from 2004 to 2014 and played a key role in bringing transformative education reforms in India. Kataria further added that he was a great mentor, academician, economist and Indian Politician.

## NDS organises Shahidi Samagam to Pay Tribute to Shri Teg Bahadur Sahib Ji

JNEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU, DEC 29

Safar-e-Shahdat: Vishesh Shahidi Samagam was organized at Gurudwara Shri Teg Bahadur Sahib Ji by Nami Dogri Sanstha (Regd.) to pay homage to the supreme sacrifices of the Sahibzade of Shri Guru Gobind Singh Ji Maharaj. The solemn event was a heartfelt tribute to the unparalleled courage and devotion of the Sahibzade, who remain eternal symbols of righteousness and bravery.

The program featured the soulful recitation of Gurbani by Parvinder Singh, popularly known as "Apple," along with his group. Ms. Kulpreet Kour's melodious voice further enhanced the devotional aura of the event. They were accompanied by Chander Dhari Kesar on the Violin and Harpreet Singh on the Tabla, whose



performances added a deep spiritual resonance to the occasion.

The gathering saw the participation of members of Nami Dogri Sanstha and prominent figures from various fields. Advocate Dogra Harish Kaila, President of NDS, while Prof. Anupama Sharma, Patron of NDS, Presided over the Event and Yash Pal Yash, General Secretary, played key roles in the proceedings. Eminent singer Mrs.

Jetinder Kour, Vigyan Bharti Executive Member S. Achhar Singh, and cultural activist Davinder Bakshi were among the dignitaries present.

The program served as a platform to reflect on the values upheld by the Sahibzade and to inspire the Younger Generation with their unparalleled legacy of sacrifice and devotion to humanity. The organizers emphasized the importance of

remembering such historical sacrifices and ensuring their relevance in contemporary times.

Speaking at the event, Advocate Dogra Harish Kaila highlighted the need to preserve and promote the teachings of the Gurus and their sacrifices, which continue to guide humanity on the path of truth and righteousness.

The Safar-e-Shahdat concluded with prayers for peace and universal harmony, leaving the attendees deeply moved and inspired. Nami Dogri Sanstha extended heartfelt thanks to all participants for making the event meaningful and successful.

The Samagam not only paid homage to the Sahibzade but also reinforced the timeless principles of bravery, faith, and selflessness, serving as a beacon of inspiration for generations to come.

## Natrang stages political satire 'Topian' highlighting hypocrisy in politics

JNEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU, DEC 29

Natrang presented a hardest political satire 'Topian' written by Mani Madhukar under the direction of Neeraj Kant in its weekly theatre series 'Sunday Theatre' at its studio. Most appropriate and timely presentation on the contemporary political scene of the country, the play is a dig on the lusty politicians who can change colors faster than a chameleon just to ensure that they remain in power. For them, the mission is to befool the public and for that they have the requisite theatrical art, know-how, expertise and the excellence to transform themselves to any color or attire as per the situation and the requirement. Human civilization has witnessed a lot of social and political revolutions, each time thinkers and philosophers have sold new political thoughts and doctrine of governance. But ironically the same faces have made their way to power just by hiding real faces in new masks. They have been changing the color of their caps and not their mind set.

In the backdrop of the story of two neighbors



who pledge to change the political scene are shown looking for alternatives. Each time they come across a person they meet only those wearing different caps and attire offering them a variety of manifestos. Each time they identify him as a different person and expect a different ideology from him. This way they succumb to his tactics. Over time when they find that nothing is changing, the slogans of socialism are furthering the divide between rich and poor, quality of life is deteriorating day by day and the security of life and property is at the mercy of God. Both muster courage and strip the person selling those dreams. Surprisingly inside clothes they find that he is the same person and every time he used to come to them in

different attire. The playwright has successfully portrayed that the politicians are the same; they only change their caps and their colors just to befool the public. They can be friends and enemies at the same time, their equations and confrontations change for lust of power. This absurd play posed a big challenge before the young actors of Natrang but interestingly their handling of the characters surprised many. The roles of two neighbors were played by Kartik Kumar and Adaksh Bagal whereas Aryan Sharma rendered equal support to them. The lights of the play were designed by Neeraj Kant whereas Mehak Chib scored the music of the play. The show was coordinated by Mohd. Yaseen.

## Altaf Thakur slams Omar-led Govt for delay in snow clearance, power, water restoration in many areas

JNEWS SERVICE  
SRINAGAR, DEC 29

Senior BJP leader and the party's J&K spokesman Altaf Thakur today criticized the Omar Abdullah-led government for its slow response to the ongoing snow crisis in the Valley.

In a statement here, Thakur accused the government of failing to clear link roads promptly and fully restore essential services such as power and water, leaving residents to suffer in freezing conditions.

The BJP leader said that while main roads were being prioritized, interior roads and link roads in rural areas and also in Srinagar remain buried under heavy snow, cutting off vital access for many communities. "The government has shown complete disregard for the plight of common people, who are left stranded without proper connectivity," Thakur said.

Highlighting the power outages and disrupted water supply across the Valley, Thakur called the government's efforts inadequate.

## Rozgar mela held in Ambala



JNEWS SERVICE  
AMBALA, DEC 29

Hundreds of students and professionals participated in a rozgar mela at Ambala today. The mela by Crack Academy served as a valuable platform for participants to interact with leading educators and mentors who shared practical tips on mastering government exam patterns, handling complex questions, and optimizing study routines.

To navigate the challenges of government job exams effectively interactive workshops on effective

study techniques and exam-specific strategies were held during mela besides insights into tackling tricky questions

Neeraj Kansal founder and CEO of academy said, "We aim to bridge the gap between their aspirations and success by offering expert guidance, structured strategies, and a supportive environment. We believe that success in public services requires not only hard work but also smart preparation and unwavering confidence, which we aim to instill through such initiatives."

## SMVDU Faculty delivered a Resource Person Talk in AICTE ATAL FDP at Kamala Institute of Technology and Sciences (Autonomous), Singapuram, Telangana

JNEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU, DEC 29

Prof. (Dr.) Eswaramoorthy Muthusamy, Professor in School of Mechanical Engineering, Shri Mata Vaishno Devi University, Katra, delivered Resource Person talk in AICTE ATAL FDP entitled 'Recent Advances in Energy System for Sustainable Development' organised by the Department of Electrical Engineering Kamala Institute of Technology Singapuram, Telangana. Prof. Eswaramoorthy delivered a resource person talk about 'Solar Thermal System and its Applications. Various insights about the need for solar thermal systems and its applications to become India are Energy Independent by 2047. Concentrat-



ing and non-concentrating solar thermal systems with various thermal energy storage for low, medium and high temperature applications has been discussed. Supercritical CO2 power cycles, Organic Rankine Cycle and Solar Solid Particle Receiver are enlightened to the participants. 50 AICTE ATAL FDP participants, MTech and BE students and about 60 students participated and interacted. Prof. (Dr.) Pragati Kumar, Vice-Chancellor, Prof. (Dr.) K.R. Jha, Dean, Faculty of Engineering, Prof. (Dr.) Yathesh Anand, Head, School of Mechanical Engineering of SMVDU, has congratulated and wished him for his outreach activities.

## IIM Jammu Hosts Transformative Angel Investor Masterclass

J I NEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU, DEC 29

Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Jammu, under the dynamic leadership of Prof. B.S. Sahay, Director, IIM Jammu, hosted the second session of its Angel Investor Masterclass series, at the STEM program being organised in association with SIDBI. Organized in association with Entrepreneurship Development Cell (EDC) of IIM Jammu, the session brought together aspiring entrepreneurs, angel investors, and industry leaders to explore the nuances of angel investing and startup funding.

The event featured an exceptional lineup of speakers led by

Mr. Suraj Malik, a Private Client and Funds Structuring Expert. It was joined by Pranav Obhroi, Syndicate Lead Manager at Alluvium Capital.

Naveen Jain, Founder of Centriti and Co-Manager at Atrium Angels & Saurabh Sharma, Investment Funds Specialist and Angel Investor.

The session was skillfully moderated by Mr. Vivek Sharma, CIO Jammu, IIM Jammu, who served as a bridge between the esteemed speakers and participants. His ability to simplify the complex topics and foster meaningful dialogue created an engaging and interactive



atmosphere, ensuring the session's success.

Mr. Suraj Malik played a pivotal role as the facilitator, contributing significantly to the session's organization and execution. The event commenced with insights from Mr. Pranav Obhroi, who shared his extensive experience evaluating over 100 startups and investing in more than 10 early-stage ventures in the past year. He emphasized the dynamic nature of India's startup ecosystem, highlighting the importance of understanding regional variations- "the many mini Indias within India."

Discussing key evaluation criteria for pitches, he stressed the significance of a founder's vision, competition analysis, industry trends, and the startup's unique value proposition. Drawing from his journey, he advised participants to cultivate an independent perspective and diversify investments to manage risks effectively.

A highlight of the event was the mock pitch session, where Mr. Naveen Jain presented Centriti, an end-to-end e-procurement solution tailored for the HoReCa sector, to Mr. Pranav Obhroi, who acted as the investor. This session offered participants a real-world glimpse into the dynamics of startup pitching, challenges, and strategic solutions.

Following the mock pitch, an engaging discussion unfolded. He shared insights on managing business intricacies, addressing seasonality in the HoReCa industry, and scaling businesses to new locations. Mr. Saurabh Sharma provided valuable perspectives by analysing major competitors and illustrating how businesses can manage and leverage data effectively to gain a competitive edge.

The masterclass provided attendees with actionable insights on crafting compelling, investor-ready pitches while addressing

challenges in the HoReCa sector and uncovering potential opportunities. Participants gained a strategic understanding of thriving as a startup in emerging markets, equipping them with essential tools to navigate today's competitive landscape.

The session concluded with an interactive Q&A session led by Mr. Saurabh Sharma and other angel investors, exploring sector-specific investment opportunities. Contributions from STEM (Skill to Enterprise Module) members enriched the discussions further. The Entrepreneurship Development Cell of IIM Jammu, in collaboration with STEM members, extends its gratitude to the speakers, participants, and angel investors for making this session an outstanding success. The masterclass demystified angel investing and empowered participants with actionable insights to navigate their entrepreneurial and investment journeys.

## MLA Bishnah Dr Rajeev Kumar Bhagat calls on LG Manoj Sinha at Raj Bhawan

J I NEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU, DEC 29

In a significant move, Dr. Rajeev Kumar Bhagat MLA Bishnah called on Lieutenant Governor Shri Manoj Sinha at Raj Bhawan in Jammu and submitted a comprehensive memorandum outlining demands pertaining to Bishnah constituency.

The primary agenda was to advocate for enhanced infrastructural development in the constituency and also discussed several important matters of public importance pertaining to Bishnah Constituency. The prominent demands of Bishnah constituency comprises of creation of New Degree College at Arnia for the youth of Border Villages, Creation of New ITI College at Bishnah, Special package for beautification of two Bishnah and Arnia towns, Drug De Addiction Centre, Upgradation of PHC Arnia to Emergency



Hospital, Special recruitment drive for Border Villages, Double Lane road from Kunjwani to Arnia, Separate Feeder for Farmers for Agriculture Pump Sets, Birdges on AIK, Sanction of ENT, Orthopedic and Dermatologist posts at SDH Bishnah, Sports Stadium each at Bishnah and Arnia, Improvement of Irrigation system for Agriculture purpose upto Jabowal so that irrigation water to be provided to the farmers for irrigation purpose, Bifurcation of Family Ration Cards, Waiver off the electricity bills to the weaker section

of the society those who not in a position to pay i.e. Widow, Handicapped, Orphan etc., Guest House to be constructed at BDO Office Bishnah, Improvement of Dak Bunglow Pandorian and Canal Front view from Chack Avtara Circular road to RKS School Bishnah. Dr Rajeev apprised the Lieutenant Governor of other public concerns and grievances stemming from the infrastructural deficit in Bishnah constituency. The Lieutenant Governor gave a patient hearing to MLA and assured him that all the major

demands put forward would be redressed on priority. Expressing satisfaction over the visionary approach of Hon'ble LG towards changing the perception about J&K in the rest of world, Dr Rajeev said that he is grateful to LG for tireless efforts in engaging with the people of J&K towards early solution of their various problems. He said that Hon'ble LG has inspired renewed confidence and brought positive changes on the ground through his initiatives. He thanked Hon'ble LG for his tireless efforts in championing their cause.

Dr Rajeev have a dream that he made Bishnah constituency as a model of constituencies of the state and desired that he provide every facilities to the people of his constituency in coming years and he also stated that people voted him for development and he wants to be full fill their dream and put every efforts on his parts.

## Last Man in the Last Row is Our Cherished Target: Pathania

J I NEWS SERVICE  
UDHAMPUR, DEC 29

Ranbir Singh Pathania, Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) from Udhampur East, held a "Dhanyavaad Sabha" at village Nakki, in the Tehsil of Majalta, where he addressed the gathering on a range of development issues.

Mr. Pathania said that the "Last man in the last row is the cherished target and mission of Modi Sarkar." He emphasized that in the last 10 years, the Modi government has made consistent efforts to transform the lives of people who were previously exploited and neglected. He cited various social welfare programs such as "Jan Dhan Yojana", "Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana", "Ujjwala Yojana", "Swachh Bharat Mission", "PM Kisan Samman Nidhi", and others, which have directly benefited the common people. Mr. Pathania stated that the central government's focus remains on uplifting the marginalized sections of society. He further emphasized that transforming the socio-economic profile of Jammu and Kashmir is a key agenda of the Modi government. He expressed satisfaction over the positive impact of various schemes in the District of Udhampur and called



on officers to be vigilant, active, and diligent in making people aware of these schemes to ensure they take full advantage of the benefits.

Mr. Pathania also highlighted the importance of infrastructure and connectivity, announcing a robust network of roads set to be commissioned next year. These roads include vital links such as Sortha, Gadena Kut, Sordla to Lah, Jai Shree Mata to Khoon, Banu to Bilaspur, Neeli to Dhat, Bharanara to Barigarh, Mansar to Jasore, Dhamma to Jhandi, and many others. These initiatives aim to enhance accessibility for remote areas and improve the quality of life for the residents. Addressing the pressing issue of drinking water, Mr. Pathania reaffirmed the commitment of the Government of India to ensure potable drinking water is made affordable

for all. He assured that efforts would be made on a war footing to achieve this goal, benefiting every household.

On education, he spoke about the planned upgradation of middle schools at Nakki and Baryalta, promising that these upgrades would be completed in the near future to provide better educational facilities to the students.

In addition, Mr. Pathania highlighted the need for improved healthcare facilities, particularly during the winter months. With snow and waterborne diseases posing a significant health threat, he called on the administration to be prepared and take necessary measures to tackle potential epidemics. He also emphasized the establishment of state-of-the-art healthcare and animal care facilities to ensure the well-being of both people and livestock

during harsh winters. Addressing the issue of infrastructure blockages, he stressed the urgent need to resolve the ongoing problems with drinking water channels, road channels, and irrigation channels in link roads. These issues, if not resolved promptly, could hinder progress and development in the region.

Further, Mr. Pathania urged the authorities to maintain buffer stocks of transformers and to ensure that faulty transformers are repaired swiftly. Ensuring a reliable and uninterrupted power supply was one of the key points raised in his speech, as he vowed to ensure that people have access to vital electricity services.

Mr. Pathania concluded by reiterating that the ultimate goal of his efforts is to reach the "last man in the last row," ensuring development and welfare for every individual in the constituency. Prominent attendees at the event included Mohan Lal Sharma, Captain Gopal Singh (Mandal Pradhans), Romesh Chander Gupta, Manoj Verma, Surinder Singh, Ashok Singh, Showkot Ali, Kuldeep Singh, Sunit Singh (all Sarpanches), Geeta Devi Panch, Pritam Sharma, Mohan Lal Gupta, Dr. Janak, and Jiginder Verma, among others.

## Indian Army Conducts Tuition Classes for School Children at Lam, Rajouri

J I NEWS SERVICE  
RAJOURI, 29 DEC 2024

In a remarkable initiative aimed at empowering the youth of Jammu and Kashmir and providing them with an opportunity to secure admissions to prestigious Sainik Schools and Military Schools, the Indian Army has successfully conducted free tuition classes for students. The tuition classes were held at Lam from 07 October 2024 to 28 December 2024, with 30 students attending the sessions. The initiative was designed not only to improve their academic skills but also to instill discipline, confidence, and leadership qualities, which are essential for a career in the armed forces. The classes focused on subjects such



as Mathematics, General Science, General Knowledge, English, and Reasoning Ability. These subjects are vital components of the Sainik School and Military School Entrance Exam. The well-trained instructor provided personalized attention to each student, ensuring they had a clear understanding of the syllabus and content. The instructor emphasized problem-

solving techniques, time management, and analytical thinking, enabling the students to approach the exam with a well-rounded skill set. The response to the tuition classes has been overwhelmingly positive, with students and parents expressing gratitude for the Indian Army's efforts to help students achieve their dreams. The Indian Army has also promised

to continue supporting students even after the completion of the tuition classes, with follow-up sessions and counselling for those who wish to further improve their skills. This initiative is part of the Indian Army's broader effort to foster national integration, build leadership qualities, and provide opportunities for youth in remote and conflict-affected areas.

## NCC Officer Lt Ruksana Kousar of 1 J & K Girls Battalion Shines at OTA Gwalior

J I NEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU, 29 DEC 2024

Lieutenant Ruksana Kousar of 1 J&K Girls Battalion NCC, Srinagar, has successfully completed the Pre-Commission Course (PRCN) at the Officers Training Academy (OTA), Gwalior. Graduating with an 'A' grade, Lieutenant Ruksana demonstrated academic excellence, leadership and operational expertise throughout the training. She performed duties of Platoon Senior, managed responsibilities as Camp Adjutant during Exercise "Shakti" and earned a Certificate of Excellence in firing for her outstanding marksmanship. Her contributions to the National Integration Awareness Programme (NIAP) through a vibrant Assamese-Manipuri cultural



performance further highlighted her commitment to fostering unity and diversity. Additionally, she was recognized as Performer of the Month for her impeccable turnout. The ANO anchored cultural events, participated in the Flag Area Exercise and served as the English Editor for the 10th edi-

tion of the OTA Newsletter. Lieutenant Ruksana's achievements are a testament to her dedication, competence and leadership. Major General Anupinder Bevl, VSM, Additional Director General, NCC Dte, Jammu Kashmir and Ladakh, felicitated the ANO and appreciated her achievements.

## Jammu police arrest drug peddler with heroin in Kanachak area

J I NEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU, DEC 29

In its ongoing drive against drug peddling, Jammu Police tightened its noose on narcotics smuggling in the region. A patrolling party from Police Station Kanachak, on 28-12-2024 while conducting routine checks at Bawa Talab area around 4:15 PM, apprehended a suspicious individual near the backside of a tube well.

Upon noticing the police, the suspect attempted to flee but was swiftly apprehended by the vigilant team. The individual was identified as Rahul Lal Sharma, son of Rattan Lal Sharma, a resident of Gharota, Tehsil Bhalwal, Jammu.

## MLA Randhawa inaugurates Regalo Kitchen Showroom in Sainik Colony

J I NEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU, DEC 29

Senior BJP leader and MLA Bahu Constituency, Vikram Randhawa today inaugurated the state-of-the-art Regalo Kitchen Showroom along the National Highway in Sainik Colony, Jammu. The new showroom, a venture by Rajesh Gupta and Deepak Gupta, promises to bring innovative kitchen solutions to the people of Jammu.

Speaking on the occasion, the senior BJP leader applauded the entrepreneurial spirit of the owners, emphasizing the importance of such ventures in boosting the local economy. He remarked, "The opening of Regalo Kitchen Showroom is not just a step towards enhancing consumer con-



venience but also a testament to the growing business acumen of our youth. Rajesh Gupta and Deepak Gupta have set an example for aspiring entrepreneurs across Jammu and Kashmir."

Randhawa said that the opening of this showroom is a shining example of how local entrepreneurship can play a pivotal role in realizing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of

Atmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliant India). He emphasized that such initiatives not only boost economic activity but also empower individuals to become self-reliant and contribute meaningfully to society. "The establishment of this showroom underscores how local talent can harness opportunities to contribute to the region's economic progress. This aligns perfectly with the

Atmanirbhar Bharat mission, encouraging our youth to explore innovative avenues and create employment opportunities within the Union Territory," he added.

The MLA further reiterated the BJP's commitment to fostering a pro-business environment in Jammu and Kashmir, ensuring that young entrepreneurs receive adequate support in their endeavors. "Under PM Modi's leadership, schemes like Mudra Yojana and Startup India are paving the way for a brighter future for our youth," he added. Rajesh Gupta and Deepak Gupta expressed their gratitude to Randhawa for his encouragement and support, vowing to deliver premium quality products and exemplary customer service.

## Dr Jitendra Singh chairs DISHA meeting at Ramban

JJ NEWS SERVICE  
RAMBAN, DECEMBER 29

Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Earth Sciences, Science and Technology, MoS, PMO, Dr Jitendra Singh, today chaired the District Development Coordination and Monitoring Committee Meeting (DISHA) here to review the status of ongoing projects and public welfare schemes.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Jitendra Singh called for maximising awareness at the local level about the government schemes like PM Surya Garh Muft Bijili Yojana, PM Vishwakarma Yojana and Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana with focus on providing health coverage to all senior citizens aged 70 years and above. He said the former has twin objectives of providing free electricity to households by facilitating installation of rooftop solar panels and incentivising the beneficiaries to sell surplus power.

Underscoring the impor-



ance of PM Vishwakarma Yojana, the Union Minister said that it aims to uplift individuals skilled in various traditional crafts, thereby preserving India's rich cultural heritage. He said the initiative is also aimed at improving the quality and reach of handicraft products as well as ensuring that craftspeople are integrated with the domestic and global value chains.

Dr Jitendra Singh directed the officials and PRIs to work in close coordination for effective implementation of the schemes related to water, electricity, housing and other civic amenities. He said all out efforts must be made for ensuring

ease of living for inhabitants of far-flung areas of the district.

Dr Singh stated that the government is taking more steps to improve the educational infrastructure and medical facilities for the local populace.

The DISHA meeting was attended by DDC, Chairperson, Dr Shamshad Shan, MLA, Ramban, Arjun Singh Raju, Deputy Commissioner, Ramban, Baseer-Ul-Haq Chaudhary, DDC Councilors, and SSP, Kulbir Singh, ADDC, Roshan Lal, ADC, Varunjeet Singh Charak, ACR, S. Harpal Singh and CPO Dr. Shakeeb Ahmed Rather and other senior officers.

## Free Cricket Coaching for Budding Cricketers Around Anantnag: Advanced Training to Begin Soon



JJ NEWS SERVICE  
SRINAGAR 29 DECEMBER

Amir Hussain Lone, an armless cricketer from Kashmir, gained worldwide recognition a few years ago when cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar personally met him to encourage his incredible spirit. Now, with support from the Adani Foundation, Amir, who is also the Brand Ambassador for Aryans Group of Colleges, is set to realize his dream of establishing an Indoor Cricket Academy in his native district of Anantnag, Jammu & Kashmir.

At a press conference, Dr. Anshu Kataria, Founder of Aryans Group of Colleges, stated, "We have been associated with Amir for the past two years and have witnessed his passion and dedication towards fulfilling his dream. With this academy, talented children from Kashmir will have the opportunity to shine at the national level in cricket."

Rupesh K Singh Head, Corporate Affairs, Punjab & Haryana said that The Adani Foundation has contributed Rs 67.6 lakh towards the establishment of this academy. Despite having no arms, Amir has captured hearts worldwide with his skills and determination. Expressing gratitude to the Adani Group, Amir shared that the academy will be built on two kanals of land in his village, Bijbehara, Anantnag. Once completed, it will provide free coaching to around 100 children.

Amir stated, "The academy will be ready by March next year. Heavy snowfall in the region poses challenges, especially for players, and that's why we decided to create an indoor facility. The academy will feature two turf pitches inside the building, and players will also have the option to practice outdoors when the weather permits. This setup will ensure uninterrupted training regardless

of the season."

Amir's story is one of unparalleled determination. Recalling his journey since 2013, he said, "I always dreamed of playing cricket at the top level, but an accident at the age of eight left me without both arms. However, I never gave up. I represented Jammu & Kashmir in the Divyang (disabled) category. My wife even sold her jewelry to support my passion for cricket."

A few years ago, Amir's videos showcasing him bowling with his feet and batting by holding the bat with his neck went viral on social media, earning him praise from cricketering legend Sachin Tendulkar and other prominent personalities from various fields.

With his dream finally coming true, Amir's academy is set to become a hub of talent, inspiring young cricketers not just in his village but across the surrounding districts of Kashmir.

## "Shopian's Nehal Zubair Strikes Silver at Junior World Pencak Silat Championship 2024"

JJ NEWS SERVICE  
SRINAGAR, DEC 29

Nehal Zubair, a rising star from Shopian, Jammu and Kashmir, has brought glory to India by winning a silver medal at the prestigious 5th Junior World Pencak Silat Championship 2024, held at the ADNEC Centre in Abu Dhabi from December 18 to 22.

Competing against the world's top young athletes, Nehal's extraordinary performance showcased her dedication, skill, and determination, solidifying her position as one of India's brightest prospects in the sport of Pencak Silat.

This silver medal marks a landmark achievement for Indian Pencak Silat, highlighting the growing prominence of the sport in a country. Nehal's exceptional journey from Shopian to the global stage is a testament to her relentless hard work and the support she has received along the way.

Expressing his pride, Mohammad Iqbal, coach of the Indian Pencak Silat Federation, said: "Nehal's silver medal is a momentous occasion for Indian sports. Her dedication and passion for Pencak Silat are truly commendable. This achievement will inspire many young athletes to take up the sport and aim for excellence."

The championship drew participants from around the globe, making Nehal's victory even more significant. Her achievement has been widely celebrated across India, with top officials and sports administrators applaud-

ing her success.

Shri Sarmad Hafeez, Secretary to the Government for Youth Services and Sports, J&K, congratulated Nehal, saying: "This is a proud moment not just for Shopian or Jammu and Kashmir, but for the entire nation. Nehal's accomplishment will inspire countless young athletes to dream big and work hard to achieve their goals."

Nuzhat Gul, Secretary of the J&K Sports Council, also extended her heartfelt congratulations and reiterated the council's commitment to supporting young athletes in the region.

The J&K Sports Council played a vital role in sponsoring the Indian team's participation in the championship, enabling athletes like Nehal to compete on a global platform. Their support underscores the importance of nurturing young talent and providing them with opportunities to excel in international arenas.

Nehal Zubair's achievement is a beacon of hope and inspiration for young athletes across the country. Her success in Abu Dhabi is not only a personal milestone but also a moment of pride for the nation. As Pencak Silat continues to gain recognition in India, Nehal's journey serves as a powerful example of what can be accomplished with hard work and determination.

As she returns home with her silver medal, Nehal carries the hopes and dreams of a new generation of Indian athletes eager to follow in her footsteps.



Col Ranveer Singh Jamwal, an international mountaineer and three-times Everest Summitee today called on Lieutenant Governor Shri Manoj Sinha.

The Lieutenant Governor lauded Col Jamwal's extraordinary achievements in the field of mountaineering and bringing pride to J&K and the nation. Col Jamwal also presented a coffee table book "Har Shikhar Tiranga".

The book chronicles the unparalleled journey of climbing the highest peaks across the country. This mission was conceptualized and led by Col Jamwal.

## FROM THE FRONT PAGE...

### Prime objective of...

project-based learning so that children develop the ability to use their skills in different situations.

The seventh resolution is to ensure regular training and capacity building of teachers and provide them the opportunity to learn new things continuously," the Lieutenant Governor said.

The Lieutenant Governor further impressed upon the youth to imbibe the ideals of Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Dr APJ Abdul Kalam.

National Education Policy 2020 is a great opportunity for you. Kindle the curiosity within you and discover new frontiers in real life through independent thinking, creativity and problem solving, he said.

The Lieutenant Governor felicitated the students who excelled in academics and diverse fields. He also released the latest edition of school magazine.

Prof Manoj Singh Gaur, Director, IIT Jammu; Sh Harpreet Singh, Chairman, Jammu Sanskriti School; Ms. Rohini Aima, Principal of the school, teachers, students and parents were present.

Ramesh Kumar, Divisional Commissioner Jammu; Sh Sachin Kumar Vaishya, Deputy Commissioner Jammu, heads of various institutions and senior officials of Civil and Police Administration were also present on the occasion.

### After the snowfall: Chief...

supplies.

The Chief Minister also held one-on-one discussions with Deputy Commissioners of the Kashmir Valley and snow-affected districts of Jammu Division.

The DCs provided updates on the current situation and detailed the measures taken to restore normalcy, particularly in challenging weather conditions.

During the meeting, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah urged officers to remain sensitive and responsive to public grievances, directing them to identify gaps in service delivery and take immediate corrective actions.

He emphasized the need to minimize hardships faced by the common people and praised the dedication of the Divisional Commissioners, Deputy Commissioners and employees who have been working tirelessly in adverse climatic conditions.

Looking ahead, the Chief Minister called for enhanced preparedness in light of the snowfall forecast for the following week.

He instructed officials to improve action plans based on lessons learnt from recent weather events.

The Chief Minister emphasized the need to prioritize snow clearance on link roads, inner lanes, and bylanes to ensure accessibility for residents.

He directed the Jal Shakti Department (PHE) to address water supply issues promptly and enhance the deployment of water tankers in affected areas.

CM Omar Abdullah instructed Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC) and concerned departments to

implement measures to prevent waterlogging in low-lying areas.

Stressing the importance of smooth traffic movement on the National Highway, the Chief Minister called for enhanced coordination between the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), Traffic Police, and District Administrations.

Chief Minister stressed the importance of continuous monitoring and synergy among various departments to avoid any inconvenience to the public.

Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo, Additional Chief Secretary to the Chief Minister Dheeraj Gupta, Divisional Commissioner Kashmir Vijay Kumar Bidhuri, Divisional Commissioner Jammu and other senior civil administration officials also participated in the meeting virtually.

### 60% terrorists killed...

as one of the biggest hubs for exporting terrorists to almost all parts of the world with a main focus on India.

Islamabad has tried to give a strong push to terrorism in the Jammu region since last year but the activities of the Pakistani terrorists in this area of Jammu region including districts in Rajouri, Poonch, Doda, Kishtwar, Kathua and Reasi govern been curbed with additional deployment of troops and filling up of the vacuum created thereafter withdrawal of the Uniform Force of Rashtriya Rifles from there for the China border deployments.

Army Chief Gen Upendra Dwivedi and Northern Army Commander Lt Gen MV Suchendra Kumar have been laying focus on eliminating the terrorists from the area looked after by the White Knight Corps of the force.

### Maha Kumbh's message...

he added.

Citing another success on the health front, the prime minister referred to a study in the medical journal Lancet that said the chances of starting cancer treatment on time in India have increased.

He said the 'Ayushman Bharat Yojana' has played a big role in getting cancer patients timely treatment.

"Because of this scheme, 90 per cent of cancer patients have been able to start their treatment on time. Due to lack of money, poor patients would earlier shy away from getting tested for cancer and its treatment. Now, the Ayushman Bharat Yojana has become a big support for them," he said.

"There is only one mantra to fight cancer - Awareness, Action and Assurance. Awareness means awareness of cancer and its symptoms, Action means timely diagnosis and treatment, Assurance means the belief that every help is available for patients," he added.

Turning to India's animation films, TV serials and movies, he said their popularity underscores the potential of the country's creative industry.

Noting that the year 2024 marked the 100th anni-

versary of many great film personalities, including Raj Kapoor and Mohammad Rafi, he said a great opportunity is on the way to showcase India's creative talent to the world.

Next year, for the first time, the World Audio Visual Entertainment Summit i.e. WAVES summit is going to be organised in our country, he added.

This summit is an important step towards making India a hub of global content creation, he said the "creators' economy" is bringing in new energy in the country's target of emerging as a USD 5 trillion economy.

During the broadcast, Modi highlighted the increasing appeal of Indian traditions and culture, noting that a Tamil teaching programme in Fiji is drawing a lot of interest.

He said a unique Olympics has started in Bastar, long associated with violent Maoist activities.

"A new revolution is coming to Bastar through the first Bastar Olympics. This is taking place in the region which was once a witness to Maoist violence. The mascot of the Bastar Olympics are - 'Wild Water Buffalo' and 'Hill Myna'. It reflects the rich culture of Bastar," he said.

In the very first instance, 1.65 lakh players from seven districts have participated in the Bastar Olympics in athletics, archery, badminton, football, hockey, kho-kho and volleyball among other sports.

Modi asked people to encourage such sporting events in their regions, saying sports not only lead to physical development but are also a powerful medium to connect society with the sportsman spirit.

He also spoke of the "vegetable revolution" in Odisha's Kalahandi, one known for its grim tales of poverty and people's migration, and lauded farmers.

### Kashmir's Gulmarg...

Kashmir, logged a minimum temperature of minus 0.4 degree Celsius, while Konibal in Parampora recorded a low of minus 1.0 degree Celsius, the weather office said.

Kupwara in north Kashmir registered minus 1.0 degrees Celsius while in south Kashmir, Kokernag recorded 1.8 degrees Celsius, the office said.

Kashmir is currently under the grip of 'Chillai-Kalan' - the harshest period of winter - which began on December 21.

During the 40 days of Chillai-Kalan, the chances of snowfall are the highest and the temperature drops considerably.

It ends on January 30 next year, but the cold wave continues even after that. The 40 days are followed by a 20-day 'Chillai-Khur'd' (small cold) and a 10-day 'Chillai-Bachha' (baby cold).

### Katra remains shut...

supporting this protest," Sharma said.

He added that the BJP has raised the issue with Union Home Minister Amit Shah and other leaders in Delhi.

"Our representatives went to Delhi and the home minister has taken cognisance of the issue. The leadership has been asked to find a solution. That is why I am here with you," he said.

The Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Sangharsh Samiti initially called for the shutdown on December 25. On Friday night, it extended the bandh by 72 hours to press its demands, including shelving the proposed ropeway project and releasing the detained protesters.

Five men are sitting on a hunger strike, demanding the release of the 18 samiti members detained during a protest march against the proposed ropeway project.

Several protesters, including two samiti leaders - Bhupinder Singh and Sohan Chand - were detained by police during Wednesday's protest and taken away in a police vehicle.

The Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board announced plans last month to install a ropeway to facilitate access to the temple for senior citizens, children and others who find the 13-km track to the cave shrine challenging.

The proposed Rs 250-crore ropeway project will connect Tarakote Marg to Sanji Chhat, leading to the cave shrine in Reasi district.

### Jammu-Srinagar highway...

along the highway are being cleared, he added.

"Passenger traffic is plying on the highway. Commuters are advised to follow lane discipline, as overtaking may cause congestion," J-K Traffic Police said in an advisory.

It also advised commuters to drive cautiously, as the road is slippery between Banihal and Qazigund.

The Mughal Road, which serves as an alternative link to the Kashmir Valley from Jammu region's Poonch district, remained shut due to snow accumulation, officials said.

Similarly, the Sinthan Pass in Kishtwar has been closed for vehicular traffic due to heavy snowfall.

In addition, the Sonamarg-Kargil inter-UT road and the Bhandarwah-Chamba inter-state road are also closed owing to heavy snowfall.

Efforts are underway to clear these roads and make them trafficable, officials said.

### Ex-PM Manmohan Singh's...

However, BJP leader Manjinder Singh Sirsa lamented that there was no one from the Gandhi family when the ashes of the former prime minister were immersed.

"It's a sad moment for all of us. However, it's true that no one was there from the Gandhi family today (during the immersion of Singh's ashes)... Today, when there was no camera, there was no one from Congress. This is a sad thing. Manmohan Singh is highly respected," Sirsa said.

## Jammu witnessing transformation in sports culture: Arvind Gupta

JINNEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU, DEC 29

Arvind Gupta, senior BJP leader and MLA Jammu West, today attended a weightlifting and arm wrestling competition held at the Muscular Fitness Zone Gym in Jammu. The event, organized by fitness enthusiasts Raju Sharma, Sidharth Sharma, and Vikas Kumar, aimed to inspire youth towards fitness and promote sportsmanship.

The competition witnessed an overwhelming turnout of young athletes eager to showcase their strength and talent. The presence of renowned athletes, including Mr. Asia Deepak Sharma and Mr. India Vikas Thappa, added immense value to the event. Both sports icons shared their personal journeys and experiences, encouraging the participants to push their limits and aim for excellence. Their motivational speeches emphasized the importance of discipline, perseverance, and hard work in achieving success, both in sports and life.

MLA Arvind Gupta, in his address to the participants and audience, com-



mended the organizers for their efforts in promoting fitness culture in Jammu. He mentioned that Prime Minister Modi, while addressing the nation during his Mann Ki Baat, gave the slogan #FitIndiaMovement, urging the youth to prioritize their health and well-being.

The senior BJP leader highlighted the significance of sports in shaping the future of youth and praised the growing interest in bodybuilding and strength sports in the region. "Jammu is witnessing a transformation in its sports culture, and events like these play a pivotal role in nurturing talent and creating a healthier, more active society," he said.

Arvind emphasized the alarming rise of drug abuse among the youth and stressed the dire need to channel their energy into positive activities like sports. He stated, "In today's world, it is crucial to guide our youth away from harmful habits and towards healthy and constructive outlets. Sports provide not only physical fitness but also instill values like discipline, teamwork, and perseverance."

The senior BJP leader also expressed his commitment to supporting initiatives that encourage the youth to pursue fitness and sports, noting that the Modi government is dedicated to providing better

facilities and platforms for aspiring athletes. He called upon parents, teachers, and community leaders to collaborate in creating a supportive environment that encourages young people to embrace fitness and sportsmanship, ultimately shaping them into responsible and successful individuals. Prominent personalities such as Bhuvnesh Gupta and MLA Arvind Gupta underscored the importance of such competitions in fostering camaraderie and sportsmanship. The event concluded with an award ceremony to recognize the outstanding performances of the participants, with winners receiving accolades and certificates.

## Kids Planet Pre-School celebrated Annual Day

JINNEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU, DEC 29

Kids Planet Pre-School, celebrated its much-awaited Annual Day Function with grandeur and enthusiasm at the Government Polytechnic College Auditorium, Bikram Chowk, Jammu. Themed "Rainbow - Unity in Diversity," the event was a vibrant showcase of cultural harmony, inclusivity, and the creative talents of tiny toddlers. The school management, led by Chairman Ravi Gupta as the Chief Guest, Director Kanchan Gupta as the Guest of Honour graced the occasion with their presence.

Principal Shilpa Kalsotra extended a warm welcome to all dignitaries and parents, emphasizing the school's commitment to holistic education and fostering a vibrant, inclusive community for its students," she added. The atmosphere was filled with excitement as the program unfolded, featuring a series of captivating performances that left the audience enthralled.

The celebrations began with a Ganesh Vandana by students followed by melodious welcome song



by the teachers, setting a joyful tone for the day. The graceful Ganesh Vandana, was invoking blessings for the success of the event. A Qawwali performance mesmerized the audience, while the Play Group (Papa, Jingle Bell, New Year) delighted everyone with their charming festive songs. Audience also enjoyed the regional soulful songs of Dogri and Punjabi performed by the little champs. The event also celebrated the students' achievements through prize distributions, which were interspersed between the performances. Levels II and III showcased their patriotism with a stirring Patriotic Song and a Mobile Act that highlighted mod-

ern-day social messages. Karate demonstrations by Levels II and III exhibited the students' physical agility and discipline, leaving the audience in awe.

A special highlight of the event was the Mother's Dance, a heartwarming performance that celebrated the bond between children and their mothers. The day concluded with a vote of thanks delivered by Chairman Mr. Ravi Gupta, who expressed gratitude to the dignitaries, parents, and staff for their unwavering support in making the event a resounding success.

The theme "Rainbow Unity in Diversity" resonated throughout the program, symbolizing the harmonious blend of cultures and the inclusive ethos of Kids Planet Pre-School.

The performances reflected the school's dedication to nurturing young minds, encouraging creativity, and instilling values of unity and togetherness. Parents and guests left the venue with hearts full of pride and joy, cherishing the unforgettable moments shared during the event.

## J&K Students Association Writes to HM Amit Shah, Seeks One-Time Age Relaxation in JKPSI Recruitment

JINNEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU, DEC 28

The Jammu & Kashmir Students Association (JKSA) on Sunday has written to Union Home Minister Amit Shah, seeking a one-time age relaxation for aspirants of the Jammu & Kashmir Police Sub-Inspector (JKPSI) recruitment process. The association has urged the Home Minister to raise the upper age limit to 32 years, ensuring fairness and equal opportunity for hundreds of aspirants who have been adversely affected by delays in the recruitment process.

Nasir Khuehami, National Convener of the Association, said that the current upper age limit of 28 years, specified in the latest recruitment notification, has disqualified many hard-working and deserving candidates. These aspirants have been preparing diligently for the opportunity but have been left ineligible due to unforeseen delays caused by court cases, administrative issues, and the disruptions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. He emphasized that the delays in the recruitment process have extended far beyond the anticipated timeline, resulting in significant challenges for candidates who now find themselves excluded due to age constraints. The current age limit for the recruitment process is set between 18 to 28 years. However, considering the typical age range for completing graduation in India is generally between 21 to 23 years, this limit excludes many deserving candidates. These delays have unfairly impacted those who, despite their qualifications and readiness, are now disqualified simply because of age.

In the letter, the association appealed to the Union Home Minister to consider granting a one-time age relaxation as a fair resolution to the issue. "We urge the Union Home Minister to raise the upper age limit to 32 years and provide a one-time relaxation. This step would address the concerns of affected candidates and ensure that deserving aspirants are not excluded due to circumstances beyond their control," the letter reads.

## Narinder releases devotional songs album, "Maa De Naam Wala Rang"

JINNEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU, DEC 29

Observing that music knows no boundaries, PDP RS Pura Jammu South constituency Narinder Sharma today said it binds the people in a unique cord and generates harmony in the society. "And, when music relates to spirituality, it directly touches souls and creates an aura free of tension and hatred", Sharma said while releasing devotional musical album, "Maa De Naam Wala Rang" sung by Sabbi Jogi. Music of Album has been given by Naresh Kanth, video by Bhupinder Productions, Choreography by Jimmy Jasotra, dance by JCM Dance Group, design by R Creative. Sharma lauded the efforts of Sabbi Jogi, saying his quest for devotional songs holds a promise to



be a leading artist in the near future, "Devotional music quenches the spiritual thirst of devotees", he said and wished the young singer a bright future. He said music plays pivotal role in preserving cultural and taking it beyond boundaries. Sharma said the young artists deserve all the encouragement by the organizations associated with promotion of art and culture besides the electronic channels. "The young artist deserves to be encouraged by providing her appropriate opportunity to showcase her talent on a bigger canvas", he

said exhorting Sabbi Jogi to aim high and strive for excellence. "Sabbi Jogi comes from a humble background which even lacks basic facilities but the laudable talent has given his state-wide exposure", Sharma said, hoping him to progress in the chosen field and making the State of Jammu and Kashmir proud. He said the State has no dearth of talent but the only need is to identify and polish it by expert hands. He also hoped that the album will inspire young artists of the State to explore their hidden talent and make their niche in the society.

JINNEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU, DEC 29

Former Deputy Mayor of Jammu & senior BJP leader Baldev Singh Billawaria kick started the development works at Gangyal in RS Pura-Jammu South constituency. Billawaria kick started

this development work following the directions of RS Pura-Jammu South MLA Dr Narinder Singh & approximately 12 lakh will be spent on it. In this development work, the construction work of lane and drain along with the installation of iron grating on the drains will be done

under the supervision of Jammu Municipal Corporation (JMC). Speaking on the occasion, Billawaria said that this was a long pending demand of the local people because the lanes and drains in the area were in dilapidated condition for a long time and the local residents were facing

a lot of problems while passing through these lanes. Billawaria further said that MLA Dr Narinder Singh has already started the construction work of about two lanes in Gangyal area and now on his directions, the construction work of other lanes has been started.

## OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, REW POONCH

### TERM NOTICE INVITING TENDER

e-NIT No. 240 of REW POONCH 2024-25 Dated:- 27-12-2024 6th Call

For & on behalf of the Lt. Governor of Jammu & Kashmir Union Territory, the Executive Engineer REW Division Poonch, as his representative invites tenders by e-tendering mode from approved and eligible contractors registered with J&K Union Territory Govt/CPWD/MES for the following work under:

S. No	Name of Work	Name of Division	Estt. Cost (Rs in lacs)	Cost of document (in Rs)	Earnest Money (in Rs)	Time Allowed for completion	Time and date of opening of tender	Class of Contractor	Position of Funds
1	Under Major Head 4055								
1	Balance work of Community Bunker Nr. H/o Mohd Rashid Moh. Sokar Pyt. Darabagial Block Poonch Under Major Head 4055 Year 2023-24 6th Call	Executive Engineer REW Division Poonch	4.24	300	8480	30 days	(1000 Hrs) on or after 04-01-2025 in the office of Executive Engineer REW Division Poonch	DEE	Partially Availab le/ Demanded
2	Balance work of Community Bunker Nr. H/o Nazar Din Moh. Sokar Pyt. Darabagial Block Poonch Under Major Head 4055 Year 2023-24 6th Call		4.24	300	8480	30 days			
3	Balance work of Community Bunker Nr. H/o Alaf Din and others Pyt. Darabagial Block Poonch Under Major Head 4055 Year 2023-24 6th Call		4.24	300	8480	30 days			
4	Balance work of Community Bunker Nr. H/o Mohd Rashid and others Pyt. Darabagial Block Poonch Under Major Head 4055 Year 2023-24 6th Call		4.24	300	8480	30 days			
5	Construction of Individual Bunker Nr. H/o Jamal Din S/o Kala W.No. 5 Pyt. Darabagial Block Poonch Under Major Head 4055 Year 2023-24 6th Call		3.15	300	6300	30 days			
6	Construction of Individual Bunker Nr. H/o Hassan Din S/o Kala Sokar Pyt. Darabagial Block Poonch Under Major Head 4055 Year 2023-24 6th Call		3.15	300	6300	30 days			
7	Construction of Individual Bunker Nr. H/o Ghulam Hussain S/o Mohd Din Pyt. Darabagial Block Poonch Under Major Head 4055 Year 2023-24 6th Call		3.15	300	6300	30 days			
8	Construction of Individual Bunker Nr. H/o Nazar Din S/o Mir Mohd Moh. Sokar Pyt. Darabagial Block Poonch Under Major Head 4055 Year 2023-24 6th Call		3.15	300	6300	30 days			
9	Construction of Individual Bunker Nr. H/o Mohd Rashid S/o Mir Mohd Sokar Pyt. Darabagial Block Poonch Under Major Head 4055 Year 2023-24 6th Call		3.15	300	6300	30 days			
10	Balance work of Individual Bunker Nr. H/o Abdul Hameed S/o Mohd Din W.No. 6 Pyt. Degwar Terwan Block Poonch Under Major Head 4055 Year 2023-24 6th Call		1.34	200	2680	30 days			
11	Balance work of Individual Bunker Nr. H/o Nazam Din S/o Imam Din Pyt. Darabagial Block Poonch Under Major Head 4055 Year 2023-24 6th Call		1.34	200	2680	30 days			

NOTE: The Contractors registered with DDC, Poonch in reference to GOVT. Order No: 238-F of 2021, Dated 07-09-2021 can participate upto an amount of Rs 3.00 Lacs, in local Panchayat works.

NOTE: No PRI member shall be allowed to take part in Tendering process

1	Date of Issue of Tender Notice	27-12-2024
2	Period of downloading of bidding documents	From 27-12-2024 to 03-01-2025, 1855 Hrs
3	Bid submission Start Date	27-12-2024 from 1800 Hrs onwards
4	Bid Submission End Date	03-01-2025 up to 1855 Hrs
5	Date & time of opening of Technical Bids (Online) (in case of holiday, the bid shall be opened on next day)	04-01-2025 on or after 1000 Hrs in the Office of the Executive Engineer REW, Poonch
6	Date & time of opening of Financial Bids (Online) (of only successful technical bidders)	To be notified after technical bid evaluation is completed

No:- XEN/REW/P/3637-44

Dated:- 27-12-2024

Executive Engineer  
Rural Engineering Wing  
Poonch

DIP/J-8695/24  
Date: 28-12-24



GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR  
OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT APPROPRIATE AUTHORITY PC & PNDDT ACT  
CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE JAMMU  
(Near MLA Hostel, Indira Chowk, Jammu-180001)  
E-Mail: cmojammu@gmail.com daapcpndtjmu@gmail.com

### NOTICE

All registered Ultrasound Clinics/ Centres/ Imaging Centres/ Genetic Clinics of Jammu District are directed to follow the below mentioned instructions and implement the norms in letter and spirit;

- Regularly file Form "F" online without any fail as per prescribed guidelines. The Proprietors shall ensure the regularity in filling Form "F" online which is mandatory under PC&PNDDT Act. Any violation shall invite action as warranted under rules.
- The Proprietors shall submit the form for renewal of registration along with requisite documents 30 days before the expiry of previous registration.
- The Ultrasound Centres/Clinics/ Imaging Centres/ Genetic Clinics shall ensure that public information in the languages Hindi, Urdu & English is displayed on board with size 3 Ft.\* 2 Ft. with white background and red paint with text "SEX SELECTION/DETERMINATION IS NOT DONE HERE, DISCLOSURE OF SEX OF THE FOETUS IS PROHIBITED UNDER LAW". Public information should be displayed on the four walls of waiting area/foot end of patient table, prominent areas of the Clinic/Centre/Imaging Centre/Genetic Clinic.

Sd/-  
District Appropriate Authority  
PC PNDDT Act, CMO Jammu

DIP/J-8682/24  
Date: 28-12-24

## EDITORIAL

## STPs flouting norms with impunity

The Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir's sewage treatment infrastructure is in dire straits, with most of its sewage treatment plants (STPs) operating in blatant violation of the National Green Tribunal's (NGT) stringent norms for effluent discharge. This environmental neglect poses a severe risk to human health and aquatic ecosystems, as untreated or poorly treated waste continues to contaminate rivers and other water bodies. As per certain media reports, the official data paints a grim picture. Out of 20 operational STPs in J&K, only 10 meet the permissible standards for Fecal Coliform Count, and a mere six meet the required physico-chemical parameters. The situation in Jammu city exemplifies this negligence. Of the four STPs—three at Bhagwati Nagar and one at Belicharana—only the 30 MLD STP is operational and compliant with standards. The other two Bhagwati Nagar plants (27 MLD and 10 MLD) remain non-functional due to disputes and delays, while the 4 MLD Belicharana plant is still undergoing trials despite its commissioning in April 2024. Srinagar fares no better. Major STPs, including those at Hazratbal, Habak, Nishat Laam, and Brarinambal, fail to meet the required standards for both Fecal Coliform Count and physico-chemical parameters. In Anantnag district, STPs at Mehandi Kadal, Pahalgam, and Nunwan share similar deficiencies. The lack of adherence to the NGT's prescribed limits for Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD), Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD), nitrogen, and total suspended solids underscores systemic apathy. Effluent discharge that fails to meet regulatory standards directly harms water quality, endangering human lives and aquatic ecosystems. Environmentalists have warned that such negligence allows untreated liquid waste to flow into rivers, threatening both biodiversity and public health. The NGT's 2019 directives, which mandated universal adherence to stricter norms for STPs, have been systematically ignored in J&K. The absence of penal action against responsible authorities only exacerbates the issue, signaling a lack of accountability and urgency. The failure of the 27 MLD STP at Bhagwati Nagar—attributed to disputes between the National Buildings Construction Corporation (NBCC) and a contractor—is emblematic of administrative inefficiency. Despite repeated interventions by the Urban Environment Engineering Department (UEED), the plant remains non-operational. The operational 30 MLD STP, constructed over 15 years ago, has exceeded its lifespan, now functioning at only two-thirds of its installed capacity. This reflects a broader trend of neglect, where aging infrastructure is neither upgraded nor adequately maintained. The ecological and public health ramifications of dysfunctional STPs demand immediate action. The steps which are imperative include strict enforcement of NGT norms, accountability and penal action, infrastructure modernization, transparent oversight and public awareness and involvement. The continued disregard for environmental norms in J&K's sewage treatment sector is not just an administrative lapse but an ethical failure that endangers public health and ecosystems. It is high time the concerned authorities act decisively to address this crisis. Anything less than a comprehensive overhaul of the current system would be an injustice to the people of J&K and the fragile environment they depend upon.

## India must stand firm against Sheikh Hasina's extradition

HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

Sheikh Hasina must not be sent back to Bangladesh in response to the note verbale received from that country's interim government calling for her extradition. Dhaka's move has followed the issue of an arrest warrant by Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) against her and a number of her former ministers, advisers, military and civil officials. The allegation? "Crimes against humanity and genocide". There are two broad reasons why India should not send her back. As prime minister of Bangladesh, she has been a steadfast friend of India whereas other heads of that country's government, except her father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, have tended to be unfriendly. Second, she will, by no means, receive a fair trial in Bangladesh and perhaps even be lynched, given the intense hostility of the current rulers of Bangladesh harbour towards her.

There will be solid legal basis for India's stand. Article 8 (1) (a) of the 'Treaty Between the Republic of India and the People's Republic of Bangladesh Relating to Extradition,' says that a person may not be extradited if "he satisfies the Requested State that it would, having regard to all the circumstances, be unjust or oppressive to extradite him" because, in the words of Article 8 (1) (A) (iii), the

accusations against him "have not been made in good faith in the interests of justice." Besides Article 8 (2) reads, "A person who has been convicted of an extradition offence may not be extradited therefor unless he was sentenced to imprisonment or other form of detention for a period of four months or more."

Sheikh Hasina has yet to be sentenced to any period of imprisonment or detention. Also, she can very well claim that it would be "unjust or oppressive" to extradite her because the accusation against her had not been made in "good faith in the interest of justice", and are a result of pure vindictiveness. That she would be justified in saying so becomes clear on considering the diatribes unleashed against her by the advisers of the interim government and the relentless persecution, including involving in hundreds of false cases, of Awami League's leaders and ministers in the party's government.

According to a report in The Daily Star carried under the headline, "No option but to succeed: Yunus" on August 18, 2024, Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus had said during a "Meet and Greet" session with foreign diplomats in Dhaka, "In their efforts to stay in power, the Sheikh Hasina dictatorship destroyed every institution of the country. Judiciary was broken. Democratic rights were suppressed through a brutal



decade-and-a-half long crackdown. Elections were rigged blatantly. Generations of young people grew up without exercising their voting rights. Banks were robbed with full political patronisation. And the state coffers were plundered by abusing power."

Referring to a proposed Awami League rally on November 10, 2024, Muhammad Yunus' press secretary, Shafiqul Alam, had written in a Facebook post on November 9, "The Awami League in its current form is a fascist party. There is no way this fascist party will be allowed to hold protests in Bangladesh. Anyone who would try to hold rally, gathering and processions by taking orders from the mass murderer and dictator Sheikh Hasina will face full force of the law enforcing agencies."

Leaders of the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement (ADSM), formed on July 1, 2024, to carry the students' struggle forward, and Jatiya Nagarik Committee (National Citizens Commit-

tee), formed on 8 September, 2024, to consolidate the movement's message and political goals, have spoken in a similar strident and denunciatory vein.

According to a report by Ashibul Islam Rifat in The Dhaka Tribune (23 October, 2024) appearing under the headline "Nahid: Awami League will never be allowed back into politics in our lifetime," Md Nahid Islam, an ADSM leader who is now advisor, in charge of information and broadcasting and other ministries, said at a discussion, that the Awami League's return to politics in the manner and ideology it previously adhered to would be tantamount to "a betrayal to the martyrs of the uprising. And certainly, as long as we are alive, we will not allow this to happen." Leaders of political parties like the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (Jamaat) have also denounced the Awami League.

One can argue that the ICT, and any other court

where Sheikh Hasina and other accused may be tried, will ignore such vituperations and pronounce its judgement on the basis of the evidence and arguments placed before it. A horse would guffaw on hearing this. The judiciary has been brought to heel through forced resignations and dismissals. The process began as early as August 10, 2024, when chief justice Obaidul Hassan of the Supreme Court and five judges of the appellate division, resigned as hundreds of students affiliated to the ADSM gathered on the court premises demanding that they quit, and threatened to besiege their residences if they did not.

On October 16, the new chief justice, Syed Refaat Ahmed, sent 12 High Court judges, appointed during the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League rule, on leave following a demonstration in the court premises by adherents of the ADSM led by Hasnat Abdullah and Sarjis Alam. According to a report in Bangladesh's The Business Standard on October 16 itself, announcing the plan, Hasnat Abdullah, had written in a Facebook post on October 15, "In demand of the resignation of the fascist judges of the Awami League, we will besiege the High Court tomorrow (Wednesday) at 11am."

The ICT itself was reconstituted on October 15, 2024, with Justice Md Golam Mortuza Majumder from the High Court

Division of Bangladesh Supreme Court as its new chairman, and Justice Md Shafiqul Alam Mahmud and retired District and Sessions Judge Md Mohitul Haque Enam Chowdhury as members of the panel.

The result is a pliant judiciary and the use of the justice system to persecute not only those associated with the Awami League but civil society activists, writers, journalists and human rights activists. A shocking example is the levelling of a false murder charge against a highly respected senior advocate of Bangladesh's Supreme Court, ZI Khan Panna. Referring to the case, The Daily Star wrote in an editorial titled "This weaponisation of legal cases must stop" and published on October 21, 2024, "Over the two months and a half since August 5, we have published multiple reports and editorials on the indiscriminate filing of such murder cases without any evidence, mostly implicating the leaders, activists, and suspected supporters of the Awami League regime. Even journalists and rights activists were not spared. In many cases, fabricated FIRs were filed. There were also instances of the names of accused in cases predating August 5 being replaced. This is nothing but a weaponisation of the legal process for harassment and political vendettas." Will Sheikh Hasina get justice in such a situation?

(The views expressed are personal)

## Hunger for power



APS MALHOTRA

I have come to seek your support and valuable vote, as I have decided to stand for re-election, declared the bespectacled, heavyset, middle-aged man-dressed in an off-white safari suit-rather pompously, as he stood with folded hands at the door of my house, surrounded by a bevy of churches and churches, who suitably nodded their head in unison. "Vote for which re-election?" I muttered under my breath, irritated at the uncalled-for intrusion into my privacy on a rather lazy Sunday morning. "I am the President" he replied sheepishly, maybe taken aback at my nonchalant reply. "I had decided not to stand for this year's election due to increased

professional and personal commitments-actually I had desired to give someone younger a chance to bear the responsibility, and take a backseat-but had to relent under the immense pressure from fellow residents, who want my leadership for a further period of three years" he continued, his voice a cocktail of benevolence and beneficence for his 'supporters', and the seasoned politician's chicanery.

"But isn't Mrs. Draupadi Murmu the President?" I retorted, further trying to pull his leg. "Malhotrajee, I am the President of our Resident Welfare Association (RWA) for the past several years," he said, flabbergasted, a tad angry and certainly deeply offended at my failure to recognize him, and worse, acknowl-

edge his self-perceived exalted status. Although I had recognised him the moment he pressed the doorbell of my house, and I opened the front door to face him, my innate aversion to people who like to throw their weight around and flaunt uncalled-for appellations came forth with all its bitterness.

Nonetheless, realizing that the man was getting increasingly exasperated at my manoeuvrings, I

salvaged the situation by promising to cast my vote in his favour and profusely apologized to him for my failure to identify his 'Excellency', with the pretext that my better half is the face of our family for outside interactions, while I busy myself in mundane things, like reading and writing. Not too surprisingly, denizens of my beloved Dilli, sitting on the centre of power since the dawn of history, have a deeply

ingrained fascination for posts and titles-which proliferate dime a dozen-and take a macho and perverse pride in flaunting them, with the same exuberance with which a child displays his or her toy, albeit not with the same innocence.

This fact is borne out in the form of roadside boards and car number plates, which often bear vague titles-such as 'Secretary, Youth Media Cell, ABC party, B-block, Village XYZ'. A carryforward from the era of the Mughals and British imperialists, this is a desperate shot to seek the much-desired VVIP status, at least in the circle one operates in. Thus, it is not unknown to find members of RWAs who run virtual fiefdoms in their associations, maybe as recompense for the voluntary service rendered

in serving the community. The perks could include a free car wash and laundry facility, use of funds near the residence where the self-styled Maharajas live, et al.

One can only speculate as to what would happen if this manic lure of titles and appellations invaded the next, and perhaps the last bastion of community living, the home. Then, it would be no surprise to see name boards outside individual residences read like this: 1/103, Beverly Park: APS Malhotra, President; Sonia Malhotra Vice President; Dr. Mehak Malhotra, Secretary (in absentia). In families with matriarchal tendencies, the designations could be reversed. Well, worth a thought!

(The author is a freelance writer; views are personal)

## Unlocking economic potential: Bridging the gender gap in public procurement

ELIZABETH A VAZQUEZ

How much of the goods and services purchased by government departments and public sector enterprises come from women-owned businesses? This crucial question is rarely asked, and it underscores the need for gender-responsive procurement policies in India and across South Asia. With government procurement "accounting for an average of 12 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in OECD countries, and up to 30 per cent of GDP in many developing countries," the untapped economic potential for women entrepreneurs to contribute as suppliers of solutions to governments is immense. Yet, globally, women-owned enterprises still win only 1 per cent of this significant public procurement market. WEConnect International is actively

working to bridge this gap. Our efforts are making headway, especially in countries such as India, where policy frameworks are beginning to reflect a greater emphasis on gender inclusivity.

The central government has increasingly prioritised women-centric policies, evident from the substantial rise in gender budget allocations, which is another way to support women and girls in addition to buying their products and services. For example, in

2013-14, Rs 97,134 crore was earmarked for women's welfare and empowerment. By 2024-25, this figure had reached Rs 3.27 lakh crore, marking a 19 per cent increase over the actual gender budget expenditure of 2023-24 and a 218.8 per cent increase since 2013-14. For 2024, the Gender Budget accounts for 6.5 per cent of the Union Budget, the



highest since the Gender Budget Statement was introduced in 2005-06.

The Statement serves as a vital tool for ministries reviewing programmes from a gender perspective to ensure that more resources are being allocated to benefit women and girls. In the last year (2023-24), the actual expenditure on gender budgeting was 16 per cent higher (Rs 2.75 lakh crore) than the total

budgeted amount (Rs 2.38 lakh crore).

The Indian government's Public Procurement Policy for Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) Order, 2018, exemplifies this progress. The policy mandates that every central ministry, department, and PSU must procure at least 25 per cent of their needs from MSEs, with 3 per cent specifically reserved for

women-owned micro and small enterprises. There has been progress since the mandated 3 per cent procurement target for women-owned MSEs was introduced in 2018. Public procurement from these enterprises has risen from almost zero in 2017-18 to 1.8 per cent in 2023-24.

The number of women-owned (owned and controlled by women having the minimum financial

interest of 51 per cent of the capital and with women constituting at least 51 per cent of generated employment) MSEs benefiting from public procurement grew from 1,410 (accounting for Rs 232.56 crore) to 21,128 (Rs 3056.4 crore) in six years.

While the evidence is encouraging, there are still gaps and challenges that, if addressed, could help India achieve a more gender-inclusive public procurement ecosystem. For example, there is currently no independent body to resolve complaints in the procurement system, leaving unhappy bidders with only two options: filing complaints directly with the purchasing entity or taking them to arbitration or court as outlined in the General Financial Rules (GFR) 2017.

Generally, there is a pressing need for transparency, well-defined processes, and a robust

mechanism for addressing grievances in tender and procurement procedures so that women-owned businesses receive constructive feedback if their bids are unsuccessful. This would enable them to refine their future proposals and compete more effectively. Such measures would help mitigate biases in tendering and procurement processes that disproportionately disadvantage women-owned enterprises. The government could also pass procurement legislation to standardise bidding processes using a central law that sets national standards and state laws that fit specific needs, with the central government providing comprehensive oversight.

Public authorities could also sensitise officials on the need to counteract gender biases that may influence the design of procurement processes. A strong starting point

would be to appoint more women to oversee public procurement in government departments. Public procurement from women-owned enterprises in India over the past six years has grown at an average annual growth rate of 70.5 per cent, while the number of beneficiary women entrepreneurs has increased at an average annual rate of 77 per cent because the baseline was close to zero. In 2023-24, total public procurement in India reached Rs 1.70 lakh crore, highlighting a growing opportunity for women to engage with the expanding public procurement market in the world's fastest-growing economy.

(The writer is CEO and Co-Founder of WEConnect International. With inputs from Eroschan Alagaretnam, Regional Director for South Asia, WEConnect International. Views are personal)

## Study says ozone therapy promising new treatment for sepsis-induced lung injury

AGENCIES  
NEW DELHI, DEC 29

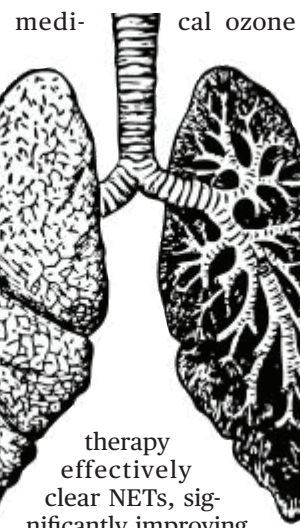
Sepsis, a severe and often fatal complication of infection, is a leading cause of both acute lung injury (ALI) and acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS). Now, researchers report medical ozone therapy as a promising new treatment for sepsis-induced ALI.

This innovative approach could significantly improve survival rates and lung function in preclinical models, offering hope for patients with limited treatment options, according to the study from Nanjing Medical University in China.

lular traps (NETs) play a central role in the progression of sepsis, as they are involved in trapping pathogens but can also trigger excessive inflammation, exacerbating lung injury.

The complexity of sepsis-induced ALI, driven by the interplay among inflammation, immune dysregulation, and coagulation, calls for innovative therapeutic strategies to better manage this critical condition.

The study, published in the Journal of Biomedical Research, detailed how



therapy effectively clear NETs, significantly improving survival rates and lung function in mice suffering from sepsis-induced ALI. This work represents a critical step forward in the search for new treatments

for this deadly condition. The study provides an in-depth examination of the mechanisms behind ozone therapy's therapeutic effects on sepsis-induced ALI.

"Our research demonstrates that medical ozone therapy could dramatically improve the management of sepsis-induced ALI.

This represents a promising new approach to critical care that could lead to better outcomes for patients suffering from sepsis," said Dr. Wen-Tao Liu, the principal investigator of the study.

The implications of this study are far-reaching.

If subsequent research confirms these results in human trials, medical ozone therapy could become a viable and effective treatment for sepsis-induced lung injury, a condition currently with few treatment options.

Ozone therapy's potential to improve survival and lung function could transform the management of sepsis, offering new hope for patients who face a bleak prognosis.

The study authors noted that as this promising therapy advances through further research, it may become a cornerstone in the fight against sepsis, reshaping how we treat this life-threatening condition.

## Staying single in life can have economic, medical disadvantages: Study

AGENCIES  
NEW DELHI, DEC 29

People who prefer to stay single all their life could be at a disadvantage both economically and medically than those who are married or in a long-term relationship, finds a study.

The study, published in the journal Psychological Science, reveals people who stay single also have lesser satisfaction in life compared to those in relationships. It showed that single people have different personality traits compared to partnered people.

These findings point to the need for developing helpful networks catered to single people. This is especially crucial as people get older and may

become more reliant on others, said the team from the University of Bremen in Germany.

"When there are differences, they might be especially important in elderly people who face more health issues and financial issues," said Julia Stern, one of the lead authors and a senior researcher at the varsity.

"They need more help, and the help is usually the partner," she added.

In the study, her team compared 77,000 Europeans who are both single and partnered individuals on life satisfaction ratings and the Big Five personality traits -- openness to experience, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism.

In addition to lower life satisfaction scores, life-long singles were found to be less extroverted, less conscientious, and less open to experience, compared to partnered people.

Further, the team found that single women scored higher on life satisfaction than single men, while the elderly tended to be happier with their singlehood status than middle-aged singles. Singles may grow happier with age, but their lower scores compared to partnered people are still worrying, said the team suggested developing new kinds of programmes to prevent loneliness that consider these personality traits and help older singles meet like-minded people.

## Digital consultations not sufficient for treatment of tonsillitis: Study

AGENCIES  
NEW DELHI, DEC 29

Even as digital healthcare consultations are becoming more common, a study showed it may not be enough for a safe assessment of tonsillitis.

Tonsillitis is a painful infection of the tonsils -- two lymph node-rich glands in the back of the throat. Symptoms of tonsillitis include swollen tonsils, sore throat, and difficulty swallowing.

The study showed that digital assessment may not be reliable, thus increasing the risk of over- or under-treatment of a sore throat.

As tonsillitis is commonly treated with antibiotics, digital assessment may not be as reliable as physical examinations in determining whether antibiotic treatment is warranted,



said the team from the University of Gothenburg in Sweden.

To determine whether a patient needs antibiotics, doctors use the so-called Centor Criteria -- fever, tender, and swollen lymph nodes in the angles of the jaw, and inspection of the tonsils. However, it has been unclear how well these criteria can be

assessed during digital healthcare consultations compared to traditional in-person consultations, said the researchers.

"Our study shows that although digital healthcare consultations are convenient for many patients, they are not reliable enough to assess tonsillitis. To ensure a correct diagnosis and

treatment, it is still important to conduct a physical examination," said Patrycja Woldan-Gradalska, a doctoral student at Sahlgrenska Academy at the varsity.

The study, published in the journal Infectious Diseases, included 189 patients who sought care at healthcare clinics and urgent care clinics in Sweden, between January 2020 and October 2023.

Each patient in the study underwent two assessments: a digital medical assessment via video and a physical examination conducted by another doctor.

The results show that digital healthcare consultations are not sufficient to assess some of the most important criteria, such as tonsil inspection and lymph node examination.

## Study shows flu vaccine effective against severe illness in kids

AGENCIES  
NEW DELHI, DEC 29

Influenza vaccine is effective for preventing severe influenza illness, including hospitalisation among children, according to a study.

The study led by researchers from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) showed having at least one dose of influenza vaccine was estimated to be over 50 per cent effective in protecting children against influenza-related emergency department and hospital visits.

"Vaccination is one of the most effective ways to protect children against influenza and its complications, including severe illness and hospitalisation," said the researchers in the paper.



"Improving vaccine uptake in children may reduce influenza illness and, subsequently, emergency department and hospital visits in a time of increased respiratory virus co-circulation," they added.

For the study, published online in the JAMA Network Open, the team analysed data from 15,728 children aged 6 months through 17 years who presented for care with acute respiratory illness.

About 17.2 per cent of participants had positive influenza tests, while 82.8 per cent had negative.

Overall, 49.5 per cent of the children in the influenza test-positive and test-negative groups were vaccinated.

Among children of all ages, receiving at least one influenza vaccine dose was estimated to have vaccine effectiveness of 55.7 per cent for preventing influenza-associated emergency department visits or

hospitalizations. Across severity levels, the estimated vaccine effectiveness was similar: 52.8, 52.3, and 50.4 per cent for emergency department visits, non-critical hospitalisation, and critical hospitalisation, respectively.

Notably, the estimated influenza vaccine effectiveness was found to be the highest among children from 6 months to 8 years of age, ages at which children are at the highest risk for severe illness.

"These findings indicate that it is important for children to receive an annual influenza vaccine to protect against all levels of influenza illness severity, ranging from emergency department visits to critical hospitalised illness, during the influenza season," the team said.

## Punjab Govt Disburses Rs 4532.60-cr in pensions, Empowers women through employment, health initiatives

AGENCIES  
CHANDIGARH, DEC 29

Punjab Government has made significant strides in ensuring the welfare of women, children, and senior citizens, said the state Social Security, Women, and Child Development Minister Dr Baljit Kaur on Friday while announcing that up to November 2024, the Government distributed pensions worth Rs 4532.60 crore to approximately 34.09 lakh beneficiaries under the Old Age Pension and financial assistance schemes.

Beneficiaries receive Rs 1500 monthly, with funds disbursed transparently via the public financial management system, she said.

Highlighting the government's free bus travel scheme for women, Dr Baljit Kaur said: "Over one crore women benefit from

free travel monthly, promoting self-confidence and security."

In December 2024, the Government launched the "Health, Hygiene, and Awareness Camps" initiative to enhance women's employment opportunities and health awareness. The first camp in Sri Muktsar Sahib saw seven companies interview 209 women, of which 28 were hired. Similar camps in Barnala, Gurdaspur, and Hoshiarpur yielded remarkable results. In Barnala, 370 women participated, 241 were shortlisted, and eight received job offers on the spot. IBM and Microsoft provided free training opportunities, while Red Cross initiatives and the PNB Rural Self-Employment Training Institute raised awareness of self-employment loans.

Gurdaspur's mega placement camp saw 465 participants, with 356 women

securing jobs across sectors like banking, textiles, and wellness. In Hoshiarpur, 204 women were hired, and 412 shortlisted from over 1,500 attendees.

Dr Baljit Kaur also highlighted the success of the Matru Vandana Yojana, which disbursed Rs 48.55 crore to nearly 1.3 lakh pregnant and lactating women in 2024. Efforts to combat malnutrition yielded significant results, with stunting rates dropping from 22.08 percent to 17.65 percent, and underweight rates from 13.58 percent to 5.57 percent between 2022 and 2024.

The Minister emphasized the government's commitment to inclusive growth, citing the establishment of state and district-level branches under the Hub for Empowerment of Women initiative to ensure effective implementation of welfare schemes.

## COOKING GARLIC, ONIONS AT HIGH HEAT MAY BE HARMFUL TO YOUR HEART: STUDY

AGENCIES  
NEW DELHI, DEC 29

Cooking garlic and onions in vegetable oil at high temperatures can generate trans-fatty acids (TFA) and can prove to be detrimental to heart health, claims a study by Japanese researchers.

TFAs are harmful fats that can accumulate along artery walls, restricting blood flow and increasing the risk of heart attacks.

While TFAs are commonly present in processed foods, evidence suggests that they can also be created at home during cooking. Studies indicate that unsaturated fatty acids (UFAs), usually considered beneficial, can undergo trans-isomerisation -- a molecular reconfiguration that transforms them into TFAs when



heated at 150 degrees Celsius or higher.

To explore, researchers from Meijo University assessed the role of isothiocyanates and polysulfides -- sulphur-containing compounds found in vegetables like garlic, leeks, onions, scallions, and shallots -- in promoting the trans-isomerisation of vegetable UFAs during

online in the journal Food Research International, showed that sulphur compounds significantly promote heat-induced trans-isomerisation of UFAs in vegetable oils. This occurs especially when cooking temperatures are above 140 degrees Celsius.

Further, the team also assessed the role of antioxidants such as alpha-tocopherol in reducing the isomerisation of UFAs in triglycerides like triolein and trilinolein.

While the addition of antioxidants significantly reduced the promotion of UFA's isomerisation by isothiocyanates, they did little to inhibit the promotion of isomerisation by polysulfides.

"This explains that cooking polysulfide-rich vegetables such as garlic and onions in vegetable oil

at high temperatures can generate TFAs. The study demonstrates that garlic and onions significantly promote the trans-isomerisation of UFAs," said the team led by Dr. Masaki Honda at Meijo University.

On the other hand, the release of TFAs under normal cooking conditions is minimal.

"Cooking with ingredients rich in natural sulphur compounds may increase the risk of TFA intake," the researchers said.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), TFAs are responsible for over 278,000 annual deaths worldwide. The global health body recommends that TFA consumption should be limited to less than 1 per cent of daily energy intake.

## HEALTH MINISTER INSPECTS RIMS, ORDERS TO IMPROVE AT THE EARLIEST

AGENCIES  
RANCHI, DEC 29

Health Minister Dr Irfan Ansari today inspected the Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences and Hospital and said that the condition of Jharkhand's largest government hospital is very bad. During the inspection, the Minister found many closed rooms and faulty machines in the hospital. He reprimanded

the hospital management and instructed to open these rooms and use the machines.

The Minister saw that the floors are broken in many places in the hospital and there are not enough beds available for the patients. He expressed deep displeasure over the situation.

Dr Irfan Ansari said that the Chief Minister has ordered to take sever-

al steps to improve RIMS. Under this, old equipment will be replaced, the number of beds in the emergency will be increased and the central lab will be started soon.

Dr Ansari said that RIMS is not just a hospital but it is a lifeline, where sick people from all over the state come for treatment with great hope. Mostly the poor people come to RIMS for treatment, so the

Director should take care that they do not face any kind of problem.

He said that the state government is dedicated to serving the people of Jharkhand and the role of the health department is very important in this. While inspecting the wards he also talked to many patients and took their feedback on the treatment and facilities being provided in RIMS.

## KIMS INSTALLS EASTERN INDIA'S FIRST CARDIAC LASER MACHINE

AGENCIES  
BHUANESWAR, DEC 29

Kalinga Institute of Medical Sciences (KIMS) has installed a state-of-the-art Xenon Chloride Fusion Cardiac Laser Machine, the first of its kind in eastern India, to treat complex heart diseases and reduce the need for stents.

The advanced laser system, inaugurated by KIIT and KISS Founder

Dr. Achyuta Samanta, will enable the performance of coronary and peripheral atherectomy, lead management, and the removal of blockages that are otherwise untreatable with conventional angioplasty.

Dr. Anupam Jena, Associate Professor in the Department of Cardiology, stated, "This laser machine allows us to perform ultra-modern treatments that were previously unavail-

able in this region. Patients with complex heart diseases, whether suffering from arterial blockages or requiring pacemaker lead removal, will benefit greatly from this technology."

The laser system is particularly advantageous for younger patients in their 20s and 30s. It can dissolve clots and calcium deposits without requiring stents, which often come with their own complications,

Dr. Jena added.

Prof. Subashish Mishra, Head of the Department of Cardiology at KIMS, remarked, "This machine enables us to dissolve blood clots and blockages resistant to standard procedures.

It significantly improves the management of complex coronary diseases and enhances patient care by reducing the risks associated with stents."

# Radiance of Indian culture spreading to every corner of world, says PM Modi

AGENCIES  
NEW DELHI, DEC 29

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday stressed the growing global interest in Indian cultural heritage, showcasing efforts from across the world during the 117th episode of his monthly radio programme, 'Mann Ki Baat.'

"All of you know how the radiance of Indian culture is spreading to every nook and corner of the world today. Today, I will tell you about efforts from three continents that highlight the global reach of our cultural heritage. These places are miles apart from each other, yet their eagerness to learn about India and its culture is the same," PM Modi said. He began by highlighting a painting competition held in Egypt.

"The more the world of paintings is filled with



colours, the more beautiful it becomes. Those watching 'Mann Ki Baat' on TV can see some of these paintings right now. They depict Indian gods and goddesses, dance forms, great personalities, and even India's rich flora and fauna. Among them is a stunning painting of the Taj Mahal created by a 13-year-old Divyang girl,

made with her mouth," he shared.

PM Modi expressed pride in the competition, which saw participation from 23,000 Egyptian students who created artworks representing Indian culture and the historical ties between the two countries.

"I appreciate all the youth who participated

in this competition. No amount of praise for their creativity would be enough," he said.

The Prime Minister then shifted focus to Paraguay, a South American country with a small Indian diaspora.

"In Paraguay, at the Indian Embassy, Erica Huber provides Ayurvedic consultations. Despite having studied engineering, Erica's passion lies in Ayurveda.

She pursued courses in the field and has become proficient over time. Today, a large number of locals approach her for Ayurvedic advice," he said, lauding her efforts to promote traditional Indian medicine in the region.

Highlighting the significance of Tamil as the world's oldest language, PM Modi mentioned its growing popularity globally.

"At the end of last month, a Tamil Teaching Programme was initiated in Fiji with the support of the Government of India. This is the first time in 80 years that trained Tamil teachers are teaching the language in Fiji," he noted.

He expressed happiness at the enthusiasm of Fijian students in learning Tamil and exploring the cultural heritage associated with it.

"These initiatives are not just success stories but also sagas of our cultural heritage. From art to Ayurveda, and from language to music, India has so much to offer to the world," the Prime Minister added.

PM Modi concluded by saying that such efforts fill every Indian with pride and underline the profound impact of India's culture on the global stage.

## Railway projects worth Rs 88,875 crore sanctioned in big boost to 3 economic corridors

AGENCIES  
NEW DELHI, DEC 29

A total of 58 railway projects have been sanctioned across three economic corridors, with a combined completion cost of about Rs 88,875 crore and a total track length of about 4,107 kilometres during 2024 as part of the Centre's strategy to spur economic growth in the country through big infrastructure projects, according to the year-end review of the Indian Railways.

The projects include Energy, Mineral and Cement Corridors, High Traffic Density Routes and Rail Sagar corridors,

A total of 434 projects have been planned for implementation under these three corridors.

The Energy, Mineral and Cement Corridors accounted for 51 projects, spanning 2,911 kilometres with a completion cost of Rs 57,313 crore.

The High Traffic Density Routes included 5



projects, covering about 830 kilometres and costing about Rs 11,280 crore.

The Rail Sagar corridor covers two projects, with a total track length of about 366 kilometres and a completion cost of about Rs 20,282 crore.

The total Capex for 2024-25 is Rs 2,65,200 crore, which is the highest amount allocated in the budget, till now.

In order to boost investment from industry in setting up cargo terminals along railway lines, Gati Shakti Multi-Modal Cargo Terminals (GCT) are also being developed across the country.

So far, 354 locations (327 on non-railway land and 27 on railway land) have been identified across the country. As many as 91 GCTs have been commissioned this year.

To expedite projects, Indian Railways has also streamlined its project engineering and management processes. All the pending cases of the Engineering Department of various Zonal Railways on Indian Railways E-Procurement System (IREPS) have been disposed of under "one time settlement scheme called 'Vivad Se Vishwas II' (Contractual Disputes)".

## BJP trying to manipulate voter list in Delhi, says Kejriwal

AGENCIES  
NEW DELHI, DEC 29

AAP national convenor and former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal launched a scathing attack on the BJP on Sunday, accusing the party of attempting to manipulate the voter lists, and also claimed that 'Operation Lotus' has been going on since December 15 in his Assembly constituency.

Kejriwal alleged that the BJP lacks a Chief Ministerial candidate, vision, or credible plans and is resorting to dishonest tactics to secure a win, jeopardising Indian democracy. "They don't have a CM face, no vision and no credible candidates. They only want to win the elections by any dishonest means, putting Indian democracy at stake. But the people of Delhi won't let this happen," said Kejriwal.

He highlighted voter deletion issues in the Shahdara constituency, where the BJP allegedly



submitted applications to remove 11,008 voters. "We won from that constituency. If those votes were cut, it would have caused significant problems for us. Thanks to the Chief Election Commissioner for intervening and preventing this," he said.

Kejriwal also alleged that "Operation Lotus" began in his own New Delhi constituency on December 15. "In 15 days, they submitted applications to delete 5,000 voters and add 7,500. My constituency has 1,06,000 voters, so they are trying to delete 5 per cent and add 7.5 per cent. If 12 per cent of the votes are manipulated, what's the point of elections? This is blatant tampering in the name of democracy."

The Election Commission conducted a summary revision of the voter list

from August 20 to October 20, releasing an updated list on October 29.

"For context, a summary revision was conducted in Delhi from August 20 to October 20, during which the Election Commission's machinery verified voters door-to-door. They corrected or updated the list based on this exercise, and on October 29, the Election Commission released the revised voter list after completing the summary revision," said Kejriwal.

"If the BJP believes that 12 per cent of votes are inappropriate, it raises questions about the Election Commission's report," he added.

He further revealed that out of 500 deletion applications verified, 408 individuals were found residing at their addresses, making the requests suspicious. Kejriwal named individuals such as Sarvesh Kumar, Vishal, and Pawan Kumar Singh as being involved in orchestrating these efforts.

## BUDGET 2025-26: CII URGES GOVT TO CUT INCOME TAX, REDUCE EXCISE DUTY ON FUELS

AGENCIES  
NEW DELHI, DEC 29

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) on Sunday urged the Central government to reduce the income tax for individuals and cut excise duty on fuels to increase disposable incomes in the hands of consumers, which would increase spending thereby spurring economic growth.

As part of its wishlist in the run-up to Union Budget 2025-26, the apex business chamber has said that reducing the excise duty on fuels is crucial as fuel prices significantly drive up inflation, forming a substantial portion of the overall household consumption basket.

The central excise duty alone accounts for approximately 21 per cent of the retail petrol price and 18 per cent for diesel. Since May 2022, these duties have not been adjusted in line with the approximately 40 per cent decrease in global crude prices. Low-



ering excise duty on fuel would help reduce overall inflation and increase disposable incomes, according to the CII statement.

It also states that the gap between the highest marginal rate for individuals at 42.74 per cent and the normal Corporate Tax Rate at 25.17 per cent, is high. Further, inflation has reduced the buying power of lower- and middle-income earners. The Budget could consider reducing marginal tax rates for personal income up to Rs 20 lakh per annum. This would help trigger the virtuous cycle of consumption, higher

growth and higher tax revenue.

CII has sought an increase in the daily minimum wage under the MGNREGS from Rs 267 to Rs 375 as suggested by the 'Expert Committee on Fixing National Minimum Wage' in 2017. CII Research estimations show that this will entail an additional expenditure of Rs 42,000 crore.

The business chamber has further suggested that the government increase the annual payout under the PM-KISAN scheme from Rs 6,000 to Rs 8,000. Assuming 10 crore beneficiaries, this will entail an

additional expenditure of Rs 20,000 crore.

It has also come out in favour of an increase in the unit costs under the PMAY-G and PMAY-U schemes, which have not been revised since the scheme's inception.

The CII has also suggested that consumption vouchers be introduced, targeted at low-income groups, to stimulate demand for specified goods and services over a designated period. The vouchers could be designed to be spent on designated items (specific goods and services) and could be valid for a designated time (like 6-8 months), to ensure spending. The beneficiary criteria can be defined as Jan-Dhan account holders who are not beneficiaries of other welfare schemes.

Highlighting the weakening trend in household savings, CII Director General Chandrajit Banerjee noted that "low returns on bank deposits compared to other avenues

such as equities and funds, coupled with a higher tax burden on interest income, have made bank savings less attractive".

Bank deposits as a proportion of a household's financial assets have declined from 56.4 per cent in FY20 to 45.2 per cent in FY24.

To encourage bank deposit growth, CII, in its budget proposals for 2024-25, has suggested taxing interest income from deposits at a lower rate and reducing the lock-in period for fixed deposits with preferential tax treatment from the current five to three years, which can help boost bank deposits.

"Domestic consumption has been critical to India's growth story, but inflationary pressures have somewhat eroded the purchasing power of consumers. The government interventions could focus on enhancing disposable incomes and stimulating spending to sustain economic momentum", Banerjee added.

## Manipur: Civilian worker at military station remains untraced for 35 days, search on

AGENCIES  
IMPHAL, DEC 29

Despite hectic search by Army and other security forces, the 56-year-old man who was working as a supervisor for a contractor at a Military station in Manipur went missing and remains untraced for 35 days, officials said on Sunday.

Defence sources said that around 2,000 soldiers of the Army and Assam Rifles continued their hectic search operation to locate Laishram Kamalbabu Singh, a resident of Gossaipur under Cachar district in southern Assam, who was staying at Loitang Khunou village in Imphal West district. He had left his residence on November 25 for the Leimakhong military station but went missing.

He was working as a supervisor for a contractor working with the Mili-



tary Engineering Services (MES) in Leimakhong Military Station of the 57th Mountain Division at Kangpokpi.

A top Manipur government official told IANS on Sunday that the state government handed over the "missing" case to CBI.

A Joint Action Committee (JAC) and the Meira Paibis (women vigilantes in Manipur), which have been separately agitating demanding the rescue of the "missing" man, have also sought intervention of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to locate the man.

The JAC leaders and other agitating organisations' representatives on a number of occasions met Chief Minister N. Biren Singh and discussed the "abduction" of Kamalbabu Singh.

The Chief Minister earlier urged the Army to undertake all-out efforts to locate and rescue Kamalbabu Singh and take responsibility for finding him.

State Social Welfare Minister Heikham Dingo Singh said that all documents related to Kamalbabu Singh were sent to the Prime Minister's Office as well as the offic-

es of Defence Minister and Home Minister to take appropriate actions.

According to a defence spokesman, the Army officials are constantly interacting with village heads and community elders to gather information to further intensify the search operation.

The CCTV feeds have been scanned, Kamalbabu Singh's co-workers were being spoken to, and an intense search operation, including with the aid of sniffer dogs, has been continued, he said.

The Manipur High Court had earlier constituted a four-member committee to conduct an enquiry in connection with the missing man.

A Home Department official said that the Division Bench of the High Court comprising Chief Justice D. Krishnakumar and Justice Golmei Gaiphulshillu Kabui heard the petition filed by the brother of the missing person and constituted the committee headed by the District Magistrate of Kangpokpi.

## INDIA RECORDS HIGHEST EVER COAL PRODUCTION IN 2023-24, FOCUS ON RAISING COKING COAL OUTPUT

AGENCIES  
NEW DELHI, DEC 29

India recorded its highest ever coal production of 997.826 million tonnes (MT) in the financial year 2023-24 which represents an 11.71 per cent increase in comparison to the corresponding figure of 893.191 MT in the year 2022-23, according to the year-end review of the Coal Ministry.

During the calendar year 2024 (up to December 15, 2024), the country supplied about 963.11 MT of coal as compared to about 904.61 MT of coal during the same period of last year with a growth of about 6.47 per cent. This comprised a coal supply to the Power Sector of 792.958 MT as compared to 755.029 MT coal during the same period of last year with a growth of 5.02 per cent.

The coal supply to the non-regulated sector during the calendar year was 171.236 MT as compared to 149.573 MT during the same period of last year with a growth of 14.48 per cent. The Ministry of Coal has launched 'Mission Coking Coal' to enhance domestic coking coal production to reduce the import of coking coal, keeping in view the demand projection of the steel sector. This mission aims to increase



domestic raw coking coal production up to 140 MT by FY 2029-30.

The total domestic raw coking coal production during the financial year 2023-24 is 66.821 million tonnes (MT) while the domestic raw coking coal production target for the financial year 2024-25 is 77 MT.

The target to increase raw coking coal production by FY2029-30 from CIL subsidiaries is about 105 MT by FY2029-30 from 60.43 MT during FY 2023-24.

Modernization and renovation of existing ageing washeries of Bharat

Coking Coal Limited (BCCL) and Central Coalfields Limited (CCL), which have surpassed the designed lifespan, for its optimal utilization to make more high-quality coal available in the country.

Supply of coal to the steel sector through the Non-Regulated Sector (NRS) Linkage auction route to promote domestic coking coal for steel production and implementation of reforms in the auction process with the aim of substitution of coking coal import are also being undertaken.

# SOUTH KOREA PLANE CRASH: 179 DEAD, TWO RESCUED

AGENCIES  
SEOUL, DEC 29

A passenger jet carrying 181 people erupted in flames after going off the runway and hitting a wall at an airport in South Korea's southwestern county of Muan on Sunday, likely leaving all but two dead, authorities said.

The accident happened at 9:07 a.m., when the Jeju Air flight veered off the runway while landing and collided with a fence wall at Muan International Airport in the Muan county, South Jeolla Province, about 288 kilometres southwest of Seoul.

Except the two rescued from the accident, all the missing people are presumed to have been killed, firefighting authorities said, adding that they were switching to search operations to recover bodies, Yonhap news agency reported.



The authorities confirmed 85 deaths from the accident so far.

One passenger and one crew member, both women, were rescued shortly after the accident and were being treated at a hospital in Mokpo.

A total of 181, including six crew members, were aboard the plane that was returning from Bangkok.

Most of the passengers were Koreans, except for two Thai nationals.

Videos aired by local TV stations show the plane attempting to land without its landing gear deployed. The plane skidded along the ground, crashing into a concrete wall before exploding and being engulfed in flames.

The plane was almost completely destroyed by the explosion.

The South Jeolla authorities raised emergency alerts to the highest levels and deployed all available rescue and police personnel to the accident site.

Officials believe the landing gear failure, possibly due to a bird strike, may have caused the accident. They began an on-

site investigation to determine the exact cause.

Acting President Choi Sang-mok arrived at the crash site around noon, instructing officials to make all-out efforts for search operations. Choi also expressed deep condolences to the bereaved family members and promised to offer them all possible government assistance.

The presidential office said it would convene an emergency meeting of senior officials at 11:30 a.m. to discuss government responses to the plane crash. The meeting was to be presided over by Presidential Chief of Staff Chung Jin-suk.

Acting National Police Agency Commissioner-General Lee Ho-young also ordered officials to mobilise all available resources and work with firefighting and other related agencies to help with the rescue efforts.

# Israeli PM to undergo prostate removal surgery

AGENCIES  
JERUSALEM, DEC 29

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is scheduled to undergo prostate removal surgery on Sunday, his office confirmed in a statement.

The statement on Saturday noted that on Wednesday, Netanyahu underwent a test at Hadassah Medical Centre in Jerusalem, where a urinary tract infection was detected, resulting from a benign prostate enlargement, Xinhua news agency reported.

The Israeli Prime Minister has since received antibiotic treatment, which has resolved the infection.

Despite the upcoming surgery, the Prime Minister's office said the Israeli Cabinet's weekly meeting will proceed as scheduled on Sunday.

Earlier this year, Netanyahu underwent hernia surgery in March under general anaesthesia, during which Israel's Deputy Prime Minister



and Justice Minister, Yariv Levin, temporarily assumed the role of Prime Minister.

In July 2023, Netanyahu was hospitalised for a pacemaker implant after suffering from arrhythmia, just one week after experiencing dehydration. The incident led to considerable speculation among many in Israel as to the health of the Prime Minister and to what degree details had been hidden from the public.

A medical report released in January said Netanyahu was in a "completely normal state of health," that his pacemaker was working correctly and that there was no evidence of heart arrhythmia or any other problematic conditions.

Despite protocols

requiring Prime Ministers to release an annual health report, Netanyahu did not release one between 2016 and late 2023.

He could not be legally forced to share his health information as these protocols, developed by the PMO, were not enshrined in law.

The latest health issue comes the same week that Israel unleashed a torrent of airstrikes on parts of Yemen controlled by the Houthis in retaliation for a barrage of missile attacks by the Iranian-backed group. After the Israeli military's strikes, which included an attack on the international airport in Sana, the Houthis have continued to fire rockets at Israel.

Israel has been embroiled in a conflict on multiple fronts since the Hamas-led terror attack on October 7, 2023, fighting the Palestinian group in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon, as well as striking targets in Syria and trading fire with Iran.

# Trump says he's 'believer in H-1B' visas; quashes opposition to programme

AGENCIES  
NEW YORK, DEC 29

President-elect Donald Trump has declared that he is a "believer in H-1B" visas, quashing the opposition to the programme for qualified professionals to work in the US that pitted the right-wing fringe against his advisers Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy.

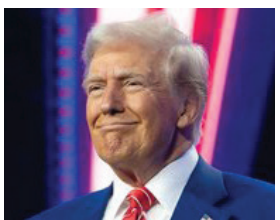
"It's a great program," he told the New York Post in a phone interview on Saturday.

He said, "I've always liked the visas, I have always been in favour of the visas. That's why we have them."

"I have many H-1B visas on my properties. I've been a believer in H-1B. I have used it many times," he told the newspaper that is a part of the Rupert Murdoch-controlled News Corp.

Trump has supported reforming the immigration system to make it merit-based, adopting a points system like Canada's or Australia's that gives weight to academic and employable qualifications.

He has said that he wanted foreign students



graduating from US universities to get green cards with their diplomas.

He reiterated it during his campaign this year: "What I want to do, and what I will do, is -- you graduate from a college, I think you should get automatically, as part of your diploma, a green card to be able to stay in this country."

The differences over H-1B visas and the immigration of highly qualified persons boiled over among Trump's loyalists after he appointed Sriram Krishnan, an Indian immigrant, as his artificial intelligence adviser.

One of the first salvos was fired by Laura Loomer, a far-right Trump supporter in the base of his loyalists known as the MAGA, an acronym for Trump's rallying cry of "Make America Great Again".

She posted on Musk's X, "Deeply disturbing to

see the appointment of Sriram Krishnan" and accused him of wanting to remove all restrictions on the number of green cards, which give permanent resident immigration status.

David Sacks, whom Trump has named the Crypto and AI czar and would be Krishnan's boss, pointed out on X that he had only suggested removing the limits on green cards that can be given to individual countries while keeping the overall limits so that unused green cards can be distributed to those with huge backlogs.

And as personal attacks and false accusations flew against Krishnan, Sacks again came to his defence writing on X that "the lies just shifted, including to some nasty attacks" on him.

Musk took a personal approach, posting on X, "The reason I'm in America along with so many critical people who built SpaceX, Tesla, and hundreds of other companies that made America strong is because of H-1B."

He warned that the US would "LOSE" without attracting the world's best talent.

AGENCIES  
SEOUL, DEC 29

The United States experienced surging labour strikes in 2024, with workers across various sectors staging protests over issues ranging from wages to working conditions.

The nation witnessed 334 labour actions across 515 locations as of Friday, continuing an upward trend in strike activity in recent years, according to the Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations's Labor Action Tracker, a database of strike and labour protest activity.

One of the year's most notable strikes occurred at Starbucks, where at least 5,000 workers from over 300 stores across 45 states walked off their jobs on Christmas Eve, according to their union, Starbucks Workers United, reports Xinhua news agency.

The strike, the largest ever at the coffee chain, involved workers from 12 major cities, including New York, Los Angeles, Boston, and Seattle. Workers demanded higher wages and fair scheduling while criticising the company's executive compensation practices, particularly CEO Brian Niccol's

\$113 million compensation package.



Just days before the Starbucks walkout, Amazon faced what the striking workers called the largest-ever strike during the peak Christmas shopping season.

While the labour union reported nearly 10,000 workers joining the movement for higher wages and improved workplace safety, Amazon disputed these figures, claiming that the striking workers aren't even Amazon employees.

The manufacturing sector was also affected when approximately 33,000 Boeing machinists launched a seven-week strike in September.

Their union accepted a contract offer in November, and the striking workers returned to work. The strike, involving workers who assemble the best-selling 737 Max airliner in Washington, added to Boeing's challenges in a turbulent year.

Maritime commerce faced major disruption in October when nearly 50,000 members of the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) struck against East and Gulf Coast ports, affecting the flow of imports and exports from Maine to Texas.

The hospitality industry wasn't spared from labour actions, as about 10,000 hotel workers struck across several major tourist destinations in September. The walkout impacted

24 hotels operated by Marriott, Hilton, and Hyatt in cities including San Francisco, San Diego, Honolulu, Boston, and Seattle.

The hotel workers' union, Unite Here, highlighted understaffing issues, with three staff members often doing the work meant for four.

Several factors contributed to the surge in labour activism. The US Department of Labor reported a doubling of union representation petitions from 1,638 in fiscal 2021 to 3,286 in fiscal 2024.

"Unions continue to be more popular than at any time since the 1960s, with 70 per cent public approval," said the Labor Notes, an organisation and network for rank-and-file

union members and grassroots activists.

In addition, economic conditions played a crucial role in driving labour actions. The unemployment rate remained low, giving workers more leverage in negotiations.

The rise of remote work and concerns about technological displacement have added new dimensions to labour negotiations as workers seek protection against job losses due to automation and artificial intelligence advancement.

These issues have become particularly pressing in industries undergoing rapid technological transformation.

This was especially evident in the recent port workers' dispute, where automation became a central issue. The ILA said automation at ports would cost some members their jobs.

Besides, reform movements in labour unions have also led to effective strike threats.

With a January 15 deadline looming to resolve the automation dispute at East and Gulf Coast ports, tensions remain high, raising the possibility of another significant port disruption in the new year.

# Syria's interim authorities deploy helicopters against 'former regime remnants' in coastal regions

AGENCIES  
DAMASCUS, DEC 29

Military forces of Syria's interim administration have begun deploying attack helicopters against what it described as "remnants of the former regime" in the country's coastal regions, media reported.

The helicopters are taking off from Istam Airfield in rural Latakia, targeting armed elements still active in the coastal countryside, media channels cited a statement by the administration, which did not elaborate on the number of helicopters in use or the scope of the operation.

The deployment came as part of a series of security initiatives nationwide, aimed at consolidating the new leadership's authority, Xinhua news agency

reported.

On Saturday, Syria's newly-appointed intelligence chief Anas Khattab pledged in an official statement to restructure the country's security apparatus "in a manner befitting our people's sacrifices and long heritage".

All existing security branches in Syria will be dissolved and reorganised, Khattab said, without outlining a timeline or providing specific details for the overhaul.

Khattab's announcement came as Syria navigates a sensitive political transition following the downfall of the previous government on December 8.

A military coalition led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham waged a major military operation from northern Syria on November 27. It swept southwards, cap-



tured the capital Damascus, and overthrew former Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's government within 12 days.

The Syrian Information Ministry declared a ban on what it described as "the circulation or publication of any media content or news with a sectarian tone aimed at spreading division" among Syrians.

The Syrian civil war took on sectarian dimensions as Assad drew on

Shia militias from across the Middle East, mobilised by his ally Iran, to battle the insurgency dominated by members of the Sunni Muslim majority, many of them Islamist.

Dissent has also surfaced in the city of Homs, 150 km (90 miles) north of Damascus.

State media reported that police imposed an overnight curfew on Wednesday night, following unrest linked to demonstrations that residents

said were led by members of the Alawite and Shia religious communities.

Footage posted on social media on Wednesday from Homs showed a crowd of people scattering, and some of them running, as gunfire was heard.

Assad's long-time Shia regional ally, Iran, has criticised the course of events in Syria in recent days.

On Sunday, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called on Syrian youth to "stand with firm determination against those who have orchestrated and brought about this insecurity".

Khamenei forecast "that a strong and honourable group will also emerge in Syria because today Syrian youth have nothing to lose", calling the country unsafe.

Syria's newly appointed Foreign Minister, Asaad

Hassan al-Shibani, said in a social media post on Tuesday that Iran must respect the will of the Syrian people and Syria's sovereignty and security.

"We warn them against spreading chaos in Syria and we hold them accountable for the repercussions of the latest remarks," he said.

Lebanon said on Thursday it was looking forward to having the best neighbourly relations with Syria, in its first official message to the new administration in Damascus.

Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah played a major role in propping up Assad during the civil war, before bringing its fighters back to Lebanon over the last year to fight in a bruising war with Israel -- a redeployment that weakened Syrian government lines.

# SKorea impeached president turns down 3rd summons request for questioning in martial law probe

AGENCIES  
SEOUL, DEC. 29

South Korea's impeached President Yoon Suk-yeol on Sunday turned down the third summons request to call him in for questioning in an investigation into his botched martial law imposition, Yonhap news agency reported on Sunday, citing an investigation body.

The Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials (CIO) handling the case said Yoon did not appear at its office in Gwacheon, just south of Seoul, at 10 a.m. local time on Sunday as requested, the report said.

The CIO launched a joint investigation unit with the National Office of Investigation and the defense ministry's investigative headquarters to look into Yoon's insurrec-



tion and other charges.

This marks the third time the embattled president has snubbed the summons request by the joint investigation unit. Yoon rejected the previous calls to appear for questioning on Dec. 18 and Dec. 25, respectively.

Yoon's repeated refusal to the summons requests could prompt the CIO to file a court warrant for his arrest, as three summonses are typically considered as the maximum number before an investigative agency seeks an arrest warrant against a suspect, Yonhap said.

## PM Modi dedicated 28 key projects worth Rs 3,921 crore under ESIC this year

AGENCIES  
NEW DELHI, DEC 29

The government on Saturday said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated, laid the foundation stone and dedicated 28 key projects worth Rs 3,921 crore under the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) this year.

In 2024, ESIC also gave in-principal approval for the establishment of 10 new ESIC medical colleges at Andheri (Maharashtra), Basaidarapur (Delhi), Guwahati-Beltola (Assam), Indore (Madhya Pradesh), Jaipur (Rajast-



han), Ludhiana (Punjab), Naroda-Bapunagar (Gujarat), Noida and Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh) and Ranchi (Jharkhand).

ESIC has approved the set up for 97 new ESI hospitals across the country in the last 10 years.

To provide the access to quality medical care

across the country, ESIC is in process of convergence with Ayushman Bharat- Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY).

This will benefit over 14.43 crore ESI beneficiaries and their families. ESIC beneficiaries will be able to avail secondary

and tertiary services at over 30,000 AB-PMJAY-empanelled hospitals, with no financial ceilings on treatment costs, said the Ministry of Labour and Employment.

In October, as many as 17.80 lakh new employees were enrolled under the ESIC scheme. The year-on-year analysis showed a growth of 3 per cent in net registrations compared to October last year.

Out of the total 17.80 lakh employees added during the month, 8.50 lakh employees amounting to around 47.75 per cent of the total registrations belonged to the

age group of up to 25 years. The gender-wise analysis of the payroll data indicated that the net enrolment of female members was 3.52 lakh in October.

According to the government, the ESI scheme currently offers medical care under 165 hospitals, 1,590 dispensaries, 105 dispensary-cum-branch-offices (DCBOs), and around 2,900 empanelled private hospitals. In the last 10 years, the ESI scheme has been implemented in 687 districts out of 788 districts of the country, from the 393 districts in 2014.

## Indian manufacturers to allocate 11-15 pc of investments on smart tech in 2 years: CII

AGENCIES  
NEW DELHI, DEC 29

The Indian manufacturing sector is set to allocate higher investment - 11-15 per cent of their budget - towards adopting smart technologies to boost digital transformation in the next two years, a CII study showed on Sunday, as most manufacturers recognise technology adoption as a critical driver of profitability and competitiveness.

The increase in investments is expected in areas like the Internet of Things (IoT), robotics and Big Data. "Current investments remain modest, with many allocating less than 10 per cent of their

budgets. However, a shift towards higher investment - targeting 11-15 per cent of budgets - is expected in the next two years," said the 'Manufacturing Competitiveness Study'.

"India's manufacturing landscape is undergoing a significant transformation, driven by the rapid adoption of innovative technologies," said Deepak Shetty, Chairman of the Council on Manufacturing Excellence, CII.

This report explores the technological revolution reshaping manufacturing, highlighting how smart technologies are essential for boosting productivity and efficiency.

"By embracing these advancements, India can

gain a competitive edge globally and establish itself as a manufacturing leader," he mentioned.

The report showcased how cutting-edge technologies such as IoT, artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), robotics and automation are reshaping the manufacturing landscape, driving optimisation, innovation, and global competitiveness.

High-capital industries like semiconductors, aerospace, and automotive are leading the charge in adopting these technologies, while traditional sectors like textiles and food processing are gradually transitioning towards digitalisation.

## Market value of Samsung Group's affiliates drops 23 pc in 2024

AGENCIES  
SEOUL, DEC 29

The combined market capitalisation of Samsung Group's affiliates dropped about 23 per cent in 2024 due to the sluggish performance of its key affiliate Samsung Electronics, data showed on Sunday.

The market value of Samsung's affiliates stood at 548.4 trillion won (\$371.5 billion) as of Thursday, compared with 709.6 trillion won a year earlier, according to data compiled by Yonhap Infomax, the financial news arm of Yonhap News Agency.

Samsung Group has 22 affiliates listed on the local

stock market, including Samsung Electronics Co., Samsung Biologics Co., Samsung C&T Corp. and Samsung Life Insurance Co.

The overall decrease came as shares of Samsung Electronics tumbled 31.71 per cent this year, with those of Samsung SDI Co. and Hotel Shilla Co. falling 47.66 per cent and 42.58 per cent, respectively.

"Shares of Samsung Electronics are expected to trade within a limited range for the time being due to the downcycle of memory chips," said Kim Dong-won, a researcher at KB Securities Co.

Meanwhile, Earn-

ings forecast for Samsung Electronics for the fourth quarter have been revised down largely due to a downturn in industry demand.

According to the latest survey conducted by Yonhap Infomax, which polled 20 Korean brokerage houses, Samsung Electronics' operating profit for the October-December period is estimated at 8.58 trillion won (\$5.92 billion).

While the latest forecast is sharply higher than the 2.82 trillion won recorded in the fourth quarter of last year, it represents a drop of over 1 trillion won compared with the previ-

ous estimate of 9.77 trillion won made in October and November.

Market observers say the deepening slump in demand for traditional IT products, including smartphones and PCs, has contributed to prolonged weak profitability in Samsung's core memory business.

The US Commerce Department recently awarded Samsung Electronics up to \$4.745 billion in direct funding to support the South Korean tech giant's chipmaking investment in central Texas, as it strives to strengthen domestic semiconductor production.

## Adani Enterprises Ltd's share has potential upside of 57.8 pc in 24 months: Ventura Securities

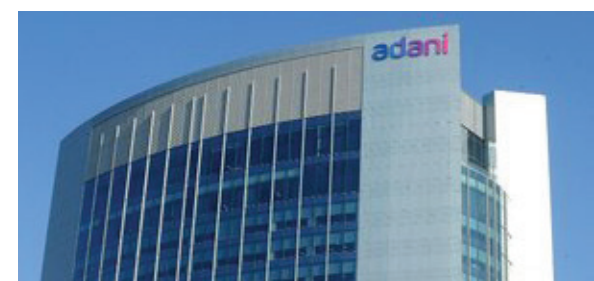
AGENCIES  
MUMBAI, DEC 29

Leading brokerage Ventura Securities Ltd has set a bullish target of Rs 3,801 for Adani Enterprises Ltd's (AEL) stock, which is a potential upside of 57.8 per cent over the next 24 months.

The share of Adani Group's flagship company is currently trading at Rs 2,409 apiece.

In a bull case scenario, the target price rises to Rs 5,748, which would mark an upside of 138.6 per cent, the brokerage said in its note.

"We have assumed revenue of Rs 1,66,615 crore (FY24-27E CAGR of 20



According to the note, this growth will be driven by the company's expansion of airport, solar, and wind turbine businesses, as well as revenue contributions from copper business.

The Adani Group's flagship company is targeting Rs 6.5-7 lakh crore in capital expenditure over the next decade, primarily focusing on airports, data centres, copper, and green hydrogen, Ventura said.

"This expansion will be funded through debt, which is expected to lead to an increase in the company's debt-to-equity and debt-to-EBITDA ratios over the next few years," it added.

## India-Australia merchandise trade reaches \$16.3 billion in April-Nov

AGENCIES  
NEW DELHI, DEC 29

Total merchandise bilateral trade between India and Australia reached \$16.3 billion in the April-November period this fiscal (FY25), the government said on Sunday.

Since the signing of the India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (Ind-Aus ECTA), bilateral merchandise trade has more than doubled, surging from \$12.2 billion in 2020-21 to \$26 billion in 2022-23.

Meanwhile, total bilateral trade between Indian and Australia stood at \$24 billion in FY 2023-24, with India's exports to Australia growing by 14 per cent.

The ECTA has completed two years of remarkable success, driving mutual growth and showcasing the complementarity of both economies.

According to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the ECTA has significantly advanced trade ties, creating new



opportunities for MSMEs, businesses and employment in both nations while reinforcing the foundation of their economic partnership.

"Entering its third year, the government of India is dedicated to sustaining this momentum through strengthened collaboration and innovative initiatives to drive mutual prosperity to realise the vision 2047 of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to make India a developed country," said the ministry.

The nations are committed to building on the momentum created by the ECTA, driving deeper eco-

economic integration and to achieve the target of trade to reach \$100 billion by 2030. Exchange of preferential import data has commenced between both countries, highlighting the effective implementation of the agreement in 2023. The data revealed export utilisation at 79 per cent and import utilisation at 84 per cent.

Key sectors like textiles, chemicals, and agriculture have shown substantial growth, while exports on new lines, including gold studded with diamonds and turbojets highlight the diversification enabled by the agreement.

## Indian real estate industry to address quality housing, meet evolving expectations in 2025

AGENCIES  
MUMBAI, DEC 29

As the Indian real estate sector undergoes transformative changes, driven by evolving consumer expectations, technological advancements, and government initiatives, collaboration between developers, policymakers and stakeholders will be essential to address the growing demand for quality housing, sustainable practices and cutting-edge technology in 2025, according to industry experts.

According to Prashant Sharma, President, Maharashtra National Real Estate Development Council (NAREDCO), affordable housing remains a cornerstone of India's real estate agenda, with the government's continued emphasis on schemes like PMAY (Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana) driving momentum in this segment.

"2024 saw steady progress in making homeownership accessible to the



middle and lower-income groups. However, meeting the dual challenges of affordability and quality will require innovative solutions in 2025. Developers must adopt cost-effective construction techniques and collaborate with policymakers to bridge the demand-supply gap," he mentioned.

Sustainable and green buildings are quickly becoming the standard. According to Sharma, in 2024, we witnessed a significant shift toward

eco-friendly practices as developers embraced green construction technologies, energy-efficient designs, and sustainable building materials.

"Homebuyers and investors are increasingly valuing projects that offer long-term environmental and economic benefits. This trend will only grow stronger in 2025, as sustainability evolves from being a differentiator to an industry imperative," he noted.

Rapid urbanisation and

infrastructure development have been pivotal in shaping the real estate market this year.

Projects such as metro expansions, expressways, and smart cities have fueled demand for residential and commercial spaces in metropolitan and suburban areas.

The momentum is expected to continue in 2025, with developers focusing on creating integrated townships and mixed-use developments that cater to the needs of a growing urban population, said experts.

India's real estate sector has also emerged as a preferred destination for foreign investment, bolstered by regulatory reforms and a burgeoning middle class.

The private equity (PE) investments in the Indian real estate sector reached \$4.2 billion in 2024, marking a 32 per cent year-on-year (YoY) growth amid high demand in the warehousing segment, accord-

ing to a Knight Frank India report.

In 2024, we saw increased interest from institutional investors and sovereign wealth funds, particularly in commercial and warehousing spaces.

Looking ahead, maintaining transparency, improving ease of doing business, and delivering consistent returns will be crucial to sustaining this momentum and further boosting global investor confidence, said industry experts.

Shishir Bajjal, Chairman and Managing Director of Knight Frank India, said that India has seen a rise in investments, particularly over the past decade, driven by economic stability and consistent growth.

As these trends unfold, they bring both challenges and opportunities for the real estate sector and 2025 will require industry leaders to adapt, innovate, and remain attuned to the shifting dynamics of the market.

## 2024 becomes year of Apple in India amid premiumisation, PLI push, retail expansion

AGENCIES  
NEW DELHI, DEC 29

2024 has certainly become the year of Apple in India where the tech giant made new exports as well as domestic sale records, driven by the rising trend of premiumisation, the government's production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme and aggressive retail expansion.

According to industry experts, Apple's strategic approach in India over the past year has resulted in significant achievements and increased market importance.

Within the electronics

sector, smartphone exports have recorded a 45 per cent increase in exports as leading players such as Apple expand production in the country. Apple's entry into India, supported by its vendors Foxconn, Pegatron, and Tata Electronics, has boosted smartphone exports this year.

Apple's iPhone production reached \$10 billion in the seven months of this fiscal (FY25), with \$7 billion in exports alone which is a record. In the April-October period, the company exported iPhones at almost Rs 8,450 crore (nearly \$1 billion) each month, as per industry data.

According to Tarun Pathak,

Research Director, Mobile Devices and Ecosystems at Counterpoint Research, Apple has gained a share in India due to highly aspirational youth appeal, strong consumer connect, chanel and manufacturing expansion along with solid marketing campaigns.

"Apple has successfully tapped into the rising trend of premiumisation in the world's second-largest smartphone market. The ultra-premiumisation trend is steadily



iPhone 16



gaining momentum with each passing quarter," Pathak told IANS.

India's strategic significance for Apple is underscored by its three-dimensional (3D) strategy - focusing on domestic manufacturing, distribution and driving premiumisation.

The country is likely to surpass Japan and UK to become the third largest market for Apple in terms of shipments in 2026, according to Counterpoint Research Market Outlook.

"Premiumisation in India, with readily available financing, boosts

affordability for premium smartphones, benefiting Apple's exclusive focus on this segment," Pathak noted.

Apple's India shipments are set to cross 11 million marks in 2024 with 10 per cent year-on-year growth and estimating a similar growth in 2025 as well, according to market watchers.

Amid the growing demand for its iPhones in aspirational Bharat, Apple clocked a 36 per cent increase in its operating revenue in India, surpassing Rs 66,700 crore (about \$8 billion) in FY24. The tech giant also posted Rs 2,746 crore (\$330 million) in profit last fiscal.

The company's profit increased by 23 per cent in FY24 against Rs 2,229.6 crore (\$268 million) in FY23.

Prabhu Ram, VP-Industry Research Group, CyberMedia Research (CMR), told IANS that Apple's growth in India is expected to continue with significant momentum in the coming year, driven by aggressive retail expansion, targeted marketing strategies, and a deeper penetration into the aspirational Indian market.

"This growth is fuelled by the strong demand for both the latest and previous generation iPhones," Ram noted.

# 4th Test: Aussie tail fights back after Bumrah barrage as hosts' lead swells to 333

AGENCIES  
MELBOURNE, DEC 29

The fourth Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy series is set for a grandstand finish at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, after a solid 55-run stand for the final wicket between Nathan Lyon (41 not out) and Scott Boland (10 not out) helped Australia extend its lead to 333 runs.

At stumps, Australia reached 228/9 in 82 overs, surviving a deadly four-wicket haul from Jasprit Bumrah, which reduced them to 91/6, with the pacer clinching his 200th Test wicket in the process. But Marnus Labuschagne stood up to make 70, while skipper Pat Cummins made 41 to stage Australia's initial recovery.

But Lyon and Boland batted together for 110 balls, and ensured their resistance left India agitated in front of 43,867 fans. It would be interesting to see if Australia would continue batting tomorrow or declare overnight and push India into a remarkable chase - the highest-ever in the MCG - on final day's play, something which will make many fans recall the epic 2021 Gabba

chase.

In the morning, India added only 11 to the overnight total before Nitish Kumar Reddy holed out off Nathan Lyon for 114. Pat Cummins believed he had Siraj caught at slip, as the third umpire said it was a bump ball. Reddy flat-batted Lyon for four, before slicing to long-off as he became the last batter to fall for India, ending his memorable maiden Test hundred which lit up MCG.

But the highlight of the first session was India putting in a disciplined bowling effort, especially with their impressive intensity in using the new ball to excellent effect. Australia's second innings began with a reprieve for Usman Khawaja, as Yashasvi Jaiswal at leg gully dropped his catch off an ever-excellent Jasprit Bumrah.

Despite that drop, Khawaja struggled for fluency against Bumrah, while Akash Deep caused trouble to Sam Konstas as the duo and Siraj got some seam movement. Bumrah finally struck in his mesmerising new-ball spell when he got one to nip back in and beat Konstas' forward defence to rattle the top of the middle stump.

12 overs later, Khawaja's



painful stay at the crease ended when he went for an extravagant drive, but was castled through the gate by Siraj.

Smith and Labuschagne then successfully negotiated the rest of the session to ensure Australia's lead went past 150 before lunch break came.

The second session saw India claw back in the game, thanks to Bumrah taking out Travis Head, Mitchell Marsh and Alex Carey in quick succession, becoming the fastest India pacer to reach 200 Test wickets.

In the second session, just when it looked like the partnership between Labuschagne and Steve Smith would go big, Siraj had Smith chasing a full and wide ball with very

little foot movement and got him to nick behind to Rishabh Pant.

The Bumrah show under bright Melbourne sunshine began when birthday boy Head was on the back foot and flicked straight to mid-wicket for just one, giving the pacer his 200th Test wicket.

Bumrah wasn't still satisfied - he got Mitchell Marsh to poke at a rising ball indecisively and took a faint shoulder edge behind to Pant, as the all-rounder was out for a five-ball duck. Alex Carey was next to fall for just two as Bumrah got a ball to jag in from outside the off-stump and sneak through the gate to hit off-stump.

Akash Deep was beating Labuschagne and Cummins consistently and

got the former to edge to Jaiswal at gully, who dropped a straightforward chance, leaving the pacer, Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli irate.

After Labuschagne got his fifty in 105 balls, he and Cummins got three more boundaries collectively, before the latter was dropped by Jaiswal again, this time at silly point, before tea break came, as the duo survived very top-class Indian bowling.

The final session began with Siraj striking with his first ball - getting to jag off the pitch to trap Labuschagne lbw.

The batter went for the review, but ball tracking said the ball was clipping the bails on the umpire's call, and Labuschagne had to walk back for 70. Starc was run-out in pursuit of a second run, with Pant removing his glove and effecting the run-out at non-striker's end.

The end of Australia's innings looked imminent when Ravindra Jadeja got one to pitch on off stump and turns away to take the edge of Cummins's bat, and dismiss him for 41 runs off 90 balls. But with India's bowlers being tiring and the ball becoming soft, Lyon and Boland got the

platform to launch their resistance.

The desperation meant Siraj dropped a chance on follow-through off Lyon, who also survived the lbw attempt, as India burnt their final review. While Boland cut Siraj for four to bring up Australia's 300, Lyon was sweeping, dancing down the pitch, chipping and slicing for boundaries.

There was some drama on the last over of the day when KL Rahul took a tumbling catch by using his legs of Lyon against Bumrah, but the replays showed a no ball. India's frustration continued as Lyon took a brace to bring up the 50-run partnership of the final wicket before getting a four off an edge on the last ball of the day as an exciting day of Test cricket came to an end, setting the stage for a cracking day five' play.

Brief Scores: Australia 474 and 228/9 in 82 overs (Marnus Labuschagne 70, Nathan Lyon 41 not out; Jasprit Bumrah 4-56, Mohammed Siraj 3-66) lead India 369 in 119.3 overs (Nitish Kumar Reddy 114, Yashasvi Jaiswal 82; Scott Boland 3-57, Pat Cummins 3-89) by 333 runs

## United Cup: Siegemund, Zverev help reigning champs Germany prevail over Brazil in Group E

AGENCIES  
PERTI, DEC 29



Defending champions Germany kicked off their United Cup campaign with a win as Alexander Zverev produced a sharp opening performance on Sunday to steer Germany to victory over Brazil in Perth, capitalising on teammate Laura Siegemund's crucial upset win earlier in the day.

World No. 2 Zverev defeated Thiago Monteiro 6-4, 6-4 in just one hour and 17 minutes, in contrast to Siegemund's gruelling three-set win over Beatriz Haddad Maia in the first match of the day as Germany took a 1-0 lead in their Group E tie at the RAC Arena.

The 23-time ATP Tour title winner Zverev served 11 aces and dropped just three points on his first serve (29/32), according to Infosys ATP Stats.

Earlier in the day, Siegemund outlasted Haddad Maia 6-3, 1-6, 6-4 to take a 1-0 lead in their Group E tie at the RAC Arena.

World No. 80 Siegemund pulled off the top-sy-turvy victory after two hours and 33 minutes in Germany's first match of the event. It was an upset on paper, but Siegemund has had 17th-ranked

Haddad Maia's number in the past, and the German now leads their head-to-head 4-1 overall, WTA reports.

Currently the top-ranked German woman in both singles and doubles in the rankings, Siegemund notched the 20th Top 20 win of her career by toppling Haddad Maia.

Elsewhere, on Sunday afternoon, Czechia emerged victorious in Group B action with a 2-1 win against Norway in Sydney.

Norway's Casper Ruud gave his country a chance with a gruelling three-set triumph against Tomas Machac.

But the Czech star quickly returned to Ken Rosewall Arena and partnered Karolina Muchova past Viktor Durasovic and Ulrikke Eikeri 6-4, 6-4 to clinch the tie.

Norway will try to bounce back quickly when they face defending finalist Poland on Monday. The Czechs will take on the Poles on Wednesday.

## Athapaththu, Wolvaardt shortlisted for ICC Women's T20I Cricketer of the Year

AGENCIES  
DUBAI, DEC 29

Sri Lanka skipper Chamari Athapaththu, along with two ICC Women's T20 World Cup finalists - Melie Kerr and Laura Wolvaardt - and Ireland batter Orla Prendergast, has been nominated for the ICC Women's T20I Cricketer of the Year for 2024.

Despite encountering an unexpected slump in the Women's T20 World Cup, Athapaththu was the second-highest run-getter in a calendar year in women's T20Is. Her 720 runs included two hundreds and four half-centuries, with 86 fours and 32 sixes to her name. Apart from her exploits with the willow, Athapaththu also picked 21 wickets in the period.

A maiden Women's T20 World Cup title and the national record for most Women's T20I wickets in a year marked quite a year for Melie Kerr. Besides, the all-rounder also starred with the willow, hitting five scores of 40 plus while playing a key role in the New Zealand top order.



Undoubtedly, Kerr's finest moment came during White Ferns' successful run to the title, where the all-rounder scored 135 runs and picked 15 wickets (a Women's T20 World Cup record) in a historic win. Melie's numbers picked up as the tournament progressed, with her finest punches coming in the knockout matches.

Having assumed leadership late in 2023, Wolvaardt led from the

front, starting the year with a flurry of impressive scores against Australia and Sri Lanka.

This included a maiden T20I ton that guided the Proteas to a win against the Island Nation in Benoni.

Wolvaardt's prolific run continued into the Women's T20 World Cup, where the opener was the leading run-getter in the tournament. As a leader, she oversaw her side into their maiden final appearance.

Orla Prendergast finished 2024 as the second-highest run-getter and the highest wicket-taker for Ireland in Women's T20Is in any calendar year, and her exemplary numbers were the reason behind their success in the format this year.

Ireland began and ended the year with whitewashes over Zimbabwe and Bangladesh, respectively, and Prendergast starred in both, also winning the Player of the Series award in the latter contest. Later, her valiant efforts at home helped her side tie the series against higher-ranked opponents like England and Sri Lanka.

## 'Don't think they'll be batting for a draw', opines O'Keefe as India eye record chase at MCG

AGENCIES  
MELBOURNE, DEC 29

As the stage is set for an epic climax to the Boxing Day Test between India and Australia, former Aussie all-rounder Steve O'Keefe opined that India will not be looking for a draw and try hard to win the crucial fourth Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on the final day of the encounter.

India pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah and fellow pacer Mohammed Siraj dismantled the Aussies top and middle order, but the hosts fought hard on the back of Marnus Labuschagne (70) and Pat Cummins (41).

Tailenders Nathan Lyon (41 not out) and Scott Boland (10 not out) extended Australia's lead to 333 at stumps on Sunday. The duo will resume on Day 5, having already put on a 55-run stand for the final wicket.

India will need the biggest successful fourth-innings run chase at the MCG on Monday if they are to win the Boxing Day Test after a



thrilling Day 4 play.

"I don't think India will be batting for a draw tomorrow; I think they will go out there and try and win it all on Day 5," said Steve O'Keefe to SEN Cricket on India's mentality ahead of Monday's run chase.

The previous highest successful

fourth innings score to win a Test at the MCG was England's 332/7 over Australia back in 1928.

The Border-Gavaskar Trophy series is currently locked at 1-1 as the two teams are fighting for the World Test Championship final spot scheduled to be played at Lord's in June 2025.

## Arshdeep Singh nominated for ICC Men's T20I Cricketer of the Year

AGENCIES  
DUBAI, DEC 29

India pacer Arshdeep Singh has been shortlisted for the ICC Men's T20I Cricketer of the Year after a splendid year with the Men in Blue that saw him lift the T20 World Cup in Barbados.

Arshdeep will compete against Zimbabwe's Sikan-dar Raza, Australia's Travis Head and former Pakistan captain Babar Azam for the annual accolade of the shortest format.

Jasprit Bumrah's selective T20I appearances have allowed Arshdeep to excel as India's primary pacer in the format. Arshdeep claimed 36 wickets in 18 matches in 2022, just one behind Bhuvneshwar Kumar's 37 but in significantly fewer games.

Filling the left-arm pacer void, Arshdeep delivered match-winning performances across conditions, including key con-



tributions to India's T20 World Cup triumph. His standout moment came in the final, where he removed Aiden Markram and Quinton de Kock before bowling a tight 19th over that sealed the second T20 title for the Rohit Sharma-led side.

Raza continues to shine for Zimbabwe, earning a shortest nod for the third consecutive year. The 39-year-old all-rounder led his side to an unbeaten run in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup sub-regional Africa Qualifier Group B, scoring 199 runs and taking 10 wickets.

His highlight came against India, where he claimed 3/25 on a tricky track to secure a 13-run

win, breaking key partnerships to script the upset.

Babar was Pakistan's leading T20I run-scorer in 2023, hitting six fifties and maintaining a strike rate of 133.21. He is on the brink of surpassing Rohit Sharma as the all-time leading T20I scorer. His standout knock was a 75 off 42 balls against Ireland, leading Pakistan to a series-clinching win.

Australia's Head demonstrated his versatility in 2024, scoring 539 T20I runs at a strike rate of 178.47. He was the third-highest run-getter in the T20 World Cup with 255 runs.

His explosive 59 off 23 balls in the Powerplay against England helped Australia secure a commanding win in Southampton. Despite Australia's World Cup exit, Head's consistent performances cemented his place as a dynamic T20I batter.

## HIL 2024-25: DELHI SG PIPERS DEFEAT GONASIKA IN SEASON OPENER

AGENCIES  
ROURKELA, DEC 28

Delhi SG Pipers triumphed 4-2 in the shoot-out over Gonasika after a 2-2 draw in the Hockey India League (HIL) 2024-25 season got off to a thrilling start at the Birs Munda Hockey Stadium here on Saturday. Tomas Domene (5', 39") scored for Delhi SG Pipers while Struan Walker (26") and Victor Charlet (35") scored for Gonasika in regulation 60 minutes.

Argentina's Domene scored the first goal of the HIL 2024-25 season in the fifth minute. Delhi SG Pipers captain Jake Whetton won possession high up the pitch and dribbled his way into the Gonasika circle before winning a penalty corner off Dipsan Tirkey. Domene rifled his drag flick into goal with goalkeeper Oliver Payne



barely getting any time to react. Gonasika slowly found their rhythm as the first quarter went on and came close to equalising towards the end. Captain Manpreet Singh played a one-two with Jack Waller but failed to connect with the ball in front of goal.

Gonasika pressed hard for an equaliser and deservedly got it four minutes from the end of the second quarter. Arajjeet Singh Hundal hit a power-

ful shot hoping to catch Delhi SG Pipers goalkeeper Benjamin Rennie off at the near post. The shot took a slight deflection off Gonasika forward Nikkin Thimmaiah's stick and crashed onto the post. Rennie was caught off guard by Scotland's Walker tapping the ball into the empty goal.

Delhi SG Pipers looked to hit back immediately but Payne made a couple of good saves to ensure both teams went into half-

time on level terms. Having trailed for most of the first half, Gonasika took the lead early five minutes into the third quarter. Mandeep Singh and Arajjeet Singh Hundal led a Gonasika counter before the latter won a penalty corner. France's Victor Charlet's ferocious drag flick evaded goalkeeper Pawan and Jarmanpreet Singh at the post sparking wild celebrations from the Gonasika players.

However, Gonasika's lead lasted only four minutes. Walker received a five-minute suspension soon after for a poor foul and Delhi SG Pipers capitalised upon their numerical advantage. Ky Willott got the ball on the goalline and the Australian played an inch-perfect cut-back which Domene converted with ease.

Domene could have completed his hat-trick

in the final minute of the third quarter from a penalty corner. However, Payne saved Domene's drag flick before denying Sumit Kumar from the rebound. Payne was in imperious form as he pulled off two stunning saves midway through the fourth quarter to deny Delhi SG Pipers the lead. A minute later, Domene o

nce again came close to completing his hat-trick but his drag-flick cannoned off the post.

Gonasika and Delhi SG Pipers went all in searching for a late winner but both goalkeepers stood firm as the match ended 2-2. In the penalty shoot-out, Delhi SG Pipers converted four of their five attempts to secure the victory. Jake Whetton, Tomas Domene, Sourabh Anand Kushwaha, and Raj Kumar Pal converted successfully for Delhi SG Pipers.

## DC G'bal reviews snow clearance ops, restoration of essential services

JINNEWS SERVICE

GANDERBAL, DECEMBER 29

In the wake of the recent snowfall, Deputy Commissioner (DC) Ganderbal, Shyambir, convened a meeting of district officers today to review snow clearance operations and the restoration of essential services across the district, here.

During the meeting, the DC conducted a thorough assessment of the situation and directed the mobilization of additional manpower and machinery to ensure all major and link roads are cleared on a war footing. He emphasized that no inconvenience should be caused to the public due to delays.

The DC instructed the departments to submit tehsil-wise updates regarding progress of snow clearance and restoration of affected services to his office for effective monitoring.

Sharing the details, Exen R&B Division Ganderbal reported that out of 449 km of roads under their jurisdiction, 418 km



have been cleared while the remaining stretches shall be cleared by today.

Similarly, Executing Engineer PMGSY informed that 106 km out of 135 km of roads under their purview have been cleared. The DC also directed manual clearance for areas inaccessible to machinery including upper reaches of the district.

The Mechanical Department confirmed the clearance of all roads under their jurisdiction, while EO Municipality reported that all inner links have been cleared in the town.

Regarding power restoration, SE, KPDCL

informed that all receiving stations are fully functional in the district besides replacement/repairing of damaged transformers is also under progress.

Meanwhile, DC directed him to ensure the prompt replacement of damaged transformers across the district.

The Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Ganderbal provided a briefed regarding the medical facilities, staff rosters & attendance.

He stated that heating systems at the District Hospital and Sub-District Hospital are functioning as scheduled.

The DC instructed the CMO to share tehsil-wise

staff rosters for further monitoring.

While concluding the meeting, DC stressed on the need for continuous monitoring of the situation, timely restoration of affected services, and the establishment of a robust monitoring mechanism to ensure effective service delivery to the public.

The meeting was attended by Additional Deputy Commissioner Ganderbal, Gulzar Ahmad, SE KPDCL Ganderbal, CMO, Executive Engineers of R&B, PMGSY, EO Municipal Council Ganderbal, Incharge Control Room and other concerned officials.

## Dy CM visits Katra



JINNEWS SERVICE

KATRA, DECEMBER 29

Deputy Chief Minister, Surinder Kumar Choudhary, today visited Katra to assess and address the issues and concerns of local residents.

During the visit, several delegations called on the Dy CM and apprised him of their grievances and demands as well seeking prompt redressal of the same.

The Dy CM also visited Shalimar Park and Katra Bus Stand and took stock of facilities there.

While interacting with the deputations, the Deputy Chief Minister said the government stands firmly with

the people and is fully committed to their welfare and development.

The Dy CM assured the people that their grievances and demands will be looked into on priority for redressal.

Acknowledging the importance of addressing public grievances, he assured the delegations of the government's commitment towards welfare of the people.

"The government remains committed towards upholding the rights of every individual while ensuring no one is deprived of the benefits of schemes being implemented by the UT administration, maintained the Dy CM."

## DC Shopian reviews snow clearance operations on Mughal Road



JINNEWS SERVICE

SHOPIAN, DECEMBER 29

Deputy Commissioner Shopian, Mohammad Shahid Saleem Dar, today visited Heerpora village to review the snow clearance operations on Mughal Road.

He was accompanied by ADDC, Dr. Nasir Ahmad Lone, ADC, Dr. Zakir Husain Faaz and other officers & officials of MED & Police.

The DC emphasized the importance of clearing snow from the vital road which serves connecting link between Shopian and the Pir Pangal region.

He also stated that the snow clearance shall

be completed upto Peer Ki Gali by tomorrow provided fair weather conditions.

During his visit, the DC took stock of the snow clearance efforts ensuring that the road is cleared as soon as possible to facilitate smooth transportation and accessibility for residents and travelers.

He also directed the concerned agencies to gear up their activities by deploying more snow cutters.

The visit demonstrates the district administration's commitment to minimizing disruptions and ensuring smooth vehicular movement during the winter season.

## DC Poonch takes stock of patient care during surprise visit to District Hospital

JINNEWS SERVICE

POONCH, DECEMBER 29

Deputy Commissioner Vikas Kundal today conducted a surprise visit to Raja Sukhdev Singh District Hospital, where he assessed the facilities being provided to the patients.

The Deputy Commissioner inspected the functioning of different wards including the Gynaecology Ward, Pharmacy, Surgical Ward, Emergency Patient area, Medicine Ward and the ongoing construction of the Critical Care Block. He also inspected the oxygen generation plant to ensure adequate oxygen support for patients.

The Deputy Commissioner was accompanied by Additional Deputy Commissioner Tahir Mustafa Malik, and other officials from line departments including Xen PHE and JPDCL besides Medical Superintendent, Dr. Nusrat Bhatti and hospital staff were also present.

The Deputy Commissioner engaged with patients to inquire about



their wellbeing. He emphasized the importance of quality healthcare and directed health authorities to prioritize patient care and medical facilities.

During his visit, the Deputy Commissioner announced plans to install air conditioners in medical and surgical wards,

aiming to enhance patient comfort during the harsh weather months. He also instructed the Executive Engineers of PHE and JPDCL to ensure uninterrupted supply of water and electricity, underscoring the commitment to patient welfare and hospital functionality.

## Union Minister addresses public darbar in Ramban; ensures on spot redressal of several public issues

JINNEWS SERVICE

RAMBAN, DECEMBER 29

Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Science and Technology, Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Earth Sciences, MoS, PMO, Dr Jitendra Singh, today convened a public darbar and had an exclusive interactive sessions with individuals and public delegations.

Present in the public outreach programme were senior Central government officers including NHAI besides UT government officers led by Deputy Commissioner Ramban, Baseer-Ul-Haq Chaudhary.

DIG DKR Range Shridhar Patil was also present on the occasion.

Dr Jitendra Singh, during his second such public darbar at Ramban, ensured on the spot redressal of several issues raised by the public. He issued instructions to the officers of the concerned department for prompt redressal of remaining issues and concerns of the public.

Dr Jitendra Singh said, the government has taken several path breaking



measures in the last one decade to scale up infrastructure development in Ramban district. The administration focussed on resumption of stalled projects besides initiating ambitious projects to boost connectivity in the district.

Dr Jitendra Singh stated that Dr Syama Prasad Mukherjee Tunnel connecting Ramban with Udhampur is one such example of boosting connectivity in the region. He said the area is also now replete with a string of other tunnels enhancing ease of travel for the commuters.

The Union Minister said that the government is focusing on bringing state-of-the-art facilities to rural areas of the country under the auspices of Prashasan Gaon Ki Aur programme.

Besides, grievance redressal mechanism has been streamlined to facilitate the people with faster public service delivery.

Highlighting the role of public representatives in governance, he said members of the PRIs have been instrumental in taking services to the grassroots and alleviating public sufferings. He said together with the district administration, these representatives have formed an essential part of the team to serve the common citizens in the last 10 years.

Dr Jitendra Singh expressed hope that the team will get strengthened with the participation of newly elected MLAs to better serve the people and improve their living standards matching the constituents of the national mainstream.

## Doda: Assistant Executive Engineer suspended for dereliction of duty

JINNEWS SERVICE

DODA, DECEMBER 29

The Deputy Commissioner Doda has ordered suspension of Assistant Executive Engineer (AEE) PMGSY Division Doda, citing suboptimal performance and negligence in clearing snow-blocked rural roads. The suspension came after reports of dereliction of duty by the AEE during crucial winter periods.

The inquiry revealed that the AEE left his station without prior authorization and failed to resume his duties despite

repeated directives. This absence led to delays in road clearance, creating difficulties for residents in accessing critical services. The administration emphasized that such behavior is unbecoming of a public servant, particularly during emergencies demanding efficient responses.

The order noted that the AEE had been reprimanded multiple times for his casual approach and failure to perform his duties. He has now been attached to the 24X7 Emergency Control Room at the Deputy Commis-

sioner's office in Doda till further orders.

To ensure smooth operations, Mukesh Kumar, Assistant Executive Engineer PWD, Doda, and Umar Jan, Assistant Engineer PWD, Bhagwah, have been directed to oversee the responsibilities of the PMGSY Sub Divisions in addition to their own duties.

This decisive action underscores the administration's commitment to maintaining accountability and ensuring timely public service delivery in adverse weather conditions.

## DC Bandipora reviews snow clearance, restoration of essential services



JINNEWS SERVICE

BANDIPORA, DECEMBER 29

Deputy Commissioner Bandipora, Manzoor Ahmad Qadri, today chaired a meeting to review and assess the ongoing efforts in snow clearance and the restoration of essential services across the district, following the recent snowfall.

The meeting was attended by Executive Engineers of PMGSY/R&B, PHE, along with Assistant Executive Engineers (AEEs), Chief Executive Officer MCB, besides officers from Mechanical Engineering Department, PDD and other concerned departments.

Senior officers from the Gurez and Sumbal subdivisions joined the meeting virtually.

During the meeting, DC assessed the progress of snow clearance operations and discuss strategies for the prompt resto-

ration of power and water supply across the district.

Speaking on the occasion, Deputy Commissioner M.A. Qadri emphasised coordination among concerned departments and stressed to ensure a smooth and effective response to the ongoing weather conditions.

M.A. Qadri emphasized the need for close monitoring of snow clearance operations, urging all departments to work efficiently and ensure the timely restoration of vital services.

He also directed the concerned departments to remain alert and prepared for any further disruptions caused by additional snowfall in the coming days.

The Deputy Commissioner reiterated the district administration's commitment to resolving public issues swiftly and ensuring minimal inconvenience to the residents.



A delegation of J&K Kho Kho Association headed by its President Dr Baljinder Kour called on Lieutenant Governor Shri Manoj Sinha, today. The members of the delegation extended invitation to the Lieutenant Governor for the inaugural function of the Kho Kho World Cup 2025. The upcoming Kho Kho World Cup is set to take place in New Delhi from 13th January to 19th January, 2025. Sh Abhijeet Jasrotia, BJP Spokesperson was also present during the interaction.



Ms. Tazeem Akhter, Chairperson, District Development Council Poonch called on Lieutenant Governor Shri Manoj Sinha. Subsequently, public delegation led by Ms Sangita Sharma, Member, District Development Council Seri; BJP delegation from Nowshera, and representatives of Beopar Mandal Rajouri also called on the Lieutenant Governor.