



### Tough childhood

Actor Bhumi Pednekar reveals she got bullied in school as she didn't look like other popular girls

LEISURE | P2



### Biden bids farewell

President Joe Biden prepares to hand over power to Prez-elect Donald Trump and exit politics after a decadeslong career

INTERNATIONAL | P10



### Trade deficit narrows

Trade deficit narrows to \$21.94 billion after last month's shocking surge to a lifetime high

BUSINESS | P11



### Historic victory

India complete a whitewash of Ireland with a massive 304-run win in women's ODI after amassing their highest-ever total of 435

SPORTS | P12

## ED gets MHA nod to prosecute Kejriwal

**NEW DELHI:** Ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls, the Union Home Ministry has granted sanction to the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to prosecute former Delhi chief minister and AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal in the excise policy linked money laundering case, officials said. The federal agency has filed a chargesheet against the 56-year-old politician before a special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court here last year after arresting him in March. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has recently granted the required sanction to the ED for prosecuting Kejriwal under the anti-money laundering law in the Delhi excise policy case, officials said. Kejriwal has been made an accused in his personal capacity as well as in the capacity of being the national convener of his political party AAP. The former chief minister was called the kingpin and key conspirator of the Delhi excise scam by the ED. **P9**

## LINGARAJ SERVITORS' DISPUTE RESOLVED

**Bhubaneswar:** Rituals at Lingaraj Temple, which remained suspended for the last three days following a scuffle between two groups of servitors over Makar Sankranti tradition, is set to resume after the dispute was resolved Wednesday evening. The 'Brahmin Nijog' and 'Badu Nijog' had disagreements over various ritualistic duties resulting in the standoff since Monday evening. Due to the disruption of rituals in the temple, the deity was not offered 'bhoga', and Makar Sankranti ceremonies were also not observed in the 11th-century shrine. Expressing concern over the issue, law minister Prithviraj Harichandan held a meeting with representatives of different servitor groups of the temple earlier in the day and directed to hold a meeting of Lingaraj Temple Trust Board on an emergency basis to discuss the issue. **P3**



**BOOSTING SECURITY:** An Indian Navy personnel aboard INS Surat ahead of its commissioning ceremony, in Mumbai. INS Surat along with INS Nilgiri and INS Vagsheer was commissioned Wednesday at the Naval Dockyard in Mumbai in the presence of PM Narendra Modi (REPORT P9) **PTI PHOTO**

# Similipal big cats under threat

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Baripada, Jan 15:** Protection of Royal Bengal Tigers (RBTs) at Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR) in Mayurbhanj district has emerged as a big challenge for the Forest department personnel as there is no let-up in poaching of national animal despite presence of AI cameras, watchtowers, strict surveillance measures, and multi-layered security arrangements in the national park. Hunters have been targeting not only regular tigers but also the melanistic ones, which are known for their distinctive black coat and exclusively found in Similipal wildlife sanctuary. Concerns about tiger safety resurfaced after the seizure of a black tiger hide

Wednesday, exposing chinks in the current security measures. While the government has been implementing extensive measures to ensure tiger safety, animal rights activists have expressed deep concern over the precarious state of the stripped animal. According to 2023 Tiger Census, Similipal is home to 27 adult RBTs and 12 cubs, including 16 melanistic ones. A Forest department employee, requesting anonymity, revealed that three RBTs have been poached in the past one year. The poachers had reportedly skinned one tiger and smuggled its hide. Forest personnel recovered the mutilated tiger's head, claws, and teeth and arrested the accused persons, who were later produced in the court. However, the de-

## MELANISTIC TIGER HIDE SEIZED; 4 HELD

Forest officials have arrested four people from Similipal after seizure of the skin and nails of a juvenile melanistic Royal Bengal Tiger from their possession, a senior official said Wednesday. The arrest and seizure were made Sunday during the crackdown by the special enforcement wing of Similipal South Wildlife Division, at Tentula and Balighat villages within limits of the Udala Police Station under Baripada Forest Division, STR Field Director, Prakash Chand Gogineni, said. The case is under investigation and other people linked to the incident are absconding, Gogineni said the state-level Joint Task Force (JTF) is supporting the Similipal team in a thorough investigation into the matter. He said the four accused held in the case were produced before the court January 13 and sent to jail. The accused are residents of Tentula village under the jurisdiction of the Udala Police Station, he said. The four were arrested while attempting to negotiate the sale of the tiger skin. Sources said that the seizure of the tiger skin was followed by the arrest of some people in Balasore district recently and tiger claws were recovered from them. The interrogation of the people arrested in Balasore reportedly led to the seizure of the tiger skin, sources said.



partment allegedly tried to hush up the incident by filing a frivolous case. The incident occurred in Jenabil forest range but was

reportedly registered under Dukura range to cover it up. In another recent case, the Forest department seized a ti-

ger hide and arrested suspects, including a doctor, who were produced in the court for prosecution. Bhanu Mitra Acharya, an independent director of Odisha Forest Development Corporation (OFDC) and former honorary wildlife warden, expressed concern as the Forest department's security plans, fraught with modernisation challenges, were rendered ineffective. The seizure of three tiger hides in the last six months has raised question marks on the efficiency of the department. Acharya stressed the need for stricter patrolling by forest staff, suggesting that patrolling on foot in forest paths could help apprehend poachers and prevent illegal poaching activities.

# Israel, Hamas finally agree for ceasefire

Office of Israeli PM, however, said ceasefire deal was still not reached, adding that final details were being sorted out

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Doha, Jan 15:** Israel and Hamas agreed to a ceasefire deal, mediators announced Wednesday, pausing a devastating 15-month war in the Gaza Strip and raising the possibility of winding down the deadliest and most destructive fighting between the bitter enemies. The deal, coming after weeks of painstaking negotiations in the Qatari capital, promises the release of dozens of hostages held by Hamas in phases, the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners in Israel and would allow hundreds of thousands of people displaced in Gaza to return to what remains of their homes. It also would flood badly needed humanitarian aid into a devastated territory. Three officials from the US and one from Hamas confirmed that a deal had been reached, while a senior Israeli official said details are still being ironed out. All three US officials requested anonymity to discuss the contours of the deal before

the official announcement by mediators in Doha. President Joe Biden was preparing to address the breakthrough agreement later Thursday, officials said. Any agreement still needs to be approved by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Cabinet, but is expected to go into effect in the coming days. The deal is expected to deliver an initial six-week halt to fighting that is to be accompanied by the opening of negotiations on ending the war altogether. Over six weeks, 33 of the nearly 100 hostages are to be reunited with their loved ones after months in captivity with no contact with the outside world, though it's unclear if all are alive. It remained unclear exactly when and how many displaced Palestinians would be able to return to what remains of their homes and whether the agreement would lead to a complete end to the war and the full withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza — key Hamas demands for releasing the remaining captives.

## US drops curbs on 3 Indian N-entities

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Jan 15:** In a significant move, the US Wednesday removed restrictions on three Indian nuclear entities, over a week after NSA Jake Sullivan announced that Washington was finalising steps to remove hurdles for civil nuclear partnership between Indian and American firms. The three entities are Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), Indira Gandhi Atomic Research Centre (IGCAR) and the Indian Rare Earths (IRE), according to the US Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS). In an address at the IIT-Delhi last week, Sullivan said the US will remove regulations that have prevented cooperation between Indian nuclear entities and American companies. The removal of the three key Indian entities is being seen as an attempt by the outgoing Biden administration to facilitate the implementation of the landmark India-US civil nuclear pact that was sealed 16 years back. The move comes five days ahead of Donald Trump's inauguration as the 47th President of the US. India and the US unveiled an ambitious plan to cooperate in civil nuclear energy in July 2005 following then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's meeting with then American President George W Bush.

# NEP implementation in schools

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Jan 15:** Following the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in all state-run universities and affiliated colleges, the state government Wednesday announced the policy's rollout in schools across the state, aligning with the National Curriculum Framework while also incorporating local context. "After careful consideration,

in the interest of strengthening the educational system in the state, the government is pleased to order that the National Education Policy 2020, as issued by the Ministry of Education (MoE), Government of India, will be implemented in the state of Odisha," read the notification issued by the School and Mass Education department. The notification further stated that the National Curriculum Framework, with local contextualisation, would

be adopted as the state's curriculum framework. This means that the curriculum will follow national guidelines but will also take into account the specific needs and culture of Odisha, ensuring a more relevant and engaging education for students. Notably, the state government had, in November last year, announced the implementation of the NEP in all state-run universities and affiliated colleges from the current academic year.

## IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Listen up! The pension is only for those jailed during the Emergency... the declared one

# Indian startups make strides in space

PIXEL, DIGANTARA LAUNCH CUTTING-EDGE SATELLITES TO MONITOR EARTH, SPACE OBJECTS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bangalore/New Delhi, Jan 15:** Ahead of the National Startup Day Thursday, two Indian space start-ups -- Pixxel and Digantara -- Wednesday announced the launch of their satellites onboard a SpaceX rocket to closely monitor the earth and objects orbiting around it, marking a new era for the private firms in the space sector. Pixxel became the first private company in India to have its own constellation of satellites using the cutting-edge hyper-spectral frequency that allows observation of the earth in



over 150 bands, a technology that is useful in sectors as diverse as agriculture and defence. Digantara Aerospace announced the launch of the world's first commercial satellite - Space Camera for Object Tracking (SCOT) - for surveillance of objects as small as 5cm orbiting the earth to ensure safer space operations. Surveillance of outer space or Situational Space Aware-

ness (SSA) is important to ensure the safety of spacecraft as Pixxel co-founder and CEO Awais Ahmed told PTI. Pixxel plans to launch three more Firefly satellites over the next two months and follow it up with 18 more in future. Digantara CEO Anirudh Sharma said SCOT aimed to enhance space safety, optimise traffic management and bolster national security initiatives. From the sun-synchronous orbit, SCOT will track objects in Low Earth Orbit (LEO) with greater efficiency than existing sensors, which are constrained by weather conditions, geographic limitations and restricted fields of view.

# leisure



## M. SHYAMALAN FACING \$81MN COPYRIGHT TRIAL

Filmmaker M. Night Shyamalan is facing a trial over allegations that he copied from an independent film to make the streaming show *Servant*. Francesca Gregorini, an Italy born director, is suing Shyamalan, alleging that the show stole key elements from her 2013 movie, *The Truth About Emanuel*.

## HILARY DUFF OFFERS SHELTER TO MANDY MOORE'S FAMILY

Mandy Moore and her family are finding solace in the kindness of friends after losing their home to the ongoing wildfires ravaging parts of Los Angeles. The family of the actress and singer sought refuge with Hilary Duff and her husband Matthew Koma, following the destruction caused by the LA wildfires.



### FORTUNE FORECAST

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#### ARIES

You continue to be a kind and cooperative person. You give generously and it pays back manifold, and today is one of those days. You will treat colleagues and subordinates like an extended family, and successfully mix business with pleasure. A rare ability, says Ganesha.

#### TAURUS

Today, most of your time is likely to be taken up by family affairs domestic. You would be getting together with your family members and discuss related issues and solutions. The time so spent will be fruitful and satisfying. New employment opportunities are expected to come your way. Avenues of additional income could be in store.

#### GEMINI

Today, you will be emotional and practical at the same time. Academically, you will be at the top of your game. People around you will be swept away by your charming and intelligent ways. By evening, you will divert your mind towards beautifying your home, feels Ganesha.

#### CANCER

It is highly probable that today you will recognise the importance of time in your profession. You will realise how long was the time that you wasted cribbing about how short is the deadline for the work allotted to you. Now that the deadline is approaching, you will learn that crying foul has only wasted your time and you have no choice but to do your job.

#### LEO

A busy mind has no time for a hungry stomach. This phrase seems to have become your motto for the day as the stars dictate every possibility of you staying extremely busy with work. This might kill your appetite in the afternoon, warns Ganesha. But rest assured, the cravings will return in the evening and push you towards the idea of an elaborate dinner.

#### VIRGO

You will be a lot more selfless and giving today than most people have known you to be, feels Ganesha. Later in the day, you will reap the profits of the work you may have done with a partner or a friend. Evening may be a cocktail of business and pleasure as you attend or host a social gathering with friends, family and co-workers.

#### LIBRA

It's smooth sailing for you today. Your eloquence shall take precedence, and your accomplishments as a person of words will foreshadow your real achievements. But there is nothing wrong in that. Let your eloquence win everyone's hearts, including colleagues. You shall be able to sort out and complete pending projects by the end of the day.

#### SCORPIO

The power of your personality will be under the scanner today, feels Ganesha. At work, you will be occupied with looking for solutions to pending problems. Your creative outlook and innovation will help you find a way out of difficult situations. It is the most favourable day for getting the support of your colleagues or superiors, says Ganesha.

#### SAGITTARIUS

Chances are high that you will be isolated and left to fend for yourself. Your resourcefulness and enterprising nature may be tested by an unpleasant situation. Seeking Ganesha's blessings can make all the difference.

#### CAPRICORN

Nothing as melodramatic as a Bollywood saga, but you will pour your heart out in front of your family members, letting out your fears, concerns, regrets and every other feeling that has been building up inside you over the years, says Ganesha. The second half of the day will find you high on energy, and you will go that extra mile to interact with your peers.

#### AQUARIUS

Today, you may finally appreciate the beauty of that valuable piece of abstract art in your living room! You have fine taste, but sometimes forget to see things from the heart. Your sensitivity is at an all-time high, says Ganesha, and consequently, you may even get touchy today.

#### PISCES

You are likely to achieve a goal you have been slaving over for the past some time. However, keep your celebrations muted, for merely winning a battle does not win the war, says Ganesha.

## Nora enters US music scene

has joined forces with American singer Jason Snake. social media, Nora shared the first look gram handle, along with a Meanwhile, the gripping teas- visuals of will not

**Mumbai:** The wait is finally over! Nora Fatehi Derulo for the much-anticipated song, Making the exciting announcement on poster of *Snake* on her official Instagram caption that read, "Snake 16.01.25." veteran ac- tress Manisha Koirala is living her life to the fullest. Aside from entertaining fans with her mag- netic on-screen presence, the Heera- mandi actress also keeps on top of her social media game. She re- cently took her Instagram dle and dropped of exciting photos from one of her pro- ductive days.

**Manisha shares her life mantra**  
to han- a couple one of her pro- ductive days. In one of the pictures, she can be seen soaking in the winter sun in stylish attire. Mean- while, another still has Manisha working on her laptop while enjoying a beverage. The last still shows her facing the camera with a small backpack, suggesting she might be heading off for another getaway soon. Shelling out her life mantra, Manisha wrote in the caption, "Setting a goal each day.."

Prior to this, the *Bom- bay* actress took to her official IG and posted snaps from her trail in Nepal. Addition- ally, the actress also paid a visit to the Ghandruk Museum. For the unversed, Manisha was diag- nosed with ovari- an cancer back in 2012. The actress has focused on leading a healthy life ever since.



## Bhumi's fortitude

**Mumbai:** Bhumi Pednekar's journey into the world of films is inspirational. From a young age, she decided she wasn't going to follow the conventional path. "When I was younger, I got bullied in school because I didn't look the way the popular girls in school looked," she said at a recent event. "That's when I had decided that I may not be the conventional 'pretty' that people have set the standards for, but I will break those boundaries."

This sense of determination has stayed with her throughout her life. Bhumi didn't have a clear way into the film industry, being a complete outsider. She began behind the scenes, working in Yash Raj Films for six years. "I didn't know how to get into the world of films," she admitted.

"It was destiny that I got my first job in a casting department. That wasn't part of my plan. It was my destiny," Bhumi recalled. Once she had her foot in the door, she set a clear goal. "I decided that I will conduct every audition so well that directors will start asking me to become an actor, and I'll say, 'No, no, sir, not me.' I was hoping that they would convince me so much that I would eventually say yes. And that's exactly what happened," she shared.

Bhumi's career is a result of determination, both as a professional and as someone who's constantly redefining what success and beauty look like.

AGENCIES



### MANANA'S ANNUAL THEATRE FESTIVAL: DAY III

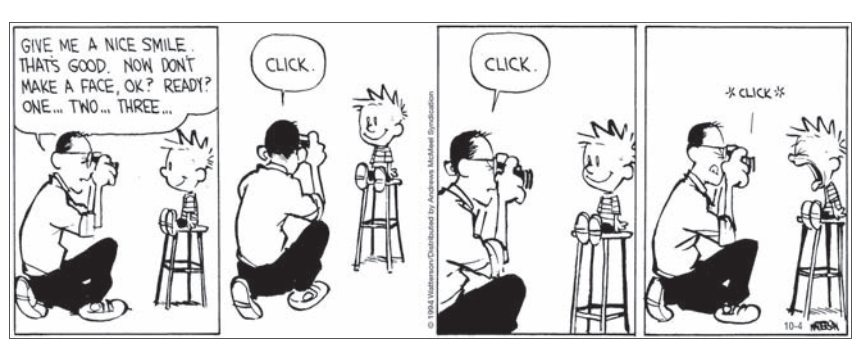


Members of Dhenkanal-based drama troupe Alternative Rhythm Theatre (ART) performed Odia play *Debadasi* at Rabindra Mandap, Bhubaneswar. The play was written and directed by acclaimed theatre and Jatra personality Dinesh Dash.

### PEANUTS



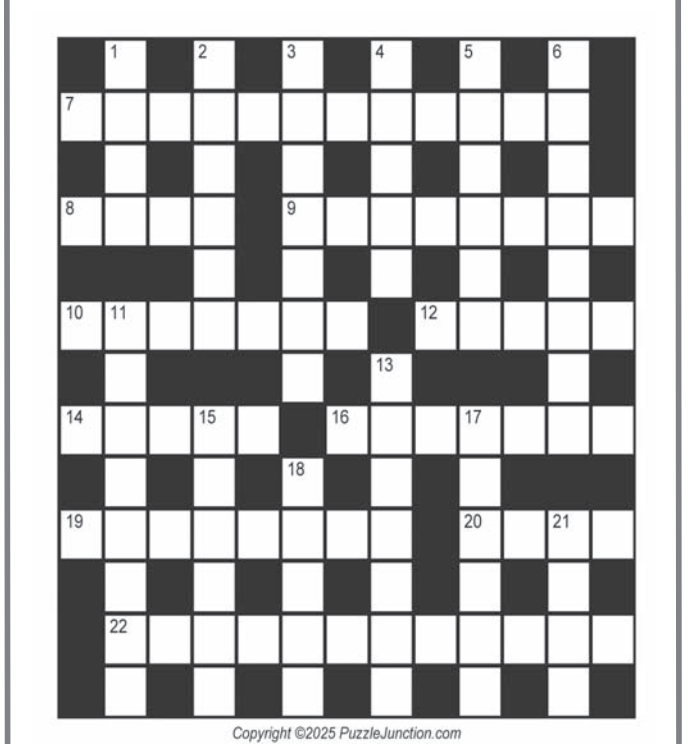
### CALVIN AND HOBBS



### BREVITY



### CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 7 Smarts
  - 8 Off-ramp
  - 9 Like a little angel
  - 10 Busybody
  - 12 Asian pepper plant
  - 14 Shoe blemish
  - 16 Basket rummy
  - 19 Peeve
  - 20 Domestic
  - 22 Office machine (5,7)
- Down**
- 1 Black stone
  - 2 Like snow in summer
  - 3 Platitudes
  - 4 Everglades bird
  - 5 Wound
  - 6 Alluvial deposit
  - 11 Belgian endive
  - 13 Fortified wine
  - 15 Fragile
  - 17 Stone fruit
  - 18 Get hitched
  - 21 Wild goat

### SUDOKU

To solve the Sudoku puzzle, fill in the boxes in such a manner that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9, without repeating any.

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

### SOLUTIONS

**CROSSWORD**

C	A	S	K	B	A	R	B	A	R	I	C	
U	S	T	R	E	R							
F	H	A	V	L	W							
L	O	I	R	E	C	H	O	P	I	N		
N	E	A	R	E	D	A	R	G	Y	L	E	
K	C	R	O	T	T	E	V	A	L	E	T	
C	O	R	W	I	S	I	O					
A	B	B	E	Y	A	D	V	I	S	O	R	
V	A	S	R	E	L	A						
A	L	T	I	T	U	D	E		C	E	L	L

**SUDOKU**

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

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

A Congress delegation meets CMC Commissioner Anam Charan Patra regarding alleged delay in execution of several projects in the Silver City, Wednesday



downtown

White tiger cub, doe perish in City zoo



POST NEWS NETWORK

Barang, Jan 15: Tiger population at Nandankanan Zoological Park (NZP) here reduced to 27 as a white tiger cub died during treatment Wednesday. This apart, a doe (female deer) housed in the deer enclosure also died on the same day.

rating condition, the zoo authorities moved the cub to the Animal Care Unit, where it received treatment. However, it died there. The deceased cub's mother, Roopa, a white tigress, gave birth to four cubs November 2, 2024—three white and one with normal coloration. With this death, the tiger population at Nandankanan has reduced to 27, comprising 14 males, 10 females, and three cubs.



EXPOSURE TRIP: Dharitri and Orissa POST Editor Tathagata Satpathy and Chief Executive Adyasha Satpathy with Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC), Dhenkanal students on the publications' office premises in Bhubaneswar, Wednesday

CM launches enhanced social security pension



PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Jan 15: Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Wednesday launched an enhanced social security pension scheme for individuals aged 80 years and above, and those with disability of 80 per cent or above.

More than 4 lakh elderly and differently-abled people, who were earlier receiving ₹1,200, will get ₹3,500 a month

Pension Scheme, will receive the enhanced pension. Highlighting the achievements of his government, Majhi said, "Our government has been in power for only seven months, and during this time, we have taken several significant steps for the welfare of the people."

HC commutes 9 convicts' capital punishment to life imprisonment

POST NEWS NETWORK

Cuttack, Jan 15: The Orissa High Court Wednesday commuted the death sentence of nine persons convicted for killing three members of a family on suspicion of practising witchcraft in Rayagada district in 2016.



According to the case details, the convicts forcibly dragged the trio out of their house in Kitum village under Putasingh police limits in Rayagada district and took them to a nearby cowshed where they brutally assaulted the three September 9, 2016 on suspicion of practising witchcraft. As a result of the assault the three died. They then burnt the bodies to obliterate evidence.

Two injured in leopard attack

AGENCIES

Phulbani, Jan 15: Two persons were injured in separate leopard attacks in Mahipur forest area of Nayagarh district, an official said Wednesday.

Lingaraj row ends; rituals to resume

A judicial commission, headed by a retired High Court judge, will be formed to prepare a draft Record of Rights for conduct of various rituals by the different servitor groups in two months, says Law Minister Prithviraj Harichandan

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Jan 15: Rituals at Lingaraj Temple which remained suspended for the last three days following a scuffle between two groups of servitors over Makar Sankranti tradition is set to resume after the dispute was resolved Wednesday evening.

Harichandan held a meeting with representatives of different servitor groups of the temple earlier in the day and directed to hold a meeting of Lingaraj Temple Trust Board on an emergency basis to discuss the issue.



The Additional District Magistrate (ADM) has been asked to conduct a detailed inquiry into the incident and submit the report in 24 hours, he said.

"If needed, the government will revoke the landed property of the temple allocated to the servitors involved in the dispute," he added. The Collector further said the temple administration will monitor the conduct of rituals of Lord Lingaraj on a daily basis.

SERVITOR DIES

POST NEWS NETWORK

Puri, Jan 15: A Suarbadu servitor, who fell ill at Srimandir, was pronounced dead at a hospital here Wednesday.

Man gets 3-year RI for sexually abusing minor

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 15: A POCSO court here Wednesday awarded a three-year rigorous imprisonment (RI) to a man after holding him guilty of sexually abusing a minor girl under Khandagiri police limits in the City in 2019.

NABA DAS MURDER

Clarify stand on CBI probe: Dipali

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Jan 15: BJD leader and former MLA Dipali Das Wednesday urged the state government to clarify its position on a CBI probe into the murder of her father Naba Kishore Das allegedly by a policeman January 29, 2023.

Woman stages dharna before lover's house

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jajpur, Jan 15: A 22-year-old woman staged a dharna in front of her lover's locked residence in Jajpur district Wednesday, alleging that she was sexually exploited by the youth, who reneged on his promise to marry her.

The drama unfolded Tuesday night after the woman and her lover returned to their village under Panikoili police station from New Delhi where they were staying together since last month

The duo had eloped and went to the national capital after the man's family objected to their marriage proposal. Police said the man's family had recently asked them to come back to the village so that their wedding could be arranged.

Two injured in leopard attack

AGENCIES

Phulbani, Jan 15: Two persons were injured in separate leopard attacks in Mahipur forest area of Nayagarh district, an official said Wednesday.





“There is no greater pride and glory than to be a perfect instrument of the Master.”

SRI AUROBINDO



## Digital Predicaments

Mathematician Cathy O'Neil once said that an algorithm is nothing more than someone's opinion embedded in code. When we speak of “the algorithms” that power Facebook, X, TikTok, YouTube, or Google Search, we are really talking about choices made by their owners about what information we, as users, should see. In these cases, “algorithm” is just a fancy name for an editorial line. Each outlet has a process of sourcing, filtering, and ranking information that is structurally identical to the editorial work carried out in media – except that it is largely automated.

This automated editorial process, far more than its analog counterpart, is concentrated in the hands of billionaires and monopolies. Moreover, it has contributed to a well-documented list of social ills, including large-scale disinformation, political polarization and extremism, negative mental-health impacts, and the defunding of journalism. Worse, social-media moguls are now doubling down, seizing the opportunity of a regulation-free operating environment under Donald Trump to roll back content-moderation programmes.

But regulation alone is not enough, as Europe has discovered. If our traditional media landscape featured only a couple of outlets that each flouted the public interest, we would not think twice about using every available tool to foster media pluralism. There is no reason to accept in social media and search what we would not tolerate in legacy media.

Fortunately, alternatives are emerging. Bluesky, a younger social-media platform that recently surpassed 26 million users, was built for pluralism: anyone can create a feed based on any algorithm they choose, and anyone can subscribe to it. For users, this opens many different windows onto the world, and people can also choose their sources of content moderation to fit their preferences. Bluesky does not use your data to profile you for advertisers, and if you decide you no longer like the platform, you can move your data and followers to another provider without any disruption.

Bluesky's potential does not stop there. The product is based on an open protocol, which means anyone can build on top of the underlying technology to create their own feeds or even entirely new social applications. While Bluesky created a Twitter-like microblogging app on this protocol, the same infrastructure can be used to run alternatives to Instagram or TikTok, or to create totally novel services – all without users having to create new accounts.

In this emerging digital world, known as “the Atmosphere” (so named for the underlying AT Protocol), people have begun creating social apps for everything from recipe sharing and book reviews to long-form blogging. And owing to the diversity of feeds and tools that enable communities or third parties to collaborate on content moderation, it will be much harder for harassment and disinformation campaigns to gain traction.

One can compare an open protocol to public roads and related infrastructure. They follow certain parameters but permit a great variety of creative uses. The road network can convey freight or tourists, and be used by cars, buses, or trucks. We might decide collectively to give more of it to public transportation, and it generally requires only minimal adjustments to accommodate electric cars, bikes, and even vehicles that had not been invented when most of it was built, such as electric scooters.

An open protocol that is operated as public infrastructure has comparable properties: our feeds are free to encompass any number of topics, reflecting any number of opinions. We can tap into social-media channels specialised for knitting, bird watching, or book piles, or for more general news consumption. We can decide how our posts may or may not be used to train AI models, and we can ensure that the protocol is collectively governed, rather than being at the mercy of some billionaire's dictatorial whims. Nobody wants to drive on a road where the fast lane is reserved for Cybertrucks and the far right.

“Open social media,” as it is known, provides the opportunity to realise the internet's original promise: user agency, not billionaire control. It is also a key component of national security. Many countries are now grappling with the reality that their critical digital infrastructure – social, search, commerce, advertising, browsers, operating systems, and more – is subordinated to foreign, increasingly hostile, companies.

But even open protocols can become subject to corporate capture and manipulation. Bluesky itself will certainly have to contend with the usual forms of pressure from venture capitalists. As its CTO, Paul Frazee, points out, every profit-driven social-media company “is a future adversary” of its own users, since it will come under pressure to prioritize profits over users' welfare. “That's why we did this whole thing, so other apps could replace us if/when it happens.”

Infrastructure may be privately provided, but it can be properly governed only by its stakeholders – openly and democratically. For this reason, we must all set our minds on building institutions that can govern a new, truly social digital infrastructure. That is why I have joined other technology and governance experts to launch the Atlas Project, a foundation whose mission is to establish open, independent social-media governance, and to foster a rich ecosystem of new applications on top of the shared “AT Protocol.” Our goal is to become a countervailing force that can durably support social media operated in the public interest. Our launch is accompanied by the release of an open letter signed by high-profile Bluesky users such as the actor Mark Ruffalo and renowned figures in technology and academia such as Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales and Shoshana Zuboff.

There is nothing esoteric about our digital predicaments. Despite the technology industry's claims, social media is media, and it should be held to the same standards we expect from traditional outlets. Digital infrastructure is infrastructure, and it should be governed in the public interest.

The writer, former Vice-President of Data Governance at The New York Times, is a technologist and governance expert.

### WISDOM CORNER

“As a matter of self-preservation, a man needs good friends or ardent enemies, for the former instruct him and the latter take him to task.”

DIOPENES

“Time and space always change, but there is something which is eternal and changeless. For example, the world and time, past or future, nothing exists for us in sleep. But we exist. Let us try to find out that which is changeless and which always exists.”

RAMANA MAHARSHI

“To have faith is to trust yourself to the water. When you swim you don't grab hold of the water, because if you do you will sink and drown. Instead you relax, and float.”

ALAN WATTS

# GIG WORKERS' WOES

FOCUS EMPLOYMENT

Not an employee. No employer. No fixed working hours. Unlimited income. Work flexibility. Freedom to work or not on any given day. These are the apparent and enviable characteristics of a gig worker. A utopian situation indeed! But there is more to it than meets the eye. Undoubtedly, the gig economy has grown splendidly fast and is growing faster. It is already contributing a big sum to the GDP, to the exchequer, and more so to gig platforms. But all this, to call a spade a spade, is at the cost of exploiting gig workers.



PSM Rao

**TO PUT IT STRAIGHT, MAKE THE GIG ECONOMY A PART OF THE ORGANISED SECTOR TO SAVE OUR YOUTH AND TO TAKE THE BEST OUT OF OUR SO-CALLED DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND**

The Labour Ministry defines a gig worker as “a person who engages in income-earning activities outside of a traditional employer-employee relationship, as well as in the informal sector.” Similar is the NITI Aayog's view which stresses gig work to be outside the traditional employer-employee arrangement.

Some 7.7 million workers (2.6% of non-agricultural workers or 1.5% of the workforce) are engaged in gig work in India by 2020-21 as per NITI Aayog's estimate although the accuracy of data is not guaranteed. The actual number could be more than double this number as per other estimates. The number is likely to reach 23.5 million (6.7% non-agricultural and 7% of total) by 2029-30. The Boston Consulting Group puts the number of gig workers number in India at 15 million in 2021 and estimates it to increase to 90 million. It is likely to add 1.25% to GDP in the next eight to ten years.

Undoubtedly the gig economy, the offspring of new technology, and new modes of production and distribution, is booming and changing economic and social relations in tandem. The resultant outcomes are not difficult to discern given the trends, experiences, and accumulated evidence of the gig economy, particularly of the digital platforms induced urban concentrated (deeply prevalent in about 300 cities) gig work.



**While technology is the facilitator and medium for the gig economy, its true begetter is the neo-liberal economic policy and the fertile ground it created**

While technology is the facilitator and medium for the gig economy, its true begetter is the neo-liberal economic policy and the fertile ground it created. Some key policy effects unmistakably drive home the point. Firstly, the growth of Indian economy has been jobless. The employment elasticity has been declining. For instance, between 2000-2012 employment grew by 1.6% against the increase in GVA of 6.2%. While the GVA further increased to 6.7% between 2012 and 2019 the employment grew at 0.01%, as per ILO-IHD's India Employment Report 2024.

Secondly, employment growth was of poor quality; 90% informally employed. Due to the nature of employment growth since 2019, informal employment in total has been increasing. Thirdly, the production process has been capital-intensive and labour-saving naturally with the increasing profit maximization motive of business owners with the newfound support of economic policies.

Fourthly, as the ILO report notes, “digitalization and introduction of new technologies are changing the structure of industrial employment. There has been a rapid introduction of digitally mediated gig and platform work, which are algorithmically controlled by platforms and have brought about new features in control

of the labour process. Increasingly, platform and gig work have been expanding, but it is, to a large extent, the extension of informal work, with hardly any social security provisions.”

So, a gig worker's life is neither free from bondage nor secure as is made out to be. The so-called flexibility and choice not to work on any day means choosing to starve. What a driver gets every day, taking a ride-hailing service for example, after the expenses including the cut by the platform is the subsistence amount for the family. That means no freedom not to work. Since the job is algorithmically controlled and monitored, the incentives, disincentives and penalties are promptly applied.

They get insufficient incomes, and work 12 hours a day or more. They have no provident fund facility, no health insurance like ESI and no other social security benefit employers provide in the organised sector. There is no employer at all who can be made responsible for providing these things.

Although legislations are brought here and there (for example Karnataka and Rajasthan enactments and Social Security Code 2020) the gig work is deliberately kept outside the employer-employee relationship. Digital platforms that provide employment continue to be recognised as aggregators while workers

are treated as contractors. This is not an unintended outcome of technology and changed production relations alone but the fruition of liberal economic policy to say it at the cost of repetition. The government gradually withdraws from its role in economic activity firmly believing the theoretical underpinning of market forces doctrine: “Business is the business of the business; the government has no business to be in business”.

Since the organised sector is not able to provide any employment, youth are forced to take up gig work though remuneration from it is low and the working conditions miserable. The only solace this sector provides is employment. While the employment elasticity in general is declining that of the gig economy has been increasing significantly. The employment elasticity to GDP growth for gig workers was found to be above one throughout the period 2011-12 to 2019-20 and was always above the overall employment elasticity which means better opportunities in gig work.

It is clear that gig platform owners, the aggregators, are doing business using unemployed youth and without providing them the adequate or fixed wages, allowances, leaves and other benefits and old age security as the regular employees provide in the organised sector because they do not treat gig workers their employees nor any statute mandates them so.

The solution is regulation of the gig industry by recognising gig platforms as employers and gig workers as their employees. The existing labour laws should cover gig workers. To put it straight, make the gig economy a part of the organised sector to save our youth and to take the best out of our so-called demographic dividend.

The writer is development economist and commentator on economic and social affairs.

### SPECTRUM BIG TECH

## Techno colonialism & surveillance state



Satya Narayan Misra

**THE INTERSECTION OF TECHNO COLONIALISM AND THE SURVEILLANCE STATE CREATES A PERFECT DYSTOPIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

AI has the potential to transform economies and democratize innovation across sectors. From agriculture to education to healthcare, AI is breaking down traditional barriers, enabling individuals and communities to participate in the creation of solutions that were once beyond reach. However, this potential can only be realized if AI is developed and integrated in ways that prioritize equity, inclusivity, and ethics. The questions revolve around the critical intersection of techno colonialism and the surveillance state, and how both contribute to the perpetuation of inequality, exploitation, and control in the digital age.

One of the central concerns around AI's impact on economic systems is its potential to either reduce or exacerbate inequality. Daron Acemoglu, Nobel laureate, argues that AI's influence will depend heavily on the nature of technologies and how they are integrated into the economy. If it replaces low-wage jobs, the economic divide could widen. However, if AI is used to complement human labour, and empower workers

with new skills and capabilities, it can promote inclusive growth.

According to Toby Miller, techno colonialism manifests when technological infrastructure and data collection are used by global corporations or powerful states to control, dominate, and extract resources from less powerful or economically marginalised regions, as they used to do during colonial times by using primary resources from the colonies. Scholars such as Nick Couldry and Ulises Mejias argue that the extraction of data from the Global South operates similarly to earlier forms of resource extraction during colonial era. They introduce the concept of “data colonialism,” where global tech giants, such as Google, Facebook, and Amazon, systematically collect and commodify personal and collective data from people around the world.

The surveillance state is a concept used to describe systems in which governments or large institutions engage in extensive monitoring of their populations, typically justified under the guise of national security, public safety, or economic efficiency. Scholars like David

Lyon and Shoshana Zuboff highlight how surveillance mechanisms have increasingly become integrated into the fabric of modern states, with technologies like facial recognition, social media surveillance, and predictive policing becoming commonplace tools of governance. These technologies enable states to monitor, track, and control populations in unprecedented ways.

The intersections between techno colonialism and the surveillance state are particularly evident in how data flows from Global South to Global North, where it is used to fuel surveillance systems and data-driven governance models. This transnational flow of data reinforces existing power structures and amplifies inequalities. For instance, Shoshana Zuboff discusses how companies collect vast amounts of personal data, which is then used for targeted surveillance, thus contributing to both global forms of techno colonialism and state-driven surveillance practices.

The intersection of techno colonialism and the surveillance state creates a perfect dystopia in the 21st century. Given the

challenges posed by techno colonialism and the surveillance state, there are steps we can take to protect human welfare in the digital age. A critical first step in addressing the risks of techno colonialism is to educate individuals about the implications of their digital activities. Governments must enact and enforce comprehensive data protection laws that prioritize privacy and informed consent. These laws should also ensure that people have control over their data and prevent its exploitation by corporations or governments for political or economic gain.

In the Indian context, Justice Sri Krishna suggested a robust data protection legal architecture, based predominantly on the practice followed by EU. However, the Data Protection Act 2024 follows the US practice, which puts a premium on corporate interest and overwhelming state surveillance, rather than the right to privacy. We need a digital future that is more just, equitable, and aligned with the values of human dignity, privacy, and social justice.

The writer is Professor Emeritus, KIIT University

## Letters

TO THE EDITOR

Readers of Orissa Post are most welcome to contribute letters (100 words), articles and columns (between 600-1000 words). Contributors are requested to send their contact numbers and full postal address/email ID. They may also send in their valuable comments, opinion and suggestions, preferably by email, to: edit@orissapost.com



### Seeking solace

Sir, This refers to “1.65 crore take dip as Maha Kumbh begins,” Orissa POST, Jan 14. The Maha Kumbh Mela, the world's largest religious congregation, began drawing millions of devotees to the sacred confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati. A once-in-a-lifetime event, it is showcasing tenacity, modernity, culture and human will to endure – all at the same time. The Maha Kumbh is a deeply spiritual event, rooted in ancient Hindu traditions. The ritual of taking a holy dip at the Triveni Sangam is believed to cleanse one of sins and pave the way for salvation (moksha). This grand gathering is a testament to India's enduring spiritual heritage and celebrates the unity and diversity of its cultural fabric. Like any mega event Maha Kumbh is also not free from fear of mishaps especially stampedes. To avoid that, the state government has deployed AI-enabled cameras, underwater drones for 24/7 monitoring. A first-of-its-kind initiative featuring digital monitoring systems to streamline crowd management and enhance safety has also been put in place. With meticulous planning and unwavering commitment, Maha Kumbh 2025 stands as a shining example of India's ability to honour its spiritual roots while embracing technological advancements. As the Maha Kumbh unfolds, it offers a transformative experience to millions who seek spiritual solace and cultural enrichment.

N Sadhasiva Reddy, BANGALORE

### Precise forecasting

Sir, Extreme weather events are frequently occurring in almost all parts of India. Many factors go into forecasting weather accurately. Precise weather forecasting helps reduce the impact of natural calamities. With this end in view India has launched Mission Mausam, to make India a “climate smart and weather ready” nation. Mission Mausam marks India's great step towards transforming weather forecasting and management. Climate change has enormous impact on weather patterns and it makes weather forecasting extremely difficult. The mission aims at improving short and medium range forecasts and boosting preparedness for extreme weather events. Enhanced weather forecast is to be extended to all levels including panchayat. Let us hope that India's new mission will help tackle climate change and minimise the impact of weather events.

Venu GS, KOLLAM

CLIMATE PRESSURES MOUNT

# Saffron growers experiment with indoor farming in J&K

About 90% of India's saffron is produced in Kashmir, of which a majority is grown in Pampore, but the small town is under threat of rapid urbanisation, according to the Indian Council of Scientific & Industrial Research

Experts say rising temperatures and erratic rainfall pose a risk to saffron production, which has dropped from 8 metric tons in the financial year 2010-11 to 2.6 metric tons in 2023-24, the federal government told parliament in February, adding that efforts were being made to boost production

One such programme is a project to help grow the plant indoors in a controlled environment in tubes containing moisture and vital nutrients

indoors in a controlled environment in tubes containing moisture and vital nutrients, which Dr Bashir Ilahi at state-run Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences said has shown good results.

"Growing saffron in a controlled environment demonstrates temperature resistance and significantly reduces the risk of crop failure," said Ilahi, standing in his laboratory between stacks of crates containing tubes of the purple flower.

Ilahi and other local experts have been helping farmers with demonstrations on how to grow the crocus plant indoors.

"It is an amazing innovation," said Abdul Majeed, president of Kashmir's Saffron Growers Association, some of whose members, including Majeed, have been cultivating the crop indoors for a few years.

Manzoor Ahmad Mir, a saffron grower, urged more state support.

"The government should promote indoor saffron cultivation on a much larger scale as climate change is affecting the entire world, and Kashmir is no exception," Mir said.



Tourists take pictures near icicles formed due to a water pipe leak at Tangmarg, in Baramulla district, Jammu and Kashmir

## J&K municipalities asked to prepare waste mgmt plans

CS directed the municipal commissioners of SMC and JMC to formulate scientific plans for both cities for treating the solid and liquid waste generated daily by the households

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jammu, Jan 15: Authorities in Jammu and Kashmir Wednesday directed municipalities to prepare comprehensive waste management plans and asked them to draw up projections on future waste generation, officials said.

On average, 450 grams per person per day of waste is generated in big cities and 300 grams is generated in smaller towns in the Union Territory, they said.



Chairing a meeting of the housing and urban development department (H&UDD), Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo asked for comprehensive and component-wise waste management plans for both the municipal corporations -- Jammu Municipal Corporation (JMC) and Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC) -- and other municipalities. The meeting was convened to take stock of measures being taken up to build capacity of different urban local bodies (ULBs) in the

processing of solid and liquid waste on scientific lines, an official spokesperson said.

Dulloo directed the municipal commissioners of SMC and JMC to formulate scientific plans for both cities for treating the solid and liquid waste generated daily by the households. He instructed them to prepare a projection based on future population and the expected waste from them, the J&K government spokesperson said.

Dulloo also advised them to make simultaneous plans for

the treatment of legacy waste in order to clear the sites of this untreated garbage.

He asked them to identify feasible locations for the establishment of Material Recovery Facilities (MRF) for solid waste, compost units or bio-CNG plants for liquid waste and dumping sites for inert waste.

"This task requires all seriousness and dedication on the part of the department to fully rid our cities and towns of untreated waste and garbage," the chief secretary said, asking the officers to use their writ to act against the violators as per laws in force.

Commissioner Secretary, H&UDD, Mandeep Kaur, said facilities for both solid and liquid waste treatment are being created all over J-K in addition to inviting tenders for treatment of legacy waste on scientific lines.

## Dense fog shrouds Delhi; flights, trains delayed

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 15: Dense fog engulfed parts of the national capital Wednesday, marking the season's first intense fog spell lasting three hours, which disrupted the schedules of over 100 flights and 26 trains due to low visibility.

The fog significantly reduced visibility during the morning hours, improved slightly in between and then once again shrouded the city as evening approached.

"Delhi experienced very dense fog on the morning of January 15, with visibility dropping to zero at Safdarjung and IGI Airport from 8:30 am, persisting until 11:30 am," the IMD stated.

"This was the season's first instance of dense fog, and CAT-III operations extended beyond 9:30 am, with RVR at IGI Airport runways ranging between 75-300 meters during the peak fog period," it added.

By 12:30 pm, visibility had slightly improved to 250 meters at Safdarjung and 400 meters at IGI Airport (Palam), with moderate fog prevailing at that time.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) issued an orange alert for Delhi, with dense to very dense fog reported in several areas. An orange alert is issued for bad weather that can disrupt rail and road services.

The minimum temperature dropped to 6 degrees Celsius, 1.4 degrees below normal, while the maximum temperature was recorded at 18.1 degrees Celsius, 1.8 degrees below normal.

The weather department advised caution, saying, "Drivers should use fog lights and exercise extreme care while on the road. Travellers should stay in touch with airlines, railways, and state transport authorities for updates on schedules."

For Thursday, the weather department has predicted cloudy skies with light rain and dense fog conditions. The minimum temperature is expected to settle around 10 degrees Celsius, while the maximum is likely to hover around 17 degrees Celsius.

## BEAMING WITH PRIDE

These men and women, who fled persecution in Pakistan, are beaming with excitement at the prospect of participating in the India democratic process -- a right they have long yearned for

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 15: In the crowded, narrow lanes lined with makeshift homes near Delhi's resettlement colony -- Majnu-ka-tilla, a sense of pride and "indebtedness" pervades as a group of Pakistani Hindu refugees prepare to cast their votes for the first time in the country they now call home.

These men and women, who fled persecution in Pakistan, are beaming with excitement at the prospect of participating in the India democratic process -- a right they have long yearned for.

Having endured years of hardships and discrimination in Pakistan, they now feel a profound sense of relief and belonging in India.

For them, this election is not just about voting -- it is a symbolic assertion of their identity as Indian citizens. Many of these families settled in Delhi since 2013 are now witnessing their dreams of a dignified life and political participation coming true.

## Pakistani Hindu refugees ready to cast their first vote in Delhi



lition. My parents and I will vote as per our Pradhan's instruction. Despite the challenges, we believe we can manage and move forward."

The struggles of these refugees are not confined to the past. Their lives in Delhi are a delicate balance between hope and survival. Issues such as sanitation, electricity costs, education and housing dominate their concerns.

Mohini (18), who dropped out of school due to financial difficulties, shared her aspirations.

"I always wanted to become a police officer but that dream seems impossible now. All I expect from the government is some skill based opportunities so that I can earn a living with dignity," she said.

For women like Baldevi (35), voting signifies not just empowerment but also a chance to address their community's

challenges. "We have been living here for over a decade and want the government to build permanent homes for us. This area is familiar. We have built our lives here. Moving elsewhere would mean starting from scratch," she said.

While some residents are gearing up to vote, a new batch of refugees has recently arrived, facing uncertainty and hardships as they await citizenship.

Many like Shiviram (36), who arrived just a month ago, are hopeful about their future in India.

"I want to stay here and work as a tailor. I have applied for a visa extension and I hope to get an Aadhaar card soon. That will open many opportunities for me," he said.

For many of these refugees, their votes will reflect collective decisions, often guided by

While some residents are gearing up to vote, a new batch of refugees has recently arrived, facing uncertainty and hardships as they await citizenship

■ For many of these refugees, their votes will reflect collective decisions, often guided by their community leader

■ As the elections approach, these new citizens are not only celebrating their right to vote but also voicing their expectations from the government

■ They want better housing, access to quality education, affordable utilities and job opportunities

their community leader.

As the elections approach, these new citizens are not only celebrating their right to vote but also voicing their expectations from the government. They want better housing, access to quality education, affordable utilities and job opportunities.

The election marks a significant chapter for these refugees. As they prepare to cast their first votes, they do so with gratitude, hope and a firm resolve to contribute to the nation they now call home.

## Traffic woes, poor civic amenities plague Atishi's Kalkaji constituency

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 15: The Kalkaji Assembly segment in south Delhi, despite its affluence, years for congestion-free roads, proper sanitation facilities and upkeep of civic infrastructure ahead of the February 5 polls.

Represented by outgoing chief minister Atishi, who has been renominated by the AAP, the seat is set to witness a high-stakes showdown with BJP heavyweight and former MP Ramesh Bidhuri and Congress' Alka Lamba also in the fray.

The voters in the area although appreciative of the health and education initiatives of the Delhi government, emphasised that more attention needs to be paid to fixing civic issues.

The Kalkaji constituency has a total of 1,94,515 voters, including 1,06,893 male voters, 87,617 female voters, and 5 transgender voters.

Areas including Maharani Bagh, Ishwar Nagar, New Friends Colony, Bharat Nagar, Sarai Jullena, Sukhdev Vihar, Srinivaspuri, East of Kailash, Garhi East of Kailash, Shyam Nagar, Kalkaji, Giri Nagar, and Govindpuri are part of the Kalkaji constituency.

At the heart of Kalkaji lies the Kalkaji Mandir, a centuries-old temple dedicated to Goddess Kali. The area is also home to landmarks like the Lotus Temple and the ISKCON Temple in East of Kailash.

The constituency is marked by two contrasting sides: one that is clean and developed, and the other burdened by traffic, pollution, narrow lanes, congested roads, potholes, and inadequate sewerage systems.

A lane with an open garbage



dump next to a park near the Nehru Enclave Metro Station is a major eyesore for the residents and visitors.

Meena Sharma, a resident of Govindpuri near Kalkaji, told PTI, "We have to drive on roads filled with potholes, and streets with dumped garbage bags and sewage water. It's a mess, and sanitation work hasn't been carried out in a long time."

Basic civic amenities remain a challenge in Kalkaji, with issues such as overflowing garbage, poor sanitation, poorly maintained parks, and blocked drains persisting.

The sewers in particular lack adequate capacity for water flow, causing frequent overflows onto the roads.

"There are two sides to this constituency - one that appears clean and well-maintained, and the other that struggles with neglected infrastructure," said Harbansal Lal, a 47-year-old resident of Kalkaji who owns a shop in the A-block Kalkaji market.

"The drainage systems have long-standing issues as water fails to pass through properly, often spilling onto the roads. These problems have remained unchanged for years," he added.

Sanjay Rawat, a retired government employee and a resident of Sant Nagar opposite the ISKCON temple, said traffic snarls remain a major concern for the area.

# national

## of the day quote

Manipur is passing through a difficult time for the last 20 months, people are not moving out through the highways due to the prevailing crisis

The LoP, who was sworn in by taking oath on the Constitution, is now saying, We are now fighting the BJP, the RSS and the Indian State itself

We must support whichever party is strong and in a position to give a fight to BJP. In Delhi, AAP and Congress are facing each other... My advice is AAP is strong so we should all support it. After all, our common goal is the defeat of BJP, whether it is Congress, Samajwadi Party or AAP



# 111 farmers begin fast in solidarity with Dallewal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Chandigarh, Jan 15:** Ramping up the pressure on the government, a group of 111 farmers began a fast-unto-death Wednesday in solidarity with their leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, and vowed they won't relent until their demands are met.

Farmer leaders said the new 'jatha', who are all in black attire, sat on the Haryana side of the border -- Dallewal has been sitting on the hunger strike since November 26 last year at the Khanauri border point on the Punjab side -- and arrangements are being made for tents and blankets as the temperature dips in the region.

The jurisdiction of Haryana's Jind district begins after Khanauri. The Haryana Police has enhanced security on its side of the border and imposed Section 163 of Bhartiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, banning gathering of five or more people. The protesting farmers have expressed concern over Dallewal's "deteriorating" health, saying the 70-year-old risks "multiple organ failure" because of the prolonged fasting. The group of 111 farmers who joined the fast Wednesday was led by farmer leader Surjit Singh Hardojhande who targeted the Centre for not accepting farmers' demands. "For the past 51 days, Dallewal has been on the fast. The Centre is not accepting our demands and his health is deteriorating," he said. "If our family head (Dallewal) is going to die then we thought we should also lay down our lives." "Our jatha is going (for an indefinite fast) to press the Centre to initiate talks and accept our demands,"



said Hardojhande. The fast will continue till the government accepts our demands, he asserted. After the 111 protesters began their fast, farmer leader Kata Singh Kotra said, "We have told the Haryana police we will sit in a peaceful manner." Jind Deputy Superintendent of Police Amit Bhatia said police have asked the farmers not to do anything which vitiates law and order and disturbs peace. "Section 163 is already in force and farmers have been informed about it. We are keeping utmost restraint and our effort is to deal with it in a peaceful manner. We have told them the terms and conditions for a peaceful demonstration," he said. The DSP said the stretch of the land where the farmers began their fast on Wednesday falls under Haryana. "Our jurisdiction is 590 meters from the naka (police barricading)," said the DSP. Farmers, under the banner of the SKM (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha, have been camping at the Shambhu and Khanauri border points between Punjab and Haryana since February 13 last year, after security forces did not allow them to march to Delhi to press for their various demands including a legal guarantee of minimum support price (MSP) for their crops. Farmer leader Abhimanyu Kohar, who has been associated with Dallewal for a long time, lashed out at the Union government Wednesday for not "paying a heed" to farmers' demands. "Today, Dallewal's fast-unto-death entered day 51. The Centre is neither ready to listen to anything nor it is initiating talks nor fulfilling our demands."

**THE HARYANA POLICE HAS ENHANCED SECURITY ON ITS SIDE OF THE BORDER AND IMPOSED SECTION 163 OF BHARTIYA NAGARIK SURAKSHA SANHITA, BANNING GATHERING OF FIVE OR MORE PEOPLE**

**THE PROTESTING FARMERS HAVE EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER DALLEWAL'S "DETERIORATING" HEALTH, SAYING THE 70-YEAR-OLD RISKS "MULTIPLE ORGAN FAILURE" BECAUSE OF THE PROLONGED FASTING.**

## SC PROTECTS KHEDKAR FROM ARREST TILL FEB 14

The Supreme Court Wednesday protected from arrest till February 14 former IAS probationer Puja Khedkar, accused of cheating and wrongly availing OBC and disability quota benefits in the civil services examination. A bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and Satish Chandra Sharma issued notice to the Delhi government and the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) on Khedkar's plea seeking anticipatory bail



## Woman murdered by father, cousin while cops stand outside house

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Gwalior (MP), Jan 15:** A 20-year-old woman was allegedly shot dead in Gwalior city by her father and her cousin for refusing to marry the man chosen by them even as police officials were present right outside the house, a senior official said Wednesday.

The accused allegedly pumped four bullets into the body of Tanu Gurjar, the victim, police said. The incident took place in Gola ka Mandir area Tuesday night, said City Superintendent of Police Nagendra Singh Sikarwar. "The victim was to get married January 18, but she was not ready to marry the man chosen by her family," he said. There were heated arguments between the woman and her parents Tuesday night. Local police came to know about the tense situation, and two constables including a woman cop reached the spot to intervene, the official said.

As there was wedding atmosphere in the house, the police personnel chose to stay outside and keep an eye on the situation, he said. While the relatives tried to pacify the woman and her parents, her father Mahesh Singh Gurjar (45) flew into rage. He and his nephew Rahul then allegedly shot Tanu with a country-made firearm and a pistol, the official said. She suffered four bullet injuries.

While Rahul fled from the spot, Mahesh Singh remained there, brandishing the weapon. The police took him in custody while the woman was taken to hospital where she was declared dead by the doctors. Rahul too was arrested Wednesday, the official said, adding that further investigation is underway.

## Rahul's 'fighting Indian state' remark triggers row

Speaking at the inauguration of the new Congress headquarters here, Gandhi also hit out at RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, saying his remark that India got "true independence" after the Ram temple consecration amounts to treason and is an insult to every Indian

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Jan 15:** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's remarks that "we are now fighting the BJP, the RSS and the Indian state itself" triggered a row Wednesday with the BJP claiming that the Congress' "ugly truth" has been exposed by its own leader and that his statement was straight out of "George Soros' playbook". Addressing party leaders after the inauguration of the Congress' new headquarters at 9A, Kotla Road here, Gandhi said, "Do not think that we are fighting a fair fight. There is no fairness in this. If you believe that we are fighting a political organisation called the BJP, that we are fighting a political organisation called the RSS, you have not understood what is going on."

"The BJP and the RSS have captured every single institution of our country. We are now fighting the BJP, the RSS and the Indian state itself," he said. BJP president JP Nadda claimed that the Congress' "ugly truth" has been exposed by its own leader. Nadda alleged on X that it is not a secret that Gandhi and his ecosystem have close links with urban Naxals and the deep state who want to "defame, demean and discredit" India. He said Gandhi's repeated actions have also strengthened this belief. Everything he has done or said has been in the direction of breaking India and dividing



our society, Nadda said. "Hidden no more, Congress' ugly truth now stands exposed by their own leader," Nadda said. "I 'compliment' Mr Rahul Gandhi for saying clearly what the nation knows that he is fighting the Indian state!" he said. The BJP president charged that the Congress has a history of encouraging forces that want to weaken India. "Their greed for power meant compromising the nation's integrity and betraying the trust of the people," Nadda said, adding, people of India are wise, and they have decided they will always reject Gandhi and his rotten ideology. Tagging a video clip of Gandhi's remarks, Union minister and senior BJP leader Nirmala Sitharaman said, "The LoP, who was sworn in by taking oath on the Constitution, is now saying, 'We are now fighting the BJP, the RSS and the Indian State itself.' So @INCIndia and @RahulGandhi, what for are you carrying a copy of the Constitution in your hand?"

## SHORT TAKES

### Trackman mowed down in Maldah

**New Delhi:** A track maintainer was mowed down in the Maldah division when he moved to save himself from an oncoming train without realising another train was hurtling down the adjacent track as well, officials said Wednesday. Division officials said trackman Bari-ul Rahman had been employed with the railways since 2012 and he was not authorised for track inspection work. However, he was sent in place of the authorised worker who was on leave. However, Maldah Divisional Railway Manager Manish Kumar Gupta later said Rahman was authorised for track inspection.

### 2 killed as car falls into gorge

**Pauri:** Two people were killed and another was injured Wednesday when their car fell into a deep gorge here, police said. The victims were returning to Delhi after attending a puja in a village here, they said. The car plunged into a 100-metre deep gorge near Chimchonia forest on Bhaun Khaludanda road, office of the Senior Superintendent of Police informed. Two of the passengers, Ramesh Lal (70) and Pradeep (37), died on the spot. Kishore Kumar (35) was injured in the accident and was sent to Dhumakot PHC where he is undergoing treatment, SSP said.

### Fire breaks out in train

**Ludhiana:** The brake of one of the coaches of the Delhi-bound Shane-Punjab Express train caught fire near Khanna late Tuesday evening, causing panic among passengers. Officials said the incident took place after the Amritsar-Delhi train left the Ludhiana railway station. After covering a distance of about 25 km, the brake of one of the coaches caught fire. After seeing smoke, some of the frantic passengers raised an alarm.

### Court denies bail to Naresh Balyan

**New Delhi:** A Delhi court Wednesday denied bail to AAP MLA Naresh Balyan in a case under the stringent Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA). "Application dismissed," held special judge Kaveri Baweja. The judge January 9 reserved the order on the application after hearing arguments from the accused and the prosecution.

## ELECTION RULES ROW

# SC seeks Centre, poll panel reply on Jairam Ramesh's plea

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Jan 15:** The Supreme Court Wednesday sought responses from the Centre and the poll panel on Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh's plea against the recent amendments, including no public access to CCTV, to the 1961 election rules.



A bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjay Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar took note of the submissions of senior advocates Kapil Sibal and Abhishek Manu Singhvi, appearing for Ramesh, and issued notices on the plea. The bench said it would hear the

plea in the week commencing March 17.

Singhvi said amendments to the 1961 Conduct of Election Rules were made "very cleverly" and barred any access to CCTV footage claiming it would reveal the identity of the voter.

He said voting choices were never revealed and the CCTV footage couldn't reveal votes.

The senior lawyer urged the bench to ask the Election Commission of India (ECI) and the Centre to file their responses before the next date of hearing else they would come and say "reply is needed to be filed" on that day. "They will file the responses," the CJI said.



Army personnel aerially display the national flag and military colours during the Gaurav Gaatha event, at Khadki in Pune, Maharashtra

## MYSTERIOUS DEATHS IN J&K

# Certain neurotoxins found in samples of dead persons

FROM DECEMBER 7, 2024, A TOTAL OF 14 DEATHS OUT OF 38 AFFECTED INDIVIDUALS WERE REPORTED IN THREE SEPARATE INCIDENTS IN BADHAL VILLAGE. THE EXACT CAUSES REMAIN UNKNOWN

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Jammu, Jan 15:** Amid growing concern over the mysterious death of 14 people in a remote village in Jammu and Kashmir over the past one month, the administration has directed officials to analyse reports from institutions to identify the cause of the deaths.

Initial reports indicate the presence of certain neurotoxins in the samples of the deceased, which are being further investigated to determine the reasons behind these fatalities, officials said. Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo chaired a high-level meeting with officials from divisional and district administrations and health experts from several national institutions to review



the measures taken so far to identify the cause of the mysterious deaths in Badhal village, Rajouri district. The Chief Secretary emphasised the need for the Health and Police departments to work in close coordination and thoroughly analyse the reports received from various reputed

study these reports to identify reasonable leads contributing to the deaths.

"The reports furnished by different institutions are now available, and more are expected soon. These should suffice to conclude the investigations and pinpoint the possible reasons behind the deaths in this particular village," Dulloo said. During the meeting, Dulloo heard from experts who had analysed numerous samples collected from the affected individuals and the area. He also sought their suggestions regarding the future course of action.

Experts informed the meeting that extensive microbiological studies ruled out viral, bacterial, or microbial infections as causes of the deaths. Instead, the deaths appeared

to be localised and possibly linked epidemiologically, the spokesperson said. It was also disclosed that certain neurotoxins were identified in the samples of the deceased, which are being further investigated, the spokesperson added.

From December 7, 2024, a total of 14 deaths out of 38 affected individuals were reported in three separate incidents in Badhal village. The exact causes remain unknown, officials said.

The government has implemented several measures, including deploying Rapid Response Teams, analysing samples from humans and animals, and testing water sources. Assistance from reputed health institutions across the country has also been sought to determine the actual cause of these deaths.

## PMLA court grants bail to Jyoti Priya Mallick

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Kolkata, Jan 15:** A PMLA court here Wednesday granted bail to former West Bengal minister Jyoti Priya Mallick in connection with an alleged ration distribution scam being probed by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on a personal bond of ₹50 lakh.

Mallick, who held the Food and Supplies portfolio from 2011 to 2021, was arrested October 27, 2023 by the ED from his residence in Salt Lake here in connection with its investigation into the alleged scam. Special judge Prasanta Mukhopadhyay of the PMLA (Prevention of Money Laundering Act) court granted bail to Mallick on a personal bond of ₹ 50 lakh.

The former minister was also directed to furnish a bail bond of ₹25,000 each. Mallick's lawyers prayed for his bail on the ground that he was under a long period of detention and that the trial is not likely to commence soon.

The ED opposed the bail prayer claiming that he was one of the key accused in the case. Mallick held the Forest portfolio in the West Bengal cabinet when he was arrested.

The PMLA court had granted bail to Bakibur Rahaman and former Bongaon Municipality chairman Shankar Adya, co-accused in the case in August 2024. The ED has alleged that Mallick had links with Rahaman, who was arrested in October 2023 and Adya who was arrested in January 2024. The ED had December 12, 2023, filed a charge sheet before the court against Mallick and Rahaman in the alleged ration distribution scam case. The charge sheet was filed 46 days after Mallick's arrest.







The emergence of non-state actors in many countries and their resorting to terrorism is also a matter of concern

RAJNATH SINGH | DEFENCE MINISTER

APEX COURT INSISTS ON COLOUR-CODED STICKERS

The Supreme Court Wednesday deliberated over making hologram-based colour-coded stickers for vehicles mandatory across the country and stressed on the effective implementation of the pollution under control (PUC) certificate norms



of the day uote

The spirit of service is a symbol of secularism. The main foundation of our spiritual culture is the spirit of service. India is not just a piece of land surrounded by geographical boundaries. It is a living land, living culture. Knowledge is spirituality and if we want to understand India, we have to imbibe spirituality



NARENDRA MODI | PRIME MINISTER

By abrogating Article 370 in 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave a clear message to the world that for Indians, there is nothing bigger than the self-respect of India and its honour



AMIT SHAH | UNION HOME MINISTER

So, opposing the Indian State itself has become the new agenda of Rahul Gandhi and the Congress party!



PRAMOD SAWANT | GOA CM

POST OF THE DAY

As Per My Ground Reports Manish Sisodia is struggling in Jangpura; massive public anger against Arvind

Kejriwal is evident. Delhi Elections results will trigger AAP dramatic downfall. Rahul Gandhi should target impressive 15%+ vote share now.

@Politix2029

SHORT TAKES

ED arrests former Ch'garh minister

Raipur: The Enforcement Directorate on Wednesday arrested Congress MLA in Chhattisgarh and former state excise minister Kawasi Lakhma in an alleged liquor scam. He was produced before the special court for Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) here which granted the ED his custodial remand till January 21. The central agency had December 28 raided the properties of the former minister and his son Harish in Raipur, Sukma and Dhamtari districts as part of a money laundering investigation into the case. It subsequently questioned Lakhma (71) and his son in the case.

BSF pushes back 13 Bangladeshi infiltrators

Kolkata: The BSF pushed back 13 Bangladeshi intruders and arrested three cattle smugglers, successfully thwarting multiple smuggling and infiltration attempts across North 24 Parganas, Nadia, Murshidabad and Malda districts along the India-Bangladesh border in West Bengal. In addition, BSF troops seized 1,236 bottles of banned Phensedyl and rescued 18 cattle during these operations.

Relief to Mayawati

New Delhi: In a relief to BSP supremo Mayawati, the Supreme Court on Wednesday disposed of a petition filed in 2009 seeking a probe into the alleged spending of more than ₹2,000 crore from the Uttar Pradesh government's budget on installing elephant statues and personal glorification, when she was the chief minister of the state. The development came on a day Mayawati turned 69.

DELHI POLLS

Kejriwal files nomination



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 15: AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal Wednesday filed his nomination from New Delhi constituency for the upcoming Assembly elections and urged people to vote based on work and not "abuses".

Before filing his nomination papers, Kejriwal, accompanied by his wife Sunita, offered prayers at Hanuman and Valmiki temples. He then led a 'padayatra' from the AAP office to the New Delhi district magistrate's office, where he filed his nomination.

Hundreds of AAP workers, carrying party flags, walked with the former chief minister. After filing his nomination, Kejriwal exuded confidence that the AAP would return to power in Delhi.

"AAP will form the government with full majority," he told reporters. "I want to request the people of Delhi to vote based on work and not abuses,"

Attacking the BJP, Kejriwal said the party has no vision, no chief ministerial face and no narrative

he said. Attacking the BJP, Kejriwal said the party has no vision, no chief ministerial face and no narrative. "They are not telling what work they will do in the next five years. People of Delhi cannot be bought with a pair of shoes, people are seeing what the BJP is doing," he said. On reports about a threat to his life from a pro-Khalistani outfit, the AAP leader said God was with him.

"Jako rakhe saiyen maar sake na koye (Those protected by God cannot be killed by anyone). God is with me. One lives as long as their lifeline. The day one's lifeline ends, God calls them," he told reporters after offering prayers at the Prachin Hanuman temple. Sunita Kejriwal said the people of Delhi

know who will provide better governance.

"People know who can provide leadership. So, people will decide," she said. Kejriwal has held the New Delhi seat since 2013. He is pitted against BJP's Parvesh Verma and Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit this time. Voting for the 70-member Delhi Assembly is scheduled to be held on February 5. The counting of votes will be taken up on February 8. Meanwhile, the Union Home Ministry has granted sanction to the Enforcement Directorate to prosecute former Delhi chief minister and AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal in the excise policy linked money laundering case, officials said Wednesday.

The federal agency filed a chargesheet against the 56-year-old politician before a special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court here last year after arresting him in March. Kejriwal, who is currently out on bail in this case, is contesting the Delhi Assembly polls from the New Delhi seat.

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has recently granted the required sanction to the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for prosecuting Kejriwal under the anti-money laundering law in the Delhi excise policy case, officials said. The ministry is the competent authority to okay such a request moved by the agency through the Delhi LG, they said.

The officials said similar sanctions have also been obtained for other accused public servants, including former Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, in this case.

Railway Board gives recognition to AIRF, NFIR for five years

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 15: The Railway Board has given recognition to two federations of rail employees, the All India Railwaymen's Federation (AIRF) and the National Federation of Indian Railwaymen (NFIR), for five years after their victory in the recently held secret ballot elections.

While recognizing the two federations, the board said that they have to follow the provisions of Indian Railway Establishment Manual and

they will not maintain any political fund. "Board has decided to accord recognition to the two Federations namely All India Railwaymen's Federation and National Federation of Indian Railwaymen at Railway Board level for a period of five years," a board's letter dated January 13 said, specifying certain conditions for them to abide by.

On November 17, 2024, the Railway Board had constituted a Secret Ballot Election Committee-III (SBEC-III) which proposed certain norms for con-

testing federations to get recognition. Based on those norms, secret ballot elections were held for three days from December 4 to 6, 2024 and the constituents of the two federations -- AIRF and NFIR -- received more than 15 per cent votes, one of the mandatory conditions to get Railway Board's recognition.

The board said that the two federations have to follow the provisions of Indian Railway Establishment Manual and they will not maintain any political fund.

3 NAVAL WARSHIPS COMMISSIONED

AGENCIES

Mumbai, Jan 15: Indian Navy warships INS Surat, INS Nilgiri and INS Vaghsheer were commissioned at the Naval Dockyard here in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi Wednesday. The Navy described the commissioning of the three major combatants as a historic occasion.

PM Modi Wednesday said India is emerging as a major maritime power, and being recognised as a reliable and responsible partner globally.

INS Nilgiri, the lead ship of the Project 17A stealth frigate class, represents a significant advancement over the Shiva-



lik-class frigates. INS Surat, the fourth and final vessel of the Project 15B stealth destroyer class, is a follow-on to the Kolkata-class destroyers. INS Vaghsheer is the sixth

and final submarine under the Scorpene-class Project 75. It is a diesel-electric submarine designed for multiple roles, including anti-surface warfare, anti-submarine war-

fare, and intelligence gathering. All the three platforms have been designed and built entirely in India, reflecting the country's growing expertise in defence production.

GRAP 4 curbs invoked in Delhi

New Delhi: The Centre's panel on Delhi-NCR's air quality Wednesday invoked curbs under stage 4 of the Graded Response Action Plan amid a sharp dip in air quality due to unfavourable meteorological conditions, according to an official order. Calm winds, low temperatures and foggy conditions allowed accumulation of pollutants in the region, with the air quality index soaring from 275 Tuesday to 396 at 6 pm Wednesday. The India Meteorological Department and the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology predicted that AQI may breach the 400 mark soon. Accordingly, the Commission for Air Quality Management directed authorities in Delhi-NCR to "straightway invoke" all actions under stages 3 and 4.

Maha Kumbh: Airfares rise for Prayagraj flights

According to an analysis by travel portal ixigo, the one-way airfare between Bhopal and Prayagraj has surged the maximum at 498 per cent to ₹ 17,796 from ₹2,977 last year

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 15: Bookings as well as airfares for flights to Prayagraj have jumped multifold as more people travel for the Maha Kumbh, with the air ticket prices rising up to 21 per cent for the Delhi-Prayagraj flights.

According to an analysis by travel portal ixigo, the one-way airfare between Bhopal and Prayagraj has surged the maximum at 498 per cent to ₹17,796 from ₹2,977 last year.

These are one-way average fares on 30 days APD (advanced purchase date) basis for

the January 13 to February 26, 2025, compared to the year-ago period.

While the airfare from Delhi to Prayagraj has risen 21 per cent to ₹5,748, the jump is 13 per cent to ₹6,381 for the Mumbai-Prayagraj flight. The rise in the air ticket price is 89 per cent for the Bengaluru-Prayagraj service to ₹11,158 while the increase is 41 per cent to ₹10,364 for the Ahmedabad-Prayagraj flight, as per the analysis.

For the flights to Lucknow and Varanasi, cities that are near Prayagraj, where the Maha Kumbh is happening, airfares have gone up in the range of 3



to 21 per cent.

On a year-on-year basis, flight bookings to Prayagraj have jumped 162 per cent while the bookings to Lucknow and

Varanasi have increased 42 per cent and 127 per cent, respectively. The figures are for the January 13 to February 26 period, the analysis showed.

ixigo said that Prayagraj is now connected to over 20 destinations through direct and one-stop flights, compared to just one from Delhi during the last Maha Kumbh. The Maha Kumbh, which started on January 13, will conclude February 26.

"One-way airfares from major metros to Prayagraj and surrounding airports are averaging between ₹7,000-10,000 if booked 30 days in advance. However, on certain routes like Bhopal-Prayagraj, fares are reaching up to ₹17,000 one way due to peak demand and limited flight availability," ixigo Group CEO Alok Bajpai said.

Fares are also trending higher for travel before key 'snan' dates. For example, fares for January 27 from key metros like Mumbai are going as high as ₹27,000 one-way for non-stop flights. Bookings for trains to Prayagraj have also jumped for the January 13 to February 26 period. The present edition of the Kumbh is being held after 12 years, though seers claim the celestial permutations and combinations for the event are taking place after 144 years, making the occasion even more auspicious.



Devotees during the ongoing 'Maha Kumbh Mela' festival in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh

PTI PHOTO

Panel submits report on activities of terror groups

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 15: A high-powered enquiry committee has submitted its report on activities of some organised criminal groups and terrorist organisations, which undermined the security interests of both India and the US.

The probe was ordered after the US alleged that there was an attempt to kill Khalistani separatist Gurbatwani Singh Pannun by Indian agents. In a statement, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said after a long enquiry, the committee has recommended legal action against an individual, whose earlier criminal links and antecedents also came to notice during the enquiry.

The home ministry statement, however, did not name any individual against whom action has been initiated.

The MHA said on receipt of information provided by US authorities regarding activities of some organised criminal groups, terrorist organisations, drug peddlers, etc., who undermined the security interests of both India and the US, a high-powered enquiry committee was set up by the government of India in November 2023.

The committee conducted its own investigations, and also pursued leads provided by the US side and it received full



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cooperation from US authorities and the two sides also exchanged visits. The committee further examined a number of officials from different agencies and also scrutinised relevant documents in this connection.

"After a long enquiry, the Committee has submitted its report to the Government and recommended legal action against an individual, whose earlier criminal links and antecedents also came to notice during the enquiry," the statement said. The committee has recommended that the legal action must be completed expeditiously.

Sonia inaugurates Cong's new Kotla Road headquarters

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 15: The Congress' new headquarters located at 9A, Kotla Road here was inaugurated Wednesday, as the grand old party turned a page in its history after operating from its iconic 24, Akbar Road premises for the last 47 years.

Congress parliamentary party chief Sonia Gandhi inaugurated the plush five-storey building in the presence of party president Mallikarjun Kharge, former party chief Rahul Gandhi, and general secretaries Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Jairam Ramesh and K C Venugopal, among other senior leaders. Indira Gandhi Bhawan, constructed by L&T and designed by Hafeez Contractor, narrates the tale of the party's 139-year-old history with its walls adorning pictures from the freedom struggle to the party's governance achievements.



The five principles of the Congress -- democracy, nationalism, secularism, inclusive growth and justice -- are inscribed on one of the walls of the building. As one enters the building, the wall in front adorns the pictures of the party's first president W C Benerjee and current chief Kharge.

While BR Ambedkar's picture with an inspirational quote adorns a wall, several other rare pictures showcasing India's struggle for independence and the Congress leaders' contribution are also put up across the five storeys. From Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel to Subhas Chandra Bose and from Rabin-dranath Tagore to Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, their contributions are highlighted.

The party's 139-year history is showcased throughout the building on the walls, in a unique blend of traditional and the modern.



We call upon Russia to immediately confirm Oscar Jenkins' status. But if there has been any harm caused to Oscar Jenkins, that is absolutely reprehensible. And the Australian government will take the strongest action possible

2 PRIVATE LUNAR LANDERS HEAD TOWARD THE MOON

In a two-for-one moonshot, SpaceX launched a pair of lunar landers Wednesday for US and Japanese companies looking to jumpstart business on Earth's dusty sidekick. The two landers rocketed away in the middle of the night from NASA's Kennedy Space Centre, the latest in a stream of private spacecraft aiming for the moon



of the day quote

We will approach the next US administration to convey that constructive commitment of the United States in this region is important also for the United States itself



TAKESHI IWAYA | FOREIGN MINISTER, JAPAN

I will not go into details, I can only confirm the validity of fears that Russia was planning acts of air terror, not only against Poland, but against airlines around the world



DONALD TUSK | PRIME MINISTER, POLAND

Muscat is hopeful of concluding the ambitious trade pact with India this year, which is expected to significantly expand the two-way trade and investment ties between the two countries



QAIS BIN MOHAMMAD AL-YOUSEF | COMMERCE MINISTER, OMAN

SHORT TAKES

Prez Xi holds talks with Dissanayake

Beijing: President Xi Jinping Wednesday expressed Beijing's readiness to usher in a new era of development in China-Sri Lanka ties as he met Sri Lankan counterpart Anura Kumara Dissanayake here following which both countries signed several agreements to boost bilateral relations. Dissanayake, who arrived here Tuesday on a four-day visit a month after travelling to India on his first overseas trip since assuming office in September, was given a ceremonial welcome at the Great Hall of People following which both the Presidents held talks. President Xi reiterated China's commitment to continuing its cooperation with Sri Lanka in the future, the release said. Following this, the two sides signed several MoUs aimed at strengthening collaboration in areas such as economy, social development, and industry, it said.

German economy shrinks for 2nd year

Berlin: Germany's economy shrank for the second straight year in 2024 as worried consumers held back on spending and Chinese competition ate into the country's traditional exports of cars and industrial machinery. The year's weak performance underlines Germany's status as Europe's worst performing major economy and shows the country as having no meaningful growth in the past four years as it has struggled to deal with major shifts in the global economy. Gross domestic product contracted by 0.2 per cent last year, following a 0.3 per cent decline in 2023, according to preliminary official figures released Wednesday, weeks before an election in which the economy is the top issue.

B'desh SC acquits Khaleda Zia

Dhaka: Bangladesh Supreme Court acquitted former prime minister and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia in a corruption case Wednesday, overturning the High Court's earlier 10-year prison sentence. The verdict was delivered by a bench led by Chief Justice Syed Rezaat Ahmed after reviewing 79 year old Zia's appeal against the High Court's ruling Wednesday, the Dhaka Tribune reported. The Supreme Court acquitted Zia, the party's Acting Chairman Tarique Rahman, and all other suspects in their appeal over the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case, the report added. The Appellate Division noted that the case was motivated by revenge.

South Korea's Yoon finally arrested

South Korean investigators question arrested President Yoon in insurrection probe

REUTERS

Seoul, Jan 15: Impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol was arrested and questioned for hours by investigators Wednesday in relation to a criminal insurrection probe, ending a weeks-long standoff with authorities.

His arrest, the first ever for a sitting president in South Korea, is the latest head-spinning development in one of Asia's most vibrant democracies, even though the country has a history of prosecuting and imprisoning former leaders.

Since lawmakers voted to impeach and strip him of his duties after his short-lived Dec 3 declaration of martial law, Yoon has been holed up at his hillside residence, guarded by a small army of presidential security staff who blocked a previous arrest attempt earlier this month.

He turned himself in for questioning at the corruption investigation offices Wednesday after more than 3,000 police officers seeking to arrest him marched on his residence before dawn.

"I decided to respond to the CIO's investigation - despite it being an illegal investigation - to prevent unsavoury bloodshed,"



Yoon said in a statement, referring to the Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials (CIO) that is heading the criminal inquiry.

A prosecutor accompanied Yoon in his car from his home in the upscale district known as Seoul's Beverly Hills to the austere CIO offices, where he slipped in through a back entrance, avoiding the media.

As Yoon was being interrogated, an unidentified man in his 60s set himself on fire nearby, fire services said. The man was severely burned and was unconscious.

Authorities have 48 hours to question Yoon, after which they must seek a warrant to detain him for up to 20 days or release him.

However, Yoon is refusing to talk and has not agreed to have interviews with investigators recorded on video, a CIO official said. The CIO said it had

- Yoon is first sitting president to be arrested
Investigation related to his Dec 3 martial law decree
Japan monitoring events with 'serious interest'
US says it is committed to working with South Korea

no information on why Yoon was refusing to talk.

The presidential motorcade was seen leaving the CIO offices late Wednesday evening, with Yoon expected to be held at Seoul Detention Centre, where other high-profile figures including former President Park Geun-hye and Samsung Electronics Chairman Jay Y Lee have also spent time.

SERIOUS INTEREST
Yoon's brief declaration of martial law shocked South Koreans and rattled Asia's fourth-largest economy, and it



I decided to respond to the CIO's investigation - despite it being an illegal investigation - to prevent unsavoury bloodshed

YOON SUK YEOL | IMPEACHED PRESIDENT, SOUTH KOREA

has ushered in an unprecedented period of political turmoil in one of the United States' key security partners in the region. Lawmakers voted to impeach Yoon Dec 14.

Separate to the criminal investigation, the Constitutional Court is deliberating whether to uphold Yoon's impeachment by parliament and permanently remove him from office or restore his presidential powers.

The US remains committed to working with Seoul and appreciates its efforts "to act in accordance with the Constitution", a spokesperson for the White House National Security Council said in statement.

The top government spokesperson in neighbourhood Japan told a daily news briefing that

Tokyo was following developments in South Korea "with particular and serious interest".

Wednesday's arrest attempt had hundreds of thousands of people glued to TV live feeds showing busloads of police arriving near the presidential residence, pushing past Yoon supporters and then walking towards the gates of the compound carrying ladders and wire cutters.

Thousands of protesters, who also gathered outside the CIO offices, waved South Korean and American flags and held posters bearing "Stop the Steal" slogans referring to Yoon's unsubstantiated claims of election fraud - one of the reasons he gave to justify his martial law declaration.

South Africa accused of 'horrific' crackdown

South African police announce sudden end of mine rescue operation

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Stilfontein, South Africa, Jan 15: South African police said Wednesday they have ended a rescue operation at an abandoned gold mine where scores of illegal miners were trapped and believe they rescued all the survivors and retrieved all the bodies of those who died.

The announcement was a surprise and came just a day after the police minister said the rescue operation would likely last until at least next week. Police said that 78 bodies had been recovered from the gold mine since the rescue operation began Monday and more than 240 survivors had been rescued.

Police made the announcement at a news conference at the mine. They said rescuers would do a final sweep of the mine Thursday to ensure no more survivors or bodies were underground.

Rescuers and volunteers have pulled at least 78 dead miners and more than 160 survivors from an abandoned South African gold



mine, where they languished for months during a standoff with authorities who demanded they surrender to police because they were mining illegally.

Hundreds are still believed to be trapped Wednesday and the death toll is expected to rise in a disaster that has focused criticism on the South African government's decision to try to "smoke them out" by cutting off food and other supplies for a time.

Civic groups claim authorities also removed the ropes and pulley systems that the miners used to enter at least one shaft and send down supplies.

The groups say the government's weeklong refusal to stage a rescue effectively left scores of miners to die of starvation or dehydration. A rescue is now underway - after a court order - but only a few miners can be pulled up at a time, and the operation could take 10 days.

Biden bids farewell from Oval Office

REUTERS

Washington, Jan 15: President Joe Biden will cap his half-century political career Wednesday with a final Oval Office speech, hoping to seal a legacy that has been overshadowed by Democrats' failure to stop Donald Trump from returning to the White House.

Biden ran for president in 2020 as a transition figure, but opted at the unprecedented age of 80 to run for reelection, convinced he was the only Democrat who could beat Trump.

Forced out of the race in July after a disastrous debate against Trump, Biden has been blamed by some Democrats for their November wipeout, after Vice President Kamala Harris' whirlwind campaign lost every battleground state.

Biden and his allies oversaw the recovery from COVID, funded an infrastructure revival, sparked new semiconductor chips manufacturing, and tackled climate change as they tried to rebalance inequality and invest in the future. He leaves an outperforming US economy and optimistic businesses.

But Biden was unable to heal divisions in the country the way he had hoped, or



I ran for president because I believed that the soul of America was at stake. The very nature of who we are was at stake. And, that's still the case

JOE BIDEN | PRESIDENT, US

stop democratic backsliding around the world. His crowning political achievement - defeating Trump in 2020 - proved temporary. Now the Republican president-elect has vowed to undo much of what the Democratic administration accomplished.

"All Joe Biden wanted was to be remembered for the great things he did for this country and, at least in the short run,

they've been eclipsed by his ill-conceived decision to run," said David Axelrod, a former adviser to President Barack Obama.

"He became a historic president when he defeated Trump. So obviously the fact that Trump is resurgent and returning to power, more powerful than he was when he left, is an unhappy coda to the story."

- President makes Oval Office address Wednesday evening
Running for reelection ushered in Trump return, critics say
Biden's decades in Senate, vice presidency, White House overshadowed for now by Trump's comeback
Leaves strong economy, manufacturing pickup

Biden addressed what he described as an ongoing threat to the country in a letter released early Wednesday by the White House.

"I ran for president because I believed that the soul of America was at stake. The very nature of who we are was at stake. And, that's still the case," he said, urging Americans to keep fighting for the country's focus on equality, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

A White House official said that legacies are set over the long term.

"In historical terms, it has been a millisecond since the election. This president has locked in the most significant legislative record since LBJ (President Lyndon Johnson in the 1960s), and the irreversible benefits of those laws will grow over decades," the official said.

As LA burns, Hollywood's Oscar season turns into a pledge drive

The fires have struck at the very heart of a movie industry still trying to stabilize itself after years of pandemic, labour turmoil and technological upheaval

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Los Angeles, Jan 15: When the Palisades Fire broke out in Los Angeles last Tuesday, Hollywood's awards season was in full swing. The Golden Globes had transpired less than 48 hours earlier and a series of splashy awards banquets followed in the days after.

But the enormity of the destruction in Southern California has quickly snuffed out all festiveness in the movie industry's high season of celebration. At one point, the flames even encroached on the hillside above the Dolby Theatre, the home of the Academy Awards.

The fires have struck at the very heart of a movie industry still trying to stabilize itself af-

ter years of pandemic, labour turmoil and technological upheaval. Not for the first time this decade, the Oscars are facing the question of: Should the show go on? And if it does, what do they mean now?

"With ALL due respect during Hollywood's season of celebration, I hope any of the networks televising the upcoming awards will seriously consider NOT televising them and donating the revenue they would have gathered to victims of the fires and the firefighters," "Hacks" star Jean Smart, a recent Globe winner, wrote on Instagram.

The Oscars remain as scheduled, but it's certain that they will be transformed due to the wildfires, and that most of the



stretch-pump that typically red-carpet between now and then will be curtailed if not altogether cancelled. With so many left without a home by the fires, there's scant appetite for the usual self-congratulatory parades of the season.

Focus has turned, instead, to what the Oscars might symbolize for a traumatised Los Angeles. The Oscars have nev-

er meant less, but, at the same time, they might be more important than ever as a beacon of perseverance for the reeling movie capital.

The film academy Monday for the second time delayed its nominations announcement.

Nominations will now be announced virtually February 23

The academy also cancelled its annual nominees luncheon and said it's planning to honour frontline workers and to support relief efforts

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"We will get through this together and bring a sense of healing to our global film community," vowed Bill Kramer, academy chief executive, and Janet Yang, academy president.

The fires, one of the costliest natural disasters in US history, continue. The ongoing nature of the crisis, which has killed at least 25 people, has made re-making well-laid plans a moving target. The Critics Choice

Awards have been postponed. Nominations to the Producers Guild Awards have been delayed twice with no new date set. The guild established a fund to support producers affected by the fires Tuesday.

The 67th Grammy Awards, scheduled to be held February 2 in downtown Los Angeles, are going forward, albeit with significant changes. Harvey Mason jr, Recording Academy chief executive, and Board of Trustees chair Tammy Hurt said this year's Grammys "will carry a renewed sense of purpose: raising additional funds to support wildfire relief efforts and honouring the bravery and dedication of first responders who risk their lives to protect ours."

Some telethon-like element also seems sure to accompany the Oscars. In recent days, many throughout the industry have voiced suggestions for how the broadcast could be reconsidered.



