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India Set To Become Major Maritime Power: PM Modi



Mumbai

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday after the commissioning of three naval warships here said India is going to play a major role in giving a direction to the global security, economy and geopolitical dynamics.

Modi said India has always supported an open, secure, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.

A destroyer, a frigate and a submarine were commissioned together for the first time on Wednesday, he noted, adding that all the three are 'Made in India'.

The 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' initiative has made the country strong and self-reliant the prime minister noted. He further said that India is becoming a major maritime power and is being recognised as a reliable

and responsible partner in the world.

"We should become a global partner in securing the sea from drugs, weapons and terrorism and make it safe and prosperous. India is becoming a major maritime power and is being recognised as a reliable and responsible partner," he said.

In the Indian Ocean region, India has emerged as the "first responder", the prime minister noted. Modi said that India is going to play a major role in giving a direction to the global security, economy and geopolitical dynamics.

"It is important to protect the territorial waters, freedom of navigation, and secure trade supply lines and sea routes," he said. Modi further said India is working for development, and not expansionism. He said 33 ships and seven submarines have been inducted into the Navy in the last 10 years.

India's defence production has crossed Rs 1.25 lakh crore and defence equipment has been exported to more than 100 countries, he added.

Naval combatants, key arsenals for maritime security

The commissioning of three major naval combatants marks a significant leap forward in realising India's vision of becoming a global leader in defence manufacturing and maritime security. INS Surat, the fourth and final ship of the P15B Guided Missile Destroyer Project, ranks among the largest and most sophisticated destroyers in the world. It has an indigenous content of 75 per cent and is equipped with state-of-the-art weapon-sensor packages and advanced network-centric capabilities.

INS Nilgiri, the first ship of the P17A Stealth Frigate Project, has been designed by the Indian Navy's Warship Design Bureau and incorporates advanced features for enhanced survivability, seakeeping, and stealth, reflecting the next generation of indigenous frigates.

INS Vaghsheer, the sixth and final submarine of the P75 Scorpene Project, represents India's growing expertise in submarine construction and has been constructed in collaboration with the Naval Group of

France.

In line with his commitment to boost India's cultural heritage, the Prime Minister will inaugurate the Sri Sri Radha Madanmohanji Temple, an ISKCON project in Kharghar, Navi Mumbai. The project, spread over nine acres, includes a temple with several deities, a Vedic education centre, proposed museums and auditorium, healing center, among others. It aims to promote universal brotherhood, peace, and harmony through Vedic teachings. Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde has informed that the Prime Minister will interact with all the MLAs of Mahayutchi during the visit. Prime Minister Modi will meet all the MLAs at Mahayutichi, Shinde said and added that PM Modi will guide all the MLAs to discharge their democratic duties. "The people have given us a big mandate. Hence our responsibility has only increased. In this context, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's interaction with MLAs is significant," Shinde said.

Inside

Torres Ponzi case: Bombay HC says 'shocked by the manner in which investigation is progressing'

Read full story on pg 2

PM Modi inaugurates the Sri Sri Radha Madanmohanji Temple of ISKCON in Navi Mumbai

Read full story on pg 3

BJP slams Rahul Gandhi over his 'fighting Indian state' remark

Read full story on pg 4

Maha Kumbh: Devotees brave biting cold to take holy dip in Sangam

Read full story on pg 8

Torres Ponzi case: Bombay HC says 'shocked by the manner in which investigation is progressing'

Mumbai

The Bombay High Court Wednesday slammed the Mumbai police over how an investigation by a "specialised agency" into the alleged Torres fraud has progressed so far, and ordered immediate interim police protection to the chartered accountant who has claimed to be a whistleblower in the case.

Questioning the Mumbai police's Economic Offences Wing (EOW), which is probing the Torres 'scam' over its laxity in finding whether the absconding Ukrainian nationals, accused in the case, have left the country, the court asked it to "act promptly" and to seek information from immigration authorities at the earliest to trace the concerned accused persons.

"Why didn't you (police) check with immigration authorities if they have left the country or are in any other part of India? We are not happy with the investigation. Let us not mince words... You were informed in June and October last year. You are taking no steps against the persons you should be going after... Somewhere the police are responsible. Despite



getting a wealth of information including their Telegram IDs, PAN cards, Aadhaar cards, and passport details, why didn't you check if they have left the shores or not?" the bench of Justices Revati Mohite-Dere and Neela K Gokhale orally questioned the police.

The court also indicated passing orders during the next hearing on departmental action against police officers who failed to take cognisance of irregularities informed to them last year.

"Have you (police) collected CCTV footage from the hotel where they (accused) were staying? Do we have to tell you everything? We are not expected to monitor cases like this

but where you fail, we come in. We are shocked by the manner in which the investigation is progressing... Is this the manner and pace of a specialised agency? We expect promptness," said the bench.

The Torres brand, run by Platinum Hern Pvt Ltd, allegedly floated multiple schemes offering weekly interests, around 500 per cent annual interest on investments and investors were allegedly lured with incentives and expensive gifts. The FIR registered on January 6 claimed that more than 1.25 lakh individuals invested money and the fraud amount can go up to Rs. 1, 000 crore.

The Bombay High Court was hearing CA Abhishek Gupta's plea seeking police protection, argued through advocates Ranjit Sangle and Priyanshu Mishra Vivek Tiwari.

Gupta apprehended threats to his life from persons involved in the fraud as he exposed them. He said he found, several irregularities, including the absence of invoices or bills of cash investments, in the company's audit report of 2023-24. He said after he informed Lakshmi Yadav, who rented office space to the

firm about the irregularities, she sent an email to the police on December 30, 2024. The bench termed Yadav's arrest as a 'knee-jerk reaction'.

On January 3, Gupta said he along with one of the directors Sarvesh Surve, who has been arrested, and another person informed the police about irregularities but no cognisance was taken until January 6. By then Ukrainian directors and other employees had gone underground, he said.

Gupta added that no steps were taken even though APMC Market (Navi Mumbai) and Shivaji Park police stations sent letters to Torres and summoned its directors and later in November last year, the Income Tax Department asked Torrest officials to appear before it.

In response, Additional Public Prosecutor (APP) Prajakta Shinde for the state submitted that a Look Out Circular (LOC) had been issued against the accused on January 10. The police conceded that they did not have instructions on whether Ukrainian nationals had left the country and said efforts would be taken to trace them.

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Maintain post's decorum: Pawar slams Shah on betrayal remark

Mumbai

Former Union minister Sharad Pawar on Tuesday rubbished Home Minister Amit Shah's remarks that the BJP's victory in the Maharashtra Assembly elections ended the politics of betrayal and treachery started by him in 1978.

"I was the CM in 1978. I am not aware about his whereabouts then," Pawar told reporters in Mumbai. "When I was the CM, there were people like Uttamrao Patil from the Jan Sangh in my ministry," he added.

The decorum of the post of Home Minister should be maintained, the NCP (SP) chief said, bemoaning the lack of communication between present political leaders. "There used to be 'susanvad' (good communication) between political

leaders earlier but that is missing now," he said.

"The BJP's victory in Maharashtra ended the politics of instability and backstabbing started by Sharad Pawar in 1978. You (people) have buried such politics 20-foot in the ground," Shah had said, addressing a state-level convention of the BJP in Shirdi on Sunday.

Shah's apparent reference was to Pawar walking out of the Vasantdada Patil-led government in 1978 with 40 MLAs and becoming the CM.

Pawar recalled that then PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee had made him the vice-chairman of the Disaster Management Authority after the Bhuj earthquake despite being in the opposition.



PM Modi inaugurates the Sri Sri Radha Madanmohanji Temple of ISKCON in Navi Mumbai

Navi Mumbai

The Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi today inaugurated the Sri Sri Radha Madanmohanji Temple, an ISKCON project in Kharghar, Navi Mumbai. Addressing the gathering, he expressed that it was his good fortune to participate in such a divine ceremony and acknowledged the immense affection and warmth of ISKCON's saints, along with the blessings of Srila Prabhupada Swami. The Prime Minister extended his gratitude to all revered saints and paid his respects to them. He highlighted the design and concept of the Sri Radha Madanmohanji Temple complex, which reflects the complete tradition of spirituality and knowledge. He added that the temple showcases various forms of the divine, expressing the idea of 'Eko Aham Bahu Syam.' The Prime Minister noted that a museum based on the Ramayana and Mahabharata was being constructed to cater to the interests and attractions of the new generation. Additionally, he added that a garden inspired by the 12 forests of Vrindavan was being developed. Shri Modi expressed his confidence that the temple complex will become a sacred center enriching India's consciousness along with faith. He congratulated all the saints and members of ISKCON and the people of Maharashtra for this noble endeavor.

Expressing his emotional remembrance of the revered Gopal Krishna Goswami Maharaj on the occasion, Shri Modi remarked that Maharaj's vision and blessings, rooted in his deep devotion to Lord Krishna, are integral to this project. He added that although Maharaj was not physically present, his spiritual presence was felt by all. The Prime Minister highlighted the special place Maharaj's affection and memories hold in his life. He recalled being invited by Maharaj for the unveiling of the world's largest Gita and receiving his guidance during Srila Prabhupada Ji's 125th birth anniversary. The Prime Minister expressed his satisfaction in witnessing the realization of another of Maharaj's dreams.

"ISKCON followers worldwide are united by their devotion to Lord Krishna", said Shri Modi and highlighted that another connecting thread is the teachings of Srila Prabhupada Swami, which guides the devotees 24/7. The Prime Minister noted that Srila Prabhupada Swami promoted the importance of the Vedas, Vedanta, and the Gita during India's struggle for independence, linking Bhakti Vedanta to the consciousness of the common people. He further added that at the age of 70, when most people consider their duties fulfilled, Srila Prabhupada Swami started the ISKCON mission and traveled the world, spreading Lord Krishna's message to every corner. Remarking that today, millions of people globally benefit from his dedication, the Prime Minister emphasized that Srila Prabhupada Swami's active efforts continue to inspire us.

"India is an extraordinary and wonderful land, not just a piece of land bound by geographical boundaries, but a living land with a vibrant culture", exclaimed the Prime Minister. He emphasized that the essence of this culture is spirituality, and to understand India, one must first embrace spirituality. The Prime Minister



noted that those who view the world only from a material perspective see India as a collection of different languages and provinces. However, he added that when one connects their soul with this cultural consciousness, they truly see India. He highlighted that in the far east, saints like Chaitanya Mahaprabhu appeared in Bengal, while in the west, saints like Namdev, Tukaram, and Dnyaneshwar emerged in Maharashtra. Shri



Modi remarked that Chaitanya Mahaprabhu spread the Mahavakya mantra to the masses, and the saints of Maharashtra shared spiritual nectar through the 'Ramkrishna Hari' mantra. He added that Sant Dnyaneshwar made the profound knowledge of Lord Krishna accessible through the Dnyaneshwari Gita. Similarly, Srila Prabhupada popularized the Gita through ISKCON, publishing commentaries and connecting people with its essence. The Prime Minister remarked that these saints, born in different places and times, each advanced the stream of Krishna devotion in their unique ways. He added that despite the differences in their birth periods, languages, and methods, their understanding, thoughts, and consciousness were one and all of them infused new life into society with the light of devotion, giving it new direction and energy.

Remarking that the foundation of India's spiritual culture is service, Shri Modi emphasized that in spirituality, serving God and serving people become one. He noted that India's spiritual culture connects practitioners to

society, fostering compassion and leading them towards service. Quoting a Shri Krishna's shloka meaning that true service is selfless, the Prime Minister highlighted that all religious texts and scriptures are rooted in the spirit of service. He remarked that ISKCON, a vast organization, operates with this spirit of service, contributing to education, health, and the environment. He noted that ISKCON was undertaking significant



service activities at the Kumbh Mela.

The Prime Minister expressed his satisfaction that the government was continuously working for the welfare of citizens with the same spirit of service. He remarked that building toilets in every home, providing gas connections to poor women through Ujjwala scheme, ensuring tap water in every household, offering free medical treatment up to 5 lakh rupees to every poor person, extending this facility to every elderly person above 70 years of age, and providing pucca houses to every homeless person are all actions driven by this spirit of service. The Prime Minister emphasized that this spirit of service brings true social justice and is a symbol of true secularism.

Underscoring that the Government was connecting various pilgrimage and religious sites across the country through the Krishna Circuit, Shri Modi highlighted that this circuit extends to Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Odisha. He added that these sites were being developed under the Swadesh Darshan and PRASAD schemes. The Prime Minister

noted that these temples showcase different forms of Lord Krishna, from his child form to his worship with Radha Rani, his Karmayogi form, and his worship as a king. He emphasized that the aim was to make it easier to visit various sites associated with Lord Krishna's life and temples, with special trains being operated for this purpose. The Prime Minister suggested that ISKCON can assist in bringing devotees to these faith centers connected to the Krishna Circuit. He urged ISKCON to encourage all devotees associated with their centers to visit at least five such places in India.

Stressing that in the past decade, the country had seen simultaneous progress in development and heritage, the Prime Minister highlighted the significant contribution of institutions like ISKCON to this mission of development through heritage. The Prime Minister noted that temples and religious sites have been centers of social consciousness for centuries, and gurukuls have played a crucial role in promoting education and skill development. He emphasized that ISKCON inspires youth to make spirituality a part of their lives through its programs. The Prime Minister remarked on how ISKCON's young practitioners embrace modern technology while following their traditions, making their information network a model for others. He expressed

confidence that under ISKCON's guidance, the youth will work for national interest with a spirit of service and dedication. Shri Modi highlighted that the Bhaktivedanta Ayurvedic Healing Center and the Bhaktivedanta College for Vedic Education established in the temple complex will benefit society and the entire country. He also emphasized the call given for 'Heal in India'.

Shri Modi remarked that as society becomes more modern, it also needs more compassion and sensitivity. He emphasized the need to create a society of sensitive individuals who advance with human qualities and a sense of belonging. The Prime Minister highlighted that ISKCON, through its Bhakti Vedanta, can breathe new life into global sensitivity and expand human values worldwide. Concluding his address, the Prime Minister expressed confidence that ISKCON's leaders will continue to uphold Srila Prabhupada Swami's ideals. He once again congratulated the entire ISKCON family and all citizens on the inauguration of the Radha Madanmohanji Temple.

'He would be arrested in any other country': Rahul Gandhi slams RSS chief's Ram temple independence remarks

New Delhi

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday attacked RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat for the latter's remarks that the consecration of Ram Temple in Ayodhya be celebrated as the day of true Independence of India.

Speaking at the inauguration of Indira Gandhi Bhavan, the new Congress headquarters on Wednesday, Rahul Gandhi said Bhagwat's remarks amounted to "treason and in any other country he would have been arrested and tried for this."

Bhagwat was speaking in

Indore on Tuesday night after presenting the "National Devi Ahilya Award" to Champat Rai, general secretary of Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust.

Bhagwat said the date of consecration of Ram Temple in Ayodhya should be celebrated as "Pratishtha Dwadashi" as the "true independence" of Bharat, which faced "parachakra" (enemy attack) for several centuries, was established on this day.

Bhagwat said India got political independence from the British on August 15, 1947 and after this a



written Constitution was drafted as per a specific vision that flows from the consciousness of "self" -- pride -- of the country.

"But the Constitution was not run according to the spirit of that vision at that

time," said Bhagwat.

He said the date of consecration of Ram Temple in Ayodhya should be celebrated as "Pratishtha Dwadashi" as the "real, true independence" of Bharat, which faced "parachakra" (enemy invasions) for centuries, came on this day.

Rahul slammed Bhagwat saying the RSS chief had the audacity to inform the nation every two or three days what he thought about the independence movement.

What he has said yesterday is treason because it is stating the constitution

is invalid, the fight against the British was invalid and he has the audacity to say this publicly. In any other country he would have been arrested and tried. That is the fact.

To say India did not get independence in 1947 is an insult to every Indian and it is about time we stop listening to this nonsense that these people think they can just keep parroting out," said Rahul, who spoke before Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on the occasion of new AICC headquarters inauguration.

BJP slams Rahul Gandhi over his 'fighting Indian state' remark

New Delhi

Rahul Gandhi's remarks that "we are now fighting the BJP, the RSS and the Indian state itself" drew a sharp response from the BJP on Wednesday, with its president JP Nadda alleging that everything the Congress leader does or says is in the direction of breaking India and dividing society.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman asked what for the Congress and Gandhi carry a copy of the Constitution when the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha is using such a language.

Nadda said on X that Gandhi had exposed his own party's "ugly truth", claiming that it is no secret that Gandhi and his ecosystem had close links with urban Naxals and the deep state who wanted to "defame, demean and discredit" India.

He said Gandhi's repeated actions had also strengthened this belief.

Everything he had done or said had been in the direction of breaking India and dividing our society, Nadda alleged.

Speaking at the inauguration of the new building of the



Congress party's headquarters, Gandhi had earlier said that the BJP and the RSS had captured every single institution of the country.

He added, "We are now fighting the BJP, the RSS and the Indian state itself."

Sharing a video clip of Gandhi's remarks, BJP IT department head Amit Malviya said, "Rahul Gandhi has now declared an open war against the Indian State itself. This is straight out of George Soros's playbook."

Hitting back at Gandhi, 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?"

Nadda said, "Hidden no more, Congress' ugly truth now stands exposed by their own leader."

"I 'compliment' Mr Rahul Gandhi for saying clearly what the nation knows - that he is fighting the Indian state!" he said.

SC Notice To Centre On Plea For Implementation of CNAP

New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday issued notice to the Centre on a plea alleging an "enormous rise" in cyber-crimes and "nuisance" of unsolicited calls in the country.

The matter came up before a bench led by Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna and comprising Justice Sanjay Kumar. The apex court was hearing a PIL filed by one Gowrishankar from Bengaluru. The bench observed that the concerned agencies were doing their bit, and issued a notice to the Department of Telecommunications. "Yes, we understand the problem is there. Let the Centre respond", said the bench.

The plea contended that it wants to bring focus on the growing menace of cybercrime frauds in India and the toll it takes on citizens, law enforcement authorities and other agencies viz., the RBI, commercial banks etc. The plea contended that calling Name Presentation service or CNAP has been identified by the respondent (DoT) and the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) as a proactive measure to contain the perils of cybercrime. "Despite the pressing nature of this issue, lack of a clear implementation timeline and the progress of CNAP during the last 2.5 years has led to the filing of this PIL seeking immediate action," it said. The plea urged the apex court to issue a writ of mandamus directing the respondent to implement CNAP within three months and establishing necessary supplementary measures viz., a reporting mechanism for fraudulent calls, integration of CNAP service with the Cybercrime Reporting Portal, and pass any other appropriate orders to safeguard public safety.

ED gets Centre's nod to prosecute Kejriwal, Sisodia in excise policy case

New Delhi

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.

The Centre has also given its nod to prosecute former Delhi deputy chief minister and senior AAP leader Manish Sisodia in the case.

Last month, Delhi Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena recommended the ED's request to the Centre to prosecute Kejriwal, which enraged AAP. The party had termed Kejriwal's arrest by CBI and ED completely "unauthorised and illegal".

The federal agency has filed a chargesheet against Kejriwal 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 Enforcement Directorate (ED) for prosecuting the 56-year-old politician under the anti-money laundering law in the Delhi excise policy case, officials said.

The development comes ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls on February 5.

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.

It was alleged that he acted in collusion with Delhi government minister, the AAP leaders and others.

The ED had earlier claimed that AAP, being a political party, is defined as an association or a body of individual citizens of India under the Representation of the People Act and hence it can be categorised as a "company" as contemplated under Section 70 of the PMLA.

As Kejriwal was "in-charge of and responsible" for the said company i.e. AAP during

the time of offence, he and his party "shall be deemed guilty" of offences mentioned under the anti-money laundering law and liable to be prosecuted and punished, it had said.

The excise case pertains to alleged corruption and money laundering in formulating and executing the Delhi government's excise policy for 2021-22, which was later scrapped.

Delhi Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena had recommended a CBI probe into the alleged irregularities. Subsequently, the ED registered a case under the PMLA.

Taking cognisance of a CBI FIR lodged on August 17, 2022, the ED filed its money laundering case on August 22, 2022 to probe the alleged irregularities.

Mark Zuckerberg remarks on India's elections Meta apologises

New Delhi

Meta on Wednesday offered an apology for false statement made by its CEO Mark Zuckerberg claiming that India was among countries where incumbent governments lost elections due to weak



Covid 19 response.

Vice-President, Public Policy, Meta India Shivnath Thukral, took to X to say sorry on Zuckerberg's behalf. "Dear Honourable Minister @AshwiniVaishnaw, Mark's observation that many incumbent parties were not re-elected in 2024 elections holds true for several countries, BUT not India. We would like to apologise for this inadvertent error. India remains an incredibly important country for @Meta and we look forward to being at the heart of its innovative future," Thukral said tagging information and broadcasting minister Ashwini Vaishnaw who had called out Meta chief for his patently false remarks on a popular podcast on Friday. On Tuesday, chairman of parliamentary committee on IT and Communications, Nishikant Dubey, said his panel would summon Meta India, which would have to apologise for the false statement of its CEO.

Man Shoots Daughter In Front Of Cops, Panchayat, Days Before Her Wedding

Gwalior

Her wedding was four days away. But her father shot her dead because she wanted to marry someone else. This shocking murder took place in Madhya Pradesh's Gwalior where a man shot and killed his 20-year-old daughter in front of police officers. The daughter, Tanu Gurjar, had publicly opposed the marriage arranged by her family, expressing her desire to marry a man of her own choice.

The killing unfolded Tuesday evening around 9 PM in the Gola Ka Mandir area of the city. The victim's father, Mahesh Gurjar, allegedly enraged by a video his daughter posted on social media earlier that day, shot her at close range using a country-made firearm. Tanu's cousin, Rahul, allegedly acted as an accomplice,

firing additional shots that ensured her death.

Just hours before her murder, Tanu recorded and shared a video on social media, accusing her family of pressuring her into a marriage against her will. In the 52-second video, she named her father, Mahesh, and other family members as responsible for her predicament, expressing fears for her life.

"I want to marry Vicky. My family initially agreed but later refused. They beat me daily and threaten to kill me. If something happens to me, my family will be responsible," Tanu stated in the video.

The man she referred to, Bhikam "Vicky" Mawai, is a resident of Uttar Pradesh's Agra and had been in a relationship with Tanu for six years.

Govt committed to welfare of armed forces, their families: PM Modi

New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday lauded the Indian Army for its determination, professionalism and dedication, and underlined his government's commitment to the welfare of armed forces and their families. In posts on X on Army Day, he said, "Today, on Army Day, we salute the unwavering courage of the Indian Army, which stands as the sentinel of our nation's security. We also remember the sacrifices made by the bravehearts who ensure the safety of crores of Indians every day." The Indian Army, he said, epitomises determination, professionalism and dedication. In addition to safeguarding our borders, it has made a mark in providing humanitarian help during natural disasters, he added. He said, "Our government is committed to the welfare of the armed forces and their families. Over the years, we have introduced several reforms and focused on modernisation. This will continue in the times to come."

Army Day is observed to commemorate the milestone of General K M Cariappa, who later became Field Marshal, taking over as the Army chief from General F R R Bucher in 1949, becoming the first Indian in that position.

Delhi Police files FIR against BJP's Parvesh Verma for MCC violation after EC writes letter

New Delhi

The Delhi Police on Wednesday filed an FIR against Parvesh Verma, a BJP candidate from the New Delhi assembly constituency Parvesh Verma for allegedly violating the Model Code of Conduct



(MCC) by distributing shoes in the Valmiki colony in the Mandir Marg Police Station area. The FIR was lodged after the Election Commission wrote to the Mandir Marg SHO regarding the incident.

The returning officer of the New Delhi Assembly constituency wrote a letter dated January 15 to the SHO. In it, he said that the complaint had shared two purported videos in which Verma could be seen distributing shoes to the women of the constituency.

Based on the complaint, the RO directed the SHO to initiate an investigation and lodge an FIR. Parvesh Verma is contesting from the New Delhi seat against AAP national convenor and former

CM Arvind Kejriwal. The New Delhi assembly seat is set for a trilateral contest as Congress has pitted senior party leader Sandeep Dikshit, son of former Delhi CM Sheila Dikshit.

Earlier on Monday, the ECI asked Delhi police to take action against Verma on Aam Aadmi Party's complaints. The development came after an AAP delegation headed by Delhi Chief Minister Atishi, her Punjab counterpart Bagwant Mann, AAP national convenor Arvind Kejriwal, MP Sanjay Singh and others met the Election Commissioner, seeking action against Verma. AAP alleged that the BJP leader is involved in the manipulation of the voter list in the New Delhi constituency.

Verma was also accused of AAP of distributing cash to the voters. Back then, Kejriwal had slammed Verma for distributing Rs 1,100 to women in New Delhi, saying his father would have been ashamed of him for a "traitor" son like him. The AAP also filed a complaint against Verma with the Enforcement Directorate (ED), alleging that cash was being distributed in Kejriwal's constituency ahead of polls. The party demanded that the agency register a case of money laundering against Verma.

Verma maintained that the money was given to women by the social organisation Rashtriya Swabhimani, founded by his father Sahib Singh Verma. He said he would continue to help the needy women.

Need to develop quake alert system: PM



New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday urged scientists to develop warning systems for earthquakes while noting that advanced weather forecasts have significantly reduced casualties and minimised economic losses caused by cyclones. Addressing a function to celebrate 150 years of the India Meteorological Department (IMD), he also lauded the institution as a symbol of country's scientific journey.

He said the advancements made by the IMD has not only strengthened the country's disaster management capability, but also benefited the world.

"The progress of a country's scientific institutions reflects its awareness of science. Over the past decade, IMD's infrastructure and technology have seen unprecedented expansion, with significant increases in the number of doppler weather radars, automatic weather stations, runway weather monitoring systems and district-wise rainfall monitoring stations, all of which have been upgraded," Modi said.

He said IMD's flash flood guidance system provides information to Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, which has raised India's global image.

Modi also

inaugurated Mission Mausam at the event. The Cabinet approved Mission Mausam in 2024 to augment weather forecasting capabilities by installing radars and weather stations.

"We have launched Mission Mausam to make India weather ready and climate smart. Meteorology offers the most important support for the disaster management capability of any country. To minimise the impact of natural disasters, we need to maximise the efficiency of meteorology," he said.

He pointed out that a decade ago, only 10 per cent of farmers and livestock owners used weather-related advice, but today, this number has increased to over 50 per cent. Modi highlighted that previously, families of lakhs of marine fishermen were worried when they went to sea, but now, with IMD's cooperation, fishermen receive timely warnings.

These real-time updates enhance safety and strengthen sectors like agriculture and the blue economy, Modi added. Recalling the devastation caused by the 1998 cyclonic storm in Kandla, Kutch, and the super cyclone in Odisha in 1999, which resulted in thousands of deaths, Modi said in recent years, despite numerous major cyclones and disasters, India has successfully minimised loss of life in most cases.

Modi inaugurates Sonamarg tunnel in Valley, calls Kashmir crown of country

Srinagar

Describing Jammu and Kashmir as the crown of the country, Prime Minister Narendra Modi who inaugurated the strategic Sonamarg Tunnel on Monday said he wanted to see it more beautiful and prosperous.

Modi alongwith Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari, J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah and Lt Governor Manoj Sinha reached to Ganderbal in Central Kashmir on Monday to inaugurate the tunnel located at an altitude of over 8,650 feet above sea level which will enhance all-weather connectivity between Srinagar and the tourist destination Sonamarg which is enroute to Ladakh.



Modi said that the tunnel would reduce the difficulties faced during avalanches, heavy snowfall and landslides and essential goods, medical access, and connectivity would now improve significantly.

After inspecting the 6.5-kilometre tunnel and interacting with construction

workers, Modi said the dream of "Viksit Bharat" can be fulfilled only "when the pearls of progress are studded on its peak."

"That is why I want this crown(Kashmir) to be more beautiful and see more progress," he said while addressing the public.

'IIT Baba' Abhay Singh, who left aerospace engineering to become monk at Mahakumbh

Prayagraj
Several Akharas reached the Sangam to take the holy bath on the first 'Amrit Snan' of Maha Kumbh 2025 and Uttar Pradesh DGP Prashant Kumar informed that the total number of devotees who had taken dip in the Sangam has crossed the 10 million mark. Interestingly, the Mahakumbh mela, being held every 12 years at Prayagraj, is the world's largest religious gathering, attracting millions of devotees worldwide.

Over 40 crore people are expected to attend the 45-day festival that offers an extraordinary opportunity to witness a diverse congregation. Amid these varying range of crowds, an unexpected figure has emerged at the Kumbh Mela who is known as 'IITian Baba'. At the crowded Kumbh Mela, he has captured the attention of devotees and social media alike.

He is Abhay Singh, an aerospace engineer from IIT

Bombay who transformed his promising scientific career to embrace spirituality.

Who is IIT Baba Abhay

other names such as Raghav and Jagdish. He also coached students in Physics.

After completing his engineering studies, IIT Baba pursued a Master's degree in Design and explored his creative side through photography. Despite his academic and artistic accomplishments, he realized that his true calling was spirituality and this made all the difference in his life.

At the Kumbh mela, Abhay Singh said that

his inner quest led him to leave his scientific career and embrace the life of a monk. At the Maha kumbh Mela 2025, he described his journey, stating, "This stage is the best stage."

Abhay Singh's story has inspired many and one video of him went viral on social media. His transition from a successful engineer to a monk highlights the universal search for meaning and fulfilment that transcends materialistic gains.

Singh?

Abhay Singh, who is natively from Haryana, completed his engineering degree at IIT Bombay. During his academic life, he developed a keen interest in philosophy and sought a deeper understanding of life by studying the works of Plato, Socrates, and exploring Postmodernism.

Later, Abhay Singh changed his name to Masani Gorakh and dedicated his life to Lord Shiva. He said he also goes by



Steve Jobs' handwritten letter on Kumbh Mela auctioned for Rs 4.32 crores

The Mahakumbh Mela began in Prayagraj on January 13 and will end on February 26. This is the largest peaceful congregation of people in the world. It is believed that people taking a bath in the holy waters of Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati during Kumbh Mela attain freedom from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth and are on the path of Moksha.

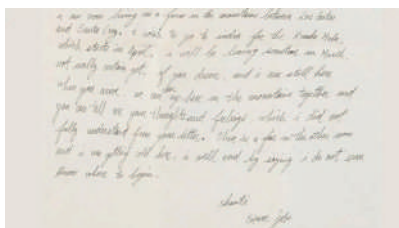
While the Mahakumbh Mela has begun, a 1974 handwritten letter of late Apple co-founder Steve Jobs is doing rounds on the internet wherein he expressed his desire to visit Kumbh Mela.

The letter was auctioned in 2021 for Rs. 4.32 crores. In the letter written to his childhood friend Tim Brown in 1974, Jobs expresses his desire to visit India for Kumbh Mela which was set to happen in April in Haridwar that year.

Here's what the letter reads.

Tim,

I have read your letter many times



I do not know what to say.

Many mornings have come and gone people have come and went

I have loved and I have cried many times.

Somehow, though, beneath it all it doesn't change - do you understand?

I am now living on a farm in the mountains between Los Gatos and Santa Cruz. I wish to go to India for the Kumbh Mela, which starts in April. I will be leaving sometime in March, not really certain yet. If you desire, and I am still here when you arrive, we can come up

here in the mountains together and you can tell me your thoughts and feelings, which I did not fully understand from your letter. There is a fire in the other room and I am getting cold here. I will end by saying I do not even know where to begin.

Shanti,

Steve Jobs

The letter was also shared by a user on X (formerly Twitter). Check the post here.

Woman skydives 13,000 feet to unfurl Mahakumbh flag over Bangkok



The Mahakumbh Mela began on January 13 at Prayagraj. It is the world's largest human congregation and holds immense significance in Hinduism. The Mahakumbh Mela is set to draw nearly 40 crore devotees from across the globe. As millions of people take part in the religious event, a girl took to the skies to unfurl the Mahakumbh flag. A video has been doing rounds on the internet which shows a girl unfurling the Mahakumbh flag at 13,000 feet over Bangkok. The video was shared by Anamika Sharma, a skydiver from Uttar Pradesh. The line accompanying the video reads, "Prayagraj girl skydiving with Maha Kumbh flag." The video which has received more than 8.5 million views was captioned, "Inviting people all over the globe for world's largest human gathering-Mahakumbh 2025."

Netizens were in awe of the girl and took to the comments section to share their views. One of them wrote, "Skydiving alone is an adventure, but doing it with a flag and such composure is just exceptional." Another wrote, "This is pure devotion and daring combined. What a way to promote Mahakumbh." A third user commented, "Incredible! What an amazing way to showcase our rich heritage."

One of the users wrote, "Congratulations for such a brave act." One of the comments read, "This is not just a stunt; it's a powerful message to the world."

The Mahakumbh Mela is organised every 12 years and the Kumbh Mela takes place every 3 years. This year, it holds immense importance because the celestial positionings of the planets is occurring after 144 years. It is believed that if you take a dip in the holy rivers of Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati during Kumbh Mela, you attain freedom from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

Maha Kumbh: Devotees brave biting cold to take holy dip in Sangam



Prayagraj

Braving the biting cold, devotees brimming with energy and enthusiasm converged at the Triveni Sangam to take a holy dip at the Maha Kumbh on Wednesday.

Chants of 'Har Har Mahadev', 'Jai Shri Ram' and 'Jai Ganga Maiyya' were heard as the devotees took a dip in the bone-chilling water.

"It was for the first time that I took a dip in Sangam. After taking the dip, I really felt refreshed," said Nibar Chaudhary, a resident of Uttar Pradesh's Basti district.

The 62-year-old was escorted by two persons, as he walked towards the Sangam area to take a dip.

Shivram Verma, who accompanied Chaudhary, said that

his experience was good, adding the administration here has made proper arrangements for the devotees.

Lucknow resident Nancy, who came here for the first time, echoed similar sentiments.

"My experience in the Maha Kumbh has been good so far," she said.

Abhishek, a resident of neighbouring Fatehpur district, said the "overall experience was good" and added that he "did not face any problems".

Vijay Katheria, a resident of Kanpur, lauded the security arrangements made at the Maha Kumbh.

"My experience was good. Proper safety arrangements were

made for the devotees and adequate police force was maintained from the security point of view," he said.

Earlier on Tuesday, the seers belonging to various 'akharas' took the first 'Amrit Snan' at the Maha Kumbh on the occasion of 'Makar Sankranti'. Around 3.5 crore devotees took a dip at the Triveni Sangam on 'Makar Sankranti'.

Leading most of the akharas were ash-smeared Naga sadhus, who mesmerised the onlookers with their mastery of traditional weapons.

From skilfully wielding spears and swords to energetically playing

the 'damru', their demonstrations were a vibrant celebration of age-old traditions, an official statement said.

In addition to the male Naga sadhus, female Naga ascetics were also present in significant numbers.

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.

The fair would continue till February 26.

3.5 Crore Devotees Take Holy Bath On Makar Sankranti



he saints of Akharas, Naga Sadhus and millions of devotees took 'Amrit Snan' of the Maha Kumbh Mela on Tuesday on the occasion of Makar Sankranti. Shri Panchayati Akhara Mahanirvani and Shri Shambhu Panchayati Atal Akhara were the first ones to take 'Amrit Snan' on Makar Sankranti. Spiritual leader Swami Kailashanand Giri on Tuesday led the processions of the Niranjani Akhara for the first Amrit Snan of Maha Kumbh on the auspicious occasion of Makar Sankranti. The first 'Amrit Snan' is special

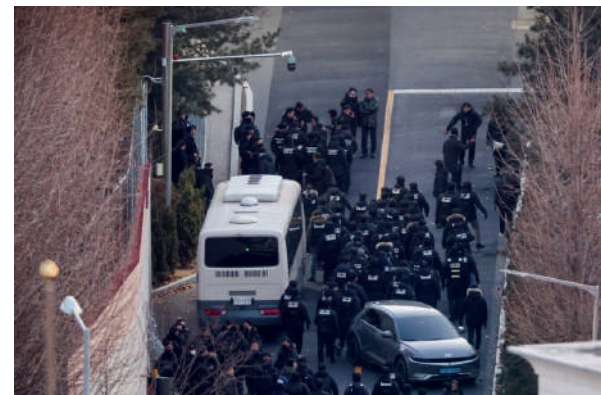
in many ways. It took place a day after the first major 'snan' on Monday in the Sangam area on the occasion of 'Paush Purnima'. Thirteen Akharas of seers from different sects are participating in the Maha Kumbh. Renowned for its emphasis on yoga, meditation, and the pursuit of spiritual knowledge, Niranjani Akhara is one of the significant Akharas who participate in this sacred gathering. The teachings focus on the transformative power of inner exploration, guiding practitioners toward spiritual awakening.

South Korea's impeached President Yoon arrested over martial law fiasco

Seoul South Korean authorities arrested impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol on Wednesday over insurrection allegations, with the embattled leader saying he agreed to comply with investigations to avoid "bloodshed", ending weeks of tense political standoff.

Since lawmakers voted to stand him down after his stunning, short-lived declaration of martial law on December 3, Yoon has been holed up at his hillside residence, guarded by a small army of personal security that blocked a previous arrest attempt.

His arrest, the first ever for an incumbent president, is the



latest head-spinning development for one of Asia's most vibrant democracies even though the country has a history of prosecuting and imprisoning former leaders.

A defiant Yoon said he submitted himself for questioning to avoid any violence after more than 3,000 police officers marched on his residence to arrest him

from the early hours on Wednesday.

"When I saw them break into the security area using firefighting equipment today, I decided to respond to the CIO's investigation - despite it being an illegal investigation - to prevent unsavoury bloodshed," Yoon said in a statement.

Yoon was seen arriving in his

motorcade at the offices of the anti-corruption agency heading the probe on Wednesday morning.

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

Yoon's lawyers have argued attempts to detain Yoon are illegal and are designed to publicly humiliate him.

As local news broadcasters reported that Yoon's detention may come soon, some minor scuffles broke out between tearful pro-Yoon protesters and police near the residence, according to a Reuters witness at the scene.

Dire fire warning for Los Angeles area pushed back as winds ease

California

Easing winds delivered a brief but much-needed reprieve to firefighters Tuesday as they battled two massive blazes burning in the Los Angeles area, and the National Weather Service pushed back its unusually dire warning of critical fire weather until early the following day.

Forecasters said the winds were below danger levels in the evening, but they were expected to strengthen overnight with potentially fire-fuelling gusts. Red flag warnings remained in effect from Central California to the Mexican border until late afternoon Wednesday.

Winds increased Tuesday but not to the near-hurricane-force levels that were predicted to happen earlier in the day. Still the danger was not over, officials said.

"Key message: We are not out of the woods yet," the National Weather Service in Los Angeles said in a post on social media. "The winds underperformed today, but one more enhancement could happen tonight-tomorrow."

This round of Santa Ana winds was not expected to be as mighty as last week, but they could carry fire-sparking embers for miles and stoke new outbreaks in a region where at least 25 people have already been killed.

Firefighters made more progress on the Palisades Fire, the largest and most stubborn blaze. CalFire Operations Section Chief Christian Litz

said he took a helicopter ride around the perimeter and saw no active flames, though it was far from over.

Nearly 90,000 households lost electricity as utilities shut off power to prevent their lines from sparking new blazes.

A state of alert

Weary and anxious residents were told to be ready to flee at a moment's notice. They remained vigilant, keeping an eye on the skies and on each other: Police announced roughly 50 arrests, for



looting, flying drones in fire zones, violating curfew and other crimes.

Of those, three people were arrested on suspicion of arson after being seen setting small fires that were immediately extinguished, LA Police Chief Jim McDonnell said. One was using a barbecue lighter, another ignited brush and a third tried to light up a trash can, he said. All were far outside the disaster zones. Authorities have not determined a cause for any of the major fires.

Among nine people charged with looting was a group that stole an Emmy from an evacuated house, Los Angeles County District Attorney Nathan Hochman said.

Elon Musk sued by US Securities regulator over late Twitter stake disclosure

New York

The US Securities and Exchange Commission has sued billionaire Elon Musk, saying he failed to disclose his ownership of Twitter stock in a timely manner in early 2022, before buying the social media site.

As a result, the SEC alleges, Musk was able to underpay "by at least USD 150 million" for shares he bought after he should have disclosed his ownership of more than 5 per cent of Twitter's shares. Musk bought Twitter in October 2022 and later renamed it X.

Musk started amassing Twitter shares in early 2022, and by March of that year, he owned more than 5 per cent. At this point, the complaint says, he was required by law to disclose his ownership but he failed to do so until April 4, 11 days after the report was due.

Representatives for X and Musk did not immediately return



a message for comment.

After Musk signed a deal to acquire Twitter in April 2022, he tried to back out of it, leading the company to sue him to force him to go through with the acquisition.

The SEC has said that starting in April 2022, it authorised an investigation into whether any securities laws were broken in connection with Musk's purchases of Twitter stock and

his statements and SEC filings related to the company.

Before it filed the lawsuit, the SEC went to court in an attempt to compel Musk to testify as part of an investigation into his purchase of Twitter.

The SEC's current chair, Gary Gensler, plans to step down from his post on January 20 and it is not clear if the new administration will continue the lawsuit.

Weakening rupee

The rupee's plunge to a record low, breaching the critical 86-per-dollar mark, has intensified concerns about a potential economic slowdown, widening trade deficit and straining of external balances. Driven by a strong dollar and surging crude oil prices, the rupee's steepest fall since early 2023 has, as expected, put pressure on stocks and bonds. The rupee remains one of Asia's most stable currencies, but the slide poses inflationary risks by driving up import costs. A combination of global and domestic pressures, the rupee has declined over 2 per cent since December. For importers, it spells an imminent challenge in managing inflation.

Conversely, for exporters, it's an opportunity to be more competitive. As the world prepares for Donald Trump's presidency, his actions are

likely to add uncertainty to global markets.

The depreciation of the rupee



could defer expected rate cuts by the Reserve Bank of India. This despite the decline of retail inflation to a four-month low of 5.22 per cent in

December, mainly on account of easing of prices in the food basket.

It would be in national interest to not let politics dictate the future course. The message to remain calm should have accommodative space for contesting views on how to go forward to tackle the economic challenges. A wait-and-watch approach is on desired lines, along with a candid discussion about the state of the economy and the potential pitfalls.

A US-based firm has forecast that the rupee could weaken to 88 in the near-to-medium term. For the Opposition, it would be the most appropriate talking point as the Union Budget nears. Political contestations are par for the course, but the focus must be on working towards a broad consensus on how to withstand the ensuing strong winds of economic slowdown.

// sātyāsya pāramām nidhānām //

**DON'T LET YESTERDAY
TAKE UP TOO MUCH OF
TODAY
- WILL ROGERS**

India's dope shame

Doping continues to cast a long shadow on sports in India. The country has earned the dubious distinction of being second among nations with the most number of athletes currently ineligible to participate in international events. Adille Sumariwalla, outgoing president of the Athletics Federation of India (AFI), believes there is a silver lining to this dark cloud — more cheats are getting caught because greater testing is being done. However, the risk of being named, shamed and penalised is not outweighing the temptation to enhance one's performance fraudulently. The level of deterrence remains low, even as unscrupulous elements keep trying out new ways to game the system.

It's not enough for the national federation to have zero tolerance for

doping. Strictness and transparency must percolate down to the district level, where the menace widely persists. If Sumariwalla is to be believed, district



coaches are themselves supplying banned substances to up-and-coming players for short-term gains. It is commendable that the Haryana Sports Department, roused to action by

The Tribune's damning report

on drug use during a boxing championship in Hisar, has warned that federations or associations would be suspended if doping occurs at any event organised by them. The message is loud and clear: sports bodies must face the music if they fail to weed out the black sheep.

Unfortunately, once sportspersons get used to taking drugs and getting away with it, they rarely try to mend their ways. Hard work and self-belief — two of the most potent tools to excel in sports — are sacrificed at the altar of unfair means. The state of affairs can improve if the evil is nipped in the bud; the earlier the clean-up happens, the better. A country aspiring to host the Olympics can't afford to suffer the fate of Russia, which has become a global outcast in the sporting arena mainly due to rampant doping.

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Modi's J&K outreach



PRIME Minister Narendra Modi has gifted Jammu & Kashmir the Z-Morh tunnel, which will make the tourist resort of Sonamarg accessible throughout the year. Last week, the PM virtually inaugurated the Jammu railway division, and he is expected to flag off the Delhi-Srinagar Vande Bharat train on Republic Day. So far so good. The BJP-led Centre is going all out to boost J&K's economy and reduce 'Dilli se duri', but what about its promise to restore statehood? It's been three months since the Assembly elections were held

— after a decade-long gap — and the NC-Congress alliance formed the government. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah keeps raising the all-important demand — he did so in the PM's presence on Monday too — but he has refrained from exerting pressure on the Centre to set a timeline. Modi has tried to reassure Omar and the people of J&K that "right things will happen at the right time". The PM has claimed that he always keeps his promises — and the CM has been quick to vouch for that, praising him effusively for keeping his word on holding the Assembly

elections. Curiously, in his speech at a poll rally in Srinagar last year, the PM had asserted that the BJP would fulfil the commitment of restoring statehood; however, in his address after the tunnel inauguration, he took a circuitous route to talk about the matter. This should have perturbed Omar, but it apparently didn't.

The CM has made it obvious that he won't follow in the footsteps of his counterparts in Opposition-ruled states who are constantly at loggerheads with the Centre. Omar's recent attack on the INDIA bloc, of which the Congress is the most prominent member, was music to the BJP's ears. His own party's MP, Aga Syed Mehdi, has stirred the pot by saying that the CM should not be seen by the people as 'Delhi's representative'. At stake here are the aspirations of local residents — and Omar's credibility.

A test of faith and logistics

THE Maha Kumbh Mela, a confluence of spirituality and culture, began in Prayagraj on Monday with the Shahi Snan, drawing millions to the sacred event. However, while the festival symbolises devotion and tradition, its history is marred by tragic incidents, such as the deadly stampede of the last Maha Kumbh in 2013 that claimed 30 lives. As against the 120 million devotees who visited the mela in 2013, this year, with over 450 million expected attendees, including 1.5 million foreign tourists, the event highlights both India's cultural vibrancy and logistical challenges. The Uttar Pradesh government has allocated Rs 7,000 crore to transform the 4,000-hectare site into a state-of-the-art temporary city, complete with 1,50,000 tents, AI-enabled surveillance and enhanced security. Yet, the spectre of past tragedies looms, reminding us that managing such massive crowds requires unwavering vigilance and innovation.

Improved planning, better coordination between agencies and the use of AI-driven monitoring systems offer hope for a safer Maha Kumbh. The stakes are high — beyond its spiritual significance, the



event is projected to inject Rs 2 lakh crore into Uttar Pradesh's economy, providing a lifeline to tourism and local businesses. If all goes well, this edition could mark a turning point in India's global tourism reputation, attracting more visitors to its rich cultural tapestry. The festival also highlights India's soft power. Cultural events, international collaborations and sustainability initiatives further elevate its global appeal.

However, amid the grandeur, challenges persist. Overcrowding, strained resources and the potential for mishaps must be addressed proactively. The Maha Kumbh is a testament to India's ability to balance tradition with modernity. As the world watches, this spectacle can reaffirm India's ethos of faith, unity and resilience, provided every effort is made to ensure safety and dignity for all devotees congregating at the 45-day mela.

We don't care

Disregard for art requires a character reset



FOR all the triumphalism about the artistic and architectural achievements of the past that dot the length and breadth of the country, our collective resolve to preserve, conserve and value such magnificence is dismal. This ironical societal trait is not confined to heritage and cultural legacies. As the utter disregard for works of modern art at a public space in Chandigarh shows, it's a failure at multiple levels — the administration, the community and even the artists' fraternity. Why don't we care? Why does it not matter to us? There's a litany of lazy excuses: financial constraints, urban developmental pressures, or the prioritisation of issues given the sheer number of people that populate the land. The answer may not entirely be about a lack of appreciation.

What's missing in the national character and what regrettably has seldom been demanded of citizens

and of each other is civic duty and responsibility — not enforced, but a way of life that embraces what's special and unique. Change would require a reset, and largely at the community level. Not far from the forgotten works of art in Chandigarh's Leisure Valley is the Rock Garden, a phenomenal creative enterprise. It bears the stamp of a committed individual, Nek Chand, whose birth centenary was celebrated last month. The long queues of visitors prove that there is a genuine desire to celebrate art and its manifestations. It then falls upon the citizen to honour such spaces.

Another concern is the self-celebratory fetish to raze or put out of use structures that have stood the test of time. The national capital has been leading the way, sanctioning the drive to weed out the old for the new, no matter the cost involved or the utility of it. New, but not necessarily better.

Workers in peril

SITTING ducks — that's what all those nameless, faceless workers are who toil day and night on development projects across the country. Their safety is of little concern to their employers, even though the infrastructure sector continues to be a key driver of Indian economy. When 40-odd labourers were rescued from Uttarakhand's Silkyara tunnel in November 2023 — the risky operation was watched by the entire nation with bated breath — it was hoped that lessons would be learnt to ensure safer working conditions at construction sites. That hope has proved to be short-lived.

Two workers were killed when a centring frame collapsed during the laying of a slab at an under-construction building in Raipur, Chhattisgarh, on Saturday. The

same day, 28 workers were trapped when the shuttering of an upcoming

response forces and the railways, to rescue all of them. In contrast,

is at the core of such mishaps, even as the rescuers put their own lives at risk to extricate survivors. Brazen disregard for the law by public or private entities shows enforcement agencies in a poor light.

Why are the humble workers not regarded as nation-builders? Why are they left to fend for themselves? Such apathy does not behove a country that aspires to become developed (Viksit) by 2047. The Buildings and Other Construction Workers Act, 1996, puts the onus on employers to set up safety committees and ensure that steps are taken to prevent accidents. Non-compliance with provisions of the Act is a punishable offence, yet offenders rarely get their just deserts. For the hapless worker, there won't be a miraculous escape every time. He or she deserves a safety net — financial as well as physical.



building caved in at Kannauj railway station in Uttar Pradesh. It took a 16-hour operation, involving personnel of the national and state disaster

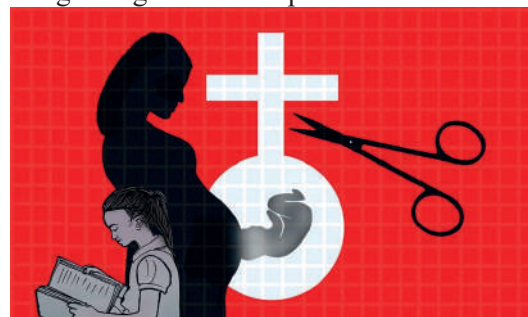
frantic efforts to save labourers from a watery grave in a flooded rat-hole coal mine in Assam have proved futile. Criminal negligence

Sex ratio plunge

PUNJAB's alarming decline in sex ratio exposes the abject failure of political will and entrenched social prejudices. Pathankot's ratio plummeting from 902 in 2023 to 864 in 2024 is not just a statistic — it's a damning indictment of society's disregard for its daughters. Gurdaspur fares no better, while the marginal gains in Kapurthala and

The roots of this crisis lie in the pervasive patriarchal mindset, which deems daughters a burden and sons a necessity. This regressive belief cuts across economic and social strata, highlighting that wealth and education are no safeguards against prejudice. The skewed gender ratio is a ticking time bomb, already manifesting in grave social issues like bride shortages, as seen in Haryana. It's time for the political establishment to stop hiding behind token initiatives and address the issue with urgency and sincerity. Awareness campaigns and grassroots action, such as Kapurthala's efforts, can only succeed when backed by stringent policy measures and unrelenting enforcement. Until families internalise the equality of genders, no law or campaign can undo the damage inflicted by decades of prejudice.

The plummeting sex ratio is not just a societal failure; it is a human rights crisis that threatens the very fabric of equity and justice. The state and society must act decisively to dismantle this toxic mindset before it corrodes the future of our daughters and our nation.



Malerkotla are cold comfort against this larger crisis. Female foeticide, despite being illegal, persists with impunity, exposing the ineffective enforcement of the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PNDT) Act. Authorities have turned a blind eye to underground networks and cross-border activities that perpetuate this crime. The lack of robust tracking mechanisms and accountability for errant doctors reflects a disturbing apathy in governance.

INDIA wilting

Onus on Congress to keep the bloc intact

JAMMU & Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah has ruffled quite a few feathers, particularly in the Congress camp, by raising doubts about the INDIA bloc's future and suggesting that it should be wound up if it was meant only for the parliamentary elections. His obvious targets are two alliance partners — AAP and the Congress — which are working at cross purposes in the Delhi Assembly elections. Omar's outburst comes in the wake of RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav's remark that the bloc was formed only for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. Putting on a brave face, senior INDIA leader and Omar's father Farooq Abdullah has claimed that the alliance is about "strengthening India and eliminating hatred", but he didn't sound very convincing when he vouched for the bloc's longevity.

The cracks are undoubtedly widening. The alliance is becoming a rudderless ship, if not a sinking one, merely seven months after its creditable performance in the Lok

Sabha elections. Who is at the helm? The Congress took its leadership of INDIA for granted, only to be rudely jolted by successive poll setbacks — first in Haryana and then in Maharashtra. The grand old party is playing second fiddle to regional parties in both Jharkhand and J&K, where INDIA triumphed last year. The Congress has lost not only bragging rights but also the ability to spearhead a pan-India coalition that can challenge the BJP.

The onus, however, is still on the Congress to keep the bloc intact, as pointed out by Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena faction. It continues to be the largest party in the Opposition alliance. The Gandhis — all three of them are in Parliament now — and Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge need to reach out to disgruntled allies. The least they can do is to set INDIA's agenda for this year in consultation with other stakeholders. Letting things drift will be a win-win situation for the BJP.

Wholesale price inflation rises to 2.37 per cent in December

New Delhi

India's Wholesale Price Inflation (WPI) rose to 2.37 per cent in December 2024, marking another month of wholesale inflation driven primarily by an increase in price of food articles and manufacturing of food products. The rise in textile manufacturing costs also contributed to the increase, according to the latest data.

"The annual rate of inflation based on all India WPI is 2.37% (provisional) for December 2024, compared to December 2023," the Ministry of Commerce and Industry stated on Tuesday.

"The positive rate of inflation in December 2024 is primarily due to price increases in food articles, manufacture of food products, other manufacturing, manufacture of textiles, and non-food articles," the ministry added.

In November 2024, India's wholesale prices increased by 1.89% year-on-year, easing from a 2.36% gain in October. Driven by surging food prices, particularly vegetables, October recorded a four-month high of 2.36%. Although fuel and power costs declined, food inflation soared, significantly impacting potato and onion prices.

WPI Food Index saw a marginal decrease to 8.89% in December 2024



from 8.92% in November 2024, as per the ministry.

Comprising 'food articles' from primary articles group and 'food products' from manufactured products group, the food index decreased from 200.3 in November 2024, to 195.9 in December 2024.

A reduction was recorded in food items like cereals, pulses, wheat. However, inflation in vegetables was recorded at 28.65% against 28.57% in November. Potatoes continued to rule high at 93.20% and onions at 16.81% in December. Meat, fish and eggs also increased to 5.43% in

December from 3.16% in November.

In manufactured items, inflation was 2.14%, against 2% in November.

The fuel and power category witnessed a deflation of 3.79% in December against a deflation of 5.83% in November.

Meanwhile, the recent retail inflation data showed that Consumer Price Index (CPI) eased marginally to a 4-month low of 5.22% in December from 5.48% in November.

Understanding WPI, CPI, PPI

For recording inflation, two indices—WPI and CPI—are tracked. There is another factor, Producer

Price Index (PPI), which measures the average change in prices received by producers for goods and services.

WPI and CPI reflect prices at the wholesale and retail levels, respectively, and PPI at the production stage, what producers get for their output.

WPI tracks prices at the wholesale level before the goods reach consumers while CPI is about the average price at the level of consumers.

Policy makers largely rely on WPI and CPI—the long-established indices with historical data for comparison.

There is demand for comprehensive PPI data, which experts say is "more robust tracker of changes in wholesale prices".

It is all interlinked

The fact is if producers experience higher input costs, they are bound to pass it on to wholesalers, causing WPI to rise.

If wholesale prices rise, retailers will also increase prices for consumers, leading to a higher CPI.

Most developed countries track PPI and reports quoting officials suggest that India too is getting ready to shift and that a PPI model "is ready and being evaluated by a multi-department team".

RBI likely to manage forex reserves cautiously amid global headwinds

New Delhi

The RBI will be more judicious in its use of foreign exchange reserves to mitigate domestic currency market volatility amid strong global headwinds, three sources aware of the development said.

The Reserve Bank of India will continue to intervene as and when necessary to smoothen volatility, but won't go against the tide and massively intervene to protect any levels, the sources said, asking not to be named as the discussions are confidential.

"Reserves were built for a rainy day and RBI has intervened when it has been necessary. But since Trump's win, it is clear that there is no point in excessive intervention," one of the three sources said.

The rupee has fallen by about

3 per cent against the US dollar since Trump's victory in early November, a sharp contrast to the near two years of relative stability.

The two sources also said newly-appointed Governor Sanjay Malhotra has been relatively less involved

in day-to-day management of the currency, but is constantly in touch with various departments to ensure the rupee is moving in line with fundamentals.

"There is no question of trying to manage competitiveness as such, as India is not an export-oriented economy. We are more import-dependent, so it is important that the RBI does not allow runaway depreciation. So to that extent, they will be there in the market," the first source said.



Bengaluru start-up to launch satellite to monitor space objects on board SpaceX rocket

Bengaluru

Bengaluru-based start-up Digantara is set to launch the world's first commercial satellite for surveillance of objects as small as 5 cm orbiting the Earth to ensure safer space operations.

Surveillance of outer space or situational space awareness (SSA) is important to ensure the safety of spacecraft as orbits around the Earth become crowded with artificial satellites as well as space debris.

Last month, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) had to delay the launch of SpaDeX satellites by two minutes due to congestion in the orbit and the path of the rocket. Even a slight nudge by a piece of debris to a spacecraft orbiting the Earth at over 25,000 km per hour could prove fatal.

Digantara's Space Camera for Object Tracking (SCOT) satellite is set for launch onboard SpaceX's Transporter-12 mission around Tuesday midnight from California.

"With SCOT, we are taking a crucial step in achieving surveillance superiority, ensuring not only a safer and more sustainable space environment but also towards safeguarding sovereign assets in the face of an increasingly contested space domain," said Anirudh Sharma, Founder and CEO of Digantara Aerospace.

SCOT aims to enhance space safety, optimise traffic management and bolster national security initiatives, he said.

SCOT will be deployed in a sun-synchronous orbit, enabling it to 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.

"Unlike these traditional systems, SCOT offers persistent monitoring of Resident Space Objects, detecting and tracking objects as small as 5 cm," a company statement said.

Weakening rupee: How India's sliding currency will impact your wallet?

The rupee closed at 86.62 (provisional) against the US dollar. When the rupee falls, it becomes weaker compared to the dollar, meaning more rupees are required to buy a single dollar than before. A weaker rupee can boost export competitiveness, while making imports costlier.

Similarly, with the rupee sliding to a lifetime low against the dollar, students studying overseas, especially in US universities, and individuals planning to travel abroad will be affected. On the other hand, non-resident Indians (NRIs) and foreign tourists on vacation in India will benefit from the depreciating currency.

Also, India's widening trade deficit due to rising import costs and stagnant exports would impact the balance of payments and weakened the economy due to weakening of rupee.

Why Indian rupee

is falling against US dollar?

According to analysts, the slump is largely attributed to several key global factors. Fresh US sanctions on Russian oil have led to a sharp rise in crude oil prices, which adds to the strain on India's import-dependent economy. Higher oil prices not only increase India's import bill but also contribute to inflationary pressures, further weighing on the rupee. The combination of a stronger dollar, rising bond yields, and escalating oil prices has placed significant pressure on the Indian rupee, creating uncertainty in the forex market.

Impact on export

For Indian exporters, a falling rupee means higher earnings when they convert foreign income or export revenue into rupees. Also, weakening rupee boosts export competitiveness by



making Indian goods cheaper in global markets. It also enables Indian exporters to offer discounts in an intensely-competitive global marketplace. Given the favourable geopolitical dynamics, a weaker rupee will help bring in export-promoting FDI when countries want to cut their China exposure. Also, an undervalued rupee will also strengthen India's relative attractiveness as a sourcing hub. On the other hand, it would offer limited benefits to the domestic exporters, when their

import content is high. For example, many exporters are dependent on imported raw materials for making finished goods. The depreciation of the rupee leads to an increase in the cost of raw materials, components, and other inputs that are denominated in dollars especially when they are imported.

Impact on import

The declining Indian rupee would make imports costlier. For example, importers need to shell out more Indian rupee to purchase US dollars to pay for imported items

and with the decline in the rupee's value, thus importing will become costlier. Indian imports include crude oil, coal, plastic material, chemicals, electronic goods, vegetable oil, fertiliser, machinery, precious and semi-precious stones, and iron and steel. An increase in importing prices of crude oil would have cascading impact on other sectors such as transportation, manufacturing, and thus consumption.

Foreign education to become costlier

The weakening rupee against US dollar could make foreign education more expensive. Students now need to pay more rupees for every dollar charged by foreign institutions as fees. So, the cost of tuition, living expenses and other fees denominated in dollar will go up. Students who have taken bank loans to fund their foreign education will also feel the pinch more

as the rupee amount required to pay in dollars will increase.

Will impact travelling abroad

For travellers, who are planning to travel abroad will have to shell out more money. For example, if they travel, shops abroad or make purchases, or book a hotel abroad, the cost of goods and services will increase as the exchange rate rises. Some credit card companies also charge foreign transaction fees on international purchases.

Fluctuations in exchange rates significantly impact the amount of remittance one receives. For non-resident Indians, a falling rupee means higher earnings when they convert foreign currency. So, non-resident Indians (NRIs) who send money back home will end up sending more in the rupee value because of the weakening of Indian rupee.

Average salary hike projected to be 9.4 pc in 2025: Report

New Delhi

Indian employees may expect an average salary increment of 9.4 per cent this year across industries, indicating strong economic growth and rising demand for skilled talent, a report said on Tuesday.

Over the last five years, salary increments have steadily increased, rising from 8 per cent in 2020, to a projected 9.4 per cent in 2025, according to Total Remuneration Survey (TRS) by HR consulting firm Mercer.

The automotive sector leads with anticipated increments of 10 per cent from 8.8 per cent, driven by the surge in electric

vehicles and the government-led 'Make in India' initiative.

Manufacturing and engineering follow closely with an increase from 8 per cent to 9.7 per cent, reflecting a resurgence in the manufacturing ecosystem.

More than 1,550 companies in India participated in the survey, spanning diverse industries, such as technology, life sciences, consumer goods, financial services, manufacturing, automotive, and engineering.

Further, the report revealed that in 2025, 37 per cent of organisations plan to increase their headcount reflecting India's vibrant talent demand across

diverse sectors.

Voluntary attrition is expected to stabilise at 11.9 per cent, with Agriculture and Chemical (13.6 per cent) and Shared Services Organisations (13 per cent) experiencing the highest rates, indicating a competitive talent market.

It is also expected that this year some organisations will focus on strategic recruitment, competitive compensation, upskilling, and employee engagement to attract talent, reduce turnover, and sustain growth to address workforce demands.

Retail inflation eases to 4-month low of 5.22%

New Delhi

India's retail inflation rate, measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), declined to a four-month low of 5.22% in December as compared to 5.48 % in November, according to data released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI). The decline in inflation is mainly attributed to softening in prices of food items such as vegetables, pulses, sugar and confectionary, personal care and effects, and cereals. Retail inflation was 6.21% in October, 5.49% in September and 3.65 % in August 2024. Inflation for rural areas was recorded at 5.76%, while urban inflation stood lower at 4.58%. The Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI), which measures food inflation, recorded a year-on-year increase of 8.39% for December. Rural food inflation was slightly higher at 8.65%, while urban areas experienced a rate of 7.90%. "The moderation was largely on account of softening food inflation which declined to 8.4 % from 9% in November.

Joyalukkas Group wins top honours at Retail Jeweller Magazine's MD and CEO Awards



Mumbai Joyalukkas Group, a leading jewellery brand in India, has been honoured with two prestigious awards — Best Strategic and Integrated Marketing 2025 and National Retail Chain of the Year 2025 — at Retail Jeweller MD and CEO Awards 2025. These awards recognise exceptional achievements and contributions to the jewellery industry, highlighting the group's commitment to innovation, strategic excellence, and unparalleled customer service. Thomas Mathew,

Executive Director of Joyalukkas India Limited, received the awards at an event held in Mumbai. The Best Strategic and Integrated Marketing 2025 award acknowledges Joyalukkas Group's outstanding efforts in building awareness and driving business through impactful and multi-faceted marketing programs. The National Retail Chain of the Year 2025 award recognises the group's remarkable growth and retail expansion over the past year.

Himadri Speciality: Valuation remains a sore point

Mumbai Himadri Speciality Chemical Ltd one of the leading carbon black and coal tar distillates manufacturers of India, posted a stable top line on a sequential basis. That said, sales volumes declined marginally quarter on quarter (QoQ). The company benefited from better gross margins (+260 bps QoQ) due to a drop in key raw material prices. This helped in better EBITDA (Earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and



amortisation) margins (+186 bps) despite higher other expenses (+6 percent QoQ).

While operational performance has improved, the end-market (global and domestic autos/ tyres) trend suggests higher inventory and demand slack. This doesn't augur well for the near-term prospects.

Can Budget 2025-26 fix three loose joints in the RE circuit?

New Delhi

The latest RE (renewable energy) report card is vibrating with energy. According to an MNRE (Ministry of New and Renewable Energy) release issued last Monday (January 13), India's total RE installed capacity reached 209.44 GW by December '24, marking a 15.84 percent growth over 180.80 GW in December 2023.

The total capacity added during 2024 amounted to 28.64 GW, representing a year-on-year increase of 119.46 percent against 13.05 GW added in 2023. While hydro earlier used to be a major contributor to RE capacity expansion in the past, solar power spearheaded the growth in 2024 with the addition of 24.54 GW.

This reflects a 33.47 percent rise in its cumulative installed capacity from 73.32 GW in 2023 to 97.86 GW in 2024. Wind energy also contributed to this expansion, with an additional 3.42 GW installed in 2024, increasing the total wind capacity to 48.16 GW, a growth of 7.64 percent from 2023.

At roughly 210 GW, RE capacity has now reached 42 percent of its targeted 500 GW by 2030. This means in the next six years, it will have to add another 290 GW to achieve the RE goal set by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Glasgow climate summit in 2021.

The annual capacity addition achieved last year, though impressive by past standards, is not enough to

achieve 500 GW of RE capacity by 2030. The annual run rate will have to go up to nearly 50 GW to meet this target.

While all stakeholders are upbeat, it implies that more initiatives and measures are needed to ratchet up RE capacity addition.

The upcoming Union budget could be the ideal platform to plug some of the loose points that are inhibiting the rapid addition of RE power.

Rooftop solar

Given the gestation time and other issues relating to utility-scale projects, rooftop solar units are a handy way to step up RE capacity quickly. In this regard, the "PM - Surya Ghar: Mufti Bijli Yojana" is a step in the right direction. With an allocation of Rs 75,000 crore, it aims to light up one crore households through rooftop solar units.

However, the progress of the scheme seems to be slow. If sector experts' data are correct, about 6 lakh installations have been done so far. This needs to go up fast and maybe the target widened. While targets keep on shifting in the RE sector, reports suggest that the national target is to achieve 40 GW of rooftop solar power by 2025. Till 2024 end, the capacity has reached 13 GW.

The slow progress is attributed to challenges ranging from financing hurdles to regulatory barriers and awareness gaps. The upcoming

Union budget needs to address these challenges to make the rooftop solar scheme a success.

Energy storage

Another snag that tends to short-circuit RE progress is energy storage. While India has ramped up RE generation, its energy storage infrastructure has not kept pace. The result is a mismatch between energy supply and demand that leads to the grid's vulnerability to blackouts and inefficiencies.

At present, India is fixated on two types of energy storage — battery and pumped-storage. The current status of such projects and those in the pipeline indicate that such initiatives could fall short of the 60 GW of storage capacity needed by 2030.

To overcome this storage bottleneck and fully harness its RE potential, India must pursue a multi-pronged strategy. This involves investing in innovation for new battery technologies, diversifying its energy storage portfolio, and fostering an ecosystem that supports rapid deployment of storage solutions.

The February budget can make a beginning by providing incentives to encourage the development of new storage technologies and the deployment of such solutions.

Smart meters

Grid infrastructure remains another loose connection that

inhibits RE growth. The budget needs to give a serious thought to this snag.

To shift to a clean power system, the distribution companies under various states need to be wired up along with the rapid deployment of smart meters. Here again, there is a big gap between target and execution. As per data shared in Parliament in December last year, around 7.3 million smart prepaid meters have been installed so far in the country under the RDSS (Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme).

Around 250 million smart prepaid meters are to be installed by March 2025 under the scheme launched in July 2021 at an outlay of Rs 3.3 lakh crore. Why is the progress so abysmal? Does the government need to allocate more money or are there technical issues that are holding back the deployment of smart meters?

The Union budget for 2025-26 has an opportunity to delve into the issue and offer corrective measures.

Opportunities in RE are huge while challenges are varied. It is obvious that an annual budget is not sufficient to address all the issues. However, such annual exercises provide the government an opportunity to plug the immediate snags that can add radiance to RE growth.

The Role of BRICS Leadership in Forging Climate and Health Strategies for a One-Health World

As the world confronts the intertwined crises of climate change and public health, BRICS+ nations have an increasingly crucial role to play in global governance. With the strategic expansion of BRICS to include other emerging economies, the grouping possesses a unique confluence of environmental, economic, and public health opportunities that would allow them to overcome the multiple challenges that confront the world. Accounting for over 40 percent of the world's population and a substantial share of its forest area (Table 1), the BRICS+ bloc can be pivotal in shaping responses to climate-related health threats. Their leadership in harmonising policies across the domains of climate action and healthcare can have profound implications for global strategies to manage pandemics and protect planetary health.

The One Health framework offers a holistic methodological approach to understanding and addressing the nexus of climate change and public health. One Health recognises the health of all species, including humans, and acknowledges the interconnectedness and bidirectional causality between human society and the broader natural ecosystem. This multidisciplinary framework is capable of addressing complex challenges that transcend national borders, which will be explored later in this article.

The idea that climate change and public health are linked is not new. In 2012, science writer David Quammen's book put the term, 'spillover effects', in the public consciousness. The term refers to the way that infectious diseases jump from animals to humans, with the phenomenon often being exacerbated by environmental degradation and climate variability. Deforestation and habitat loss, driven by human activities, push wildlife into closer contact with human populations, increasing the risk of disease transmission. There is an inextricable link between human livelihoods and ecosystem services, particularly in the Global South, where climate change not only alters ecosystems and vector patterns but also impairs human well-being. This can lead to the emergence, and re-emergence, of diseases.

The BRICS nations' vast forested terrains are not just lungs for the Earth but potential hotbeds

for future pandemics. The effective management of these ecological assets, therefore, is a public health imperative, illustrating why a One Health approach is essential for predicting, preventing, and responding to spillover events. The BRICS consortium, by leading in this integrated approach, can pave the way for the creation of a global strategy that effectively mitigates climate-related health risks and safeguards both biodiversity and the well-being of all nations.

BRICS has been a force in global



climate diplomacy. Individually and as a collective, the BRICS countries have played a crucial role in shaping the trajectory of global climate action and sustainable development. The following discussion draws insights from two previously published studies on climate governance within the BRICS and the G20, exploring how the BRICS have fared in climate diplomacy, particularly focusing on their Climate Performance Index (CPI) scores and examining whether health cooperation has negatively affected their performance. Figure 1 shows the CPI scores for the BRICS countries.

With a dynamic approach to climate diplomacy, the BRICS countries actively engage in multilateral forums such as the United Nations and the G20 to advocate for comprehensive climate policies and sustainable environmental practices. Their commitment to climate action is underpinned by an emphasis on the Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) framework, reflecting their collective aspiration for a balanced approach to climate change that accommodates their diverse developmental trajectories and environmental vulnerabilities.

India's leadership in climate performance within the BRICS, as well as among all G20 members,

underscores the potential for developing nations to contribute meaningfully to global climate action while pursuing their development objectives. Brazil and China have also made notable strides in climate action. Figure 2 shows the average performance of the BRICS economies across various domains of climate action.

Historically, the primary focus of the BRICS' climate diplomacy efforts has been on mitigation and adaptation. The intersection of health and environmental policy

amid the spread of communicable diseases—a spillover of climate change impacts. Engaging the BRICS platform in external cooperation could enhance the bloc's ability to address the interrelated challenges of global health and environmental sustainability.

For the BRICS bloc to enhance its influence in global climate and health diplomacy effectively, a more pronounced integration of health cooperation into their climate action frameworks is essential. Such integration not only aligns with the One Health approach, but also enhances the BRICS' scope to influence the global agenda on climate diplomacy and health governance.

Additionally, with the BRICS+ expansion that brought together six of the world's top oil producers and four biggest natural gas producers, energy politics could continue to occupy centrestage in the BRICS' collective stance on climate governance. The principal consensus around developmental concerns underpinning the BRICS+ expansion provides a strong foundation for bolstering the forum's stance on climate and health diplomacy through the 'One Health' approach.

Climate change presents massive challenges to human, animal, and environmental health, necessitating a comprehensive approach that recognises their interconnectedness. The 'One Health' framework integrates these domains, emphasising collaboration among health, agriculture, environment, and other sectors to address climate-related health risks (Figure 3). This holistic model is critically important in addressing the interconnections between climate change and public health, particularly because these domains are tightly linked through shared ecosystems and environmental resources. Climate change exacerbates public health problems by altering the habitats of disease vectors and reservoirs, thereby increasing the risk of zoonotic diseases—or those illnesses that transfer from animals to humans. This is particularly salient in BRICS countries, which are already facing profound public health challenges driven by climatic shifts, such as malaria spread by expanding mosquito territories aggravated by high temperature or respiratory illnesses exacerbated by increased air pollution.

for disease prevention has now emerged as an area ripe for the expansion of cooperation. Indeed, the current national climate action strategies of the BRICS countries lack an explicit focus on health cooperation; this gap will need to be filled as more evidence is found of the interlinkages between climate change and public health outcomes.

This becomes even more urgent as the BRICS countries experience graver implications of climate change. Between 2016-2019, the average annual mean surface temperature change has been highest for the BRICS countries, combined, compared to the G20, OECD, and global average (Table 2). Rising temperatures intensify health challenges, including the risk of epidemics.

Many BRICS members have been active participants in global and regional health diplomacy initiatives. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, when vaccines manufactured by the multinational pharmaceutical giants were accessible largely to the wealthier countries, BRICS emerged as a crucial source of doses for the developing world. Such unified representation in global health governance frameworks, however, remains confined to internal cooperation. The grouping will need to grow its external influence

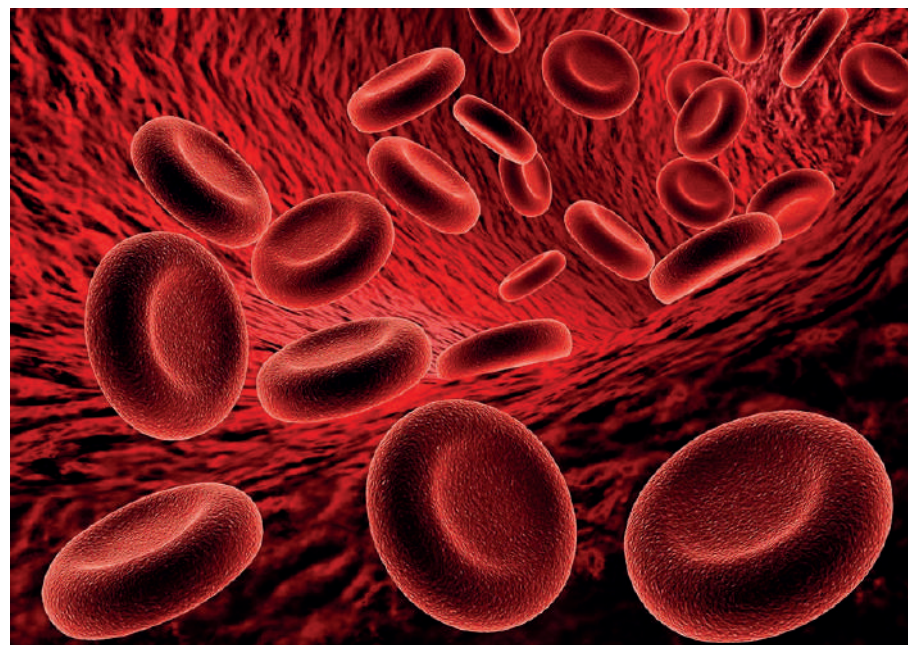
Anaemia in India: A silent public health crisis

India has the highest number of anaemic individuals globally, with anaemia often described as a silent epidemic in the country. Despite efforts to address it, anaemia remains a significant public health challenge, and its prevalence has continued to rise in recent decades. Anaemia manifests through symptoms such as weakness, exhaustion, shortness of breath, pale complexion, cold extremities, light-headedness, fast heartbeat, and difficulty concentrating. A vicious cycle is created where weakness reduces productivity and well-being, posing a risk of maternal mortality, infant mortality, and low birth weight. Anaemia has far-reaching social and economic consequences, significantly impairing both physical and cognitive development.

According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) 2019-2021 data, 57 percent of women and 67.1 percent of children are anaemic in India (figure below). The prevalence is higher in women of reproductive age, young children, and rural populations. The increase in anaemia rates highlights systemic issues in India's public health system that need to be addressed urgently.

Over the past two decades, India's anaemia prevalence has decreased between the NFHS-3 and NFHS-4 and an improvement in other important anaemia-related indicators, including maternal health services due to increased antenatal care coverage, institutional deliveries, and access to healthcare for pregnant women has been witnessed. Additionally, child health indicators have improved, with children under five years old having better nutrition and greater vaccination rates. However, the prevalence of anaemia increased again in the NFHS-5 for all categories. The frequency of anaemia in women rose from 53 to 57 percent between 2015-16 and 2019-21. In all of the female groupings, the overall prevalence of anaemia is continuously high, exceeding 50 percent. Anaemia was more prevalent in children living in rural areas (68.3 percent) than in urban areas (64.2 percent), which is directly related to mothers' low educational levels and low-income households. Children of anaemic mothers are more likely to have anaemia than children of non-anaemic mothers, and this prevalence rises with the number of children born. Adolescent

women, who make up roughly 17 percent of all Indian women, are especially vulnerable to anaemia because of the distinctive physical and physiological changes that take place during this phase of life, along with low iron intake and loss during menstruation. They may also be at risk for other dietary deficiencies, such as folate and vitamin B12, which are critical for synthesising



red blood cells.

Anaemia in children and women of reproductive age has risen as a result of COVID-19, attributable to lockdown-related disruptions in nutritional programs and health services, which made it more difficult to obtain essential medical treatment and dietary supplements. Anaemia was found to be present in 80 percent of women hospitalised for COVID-19 in a cross-sectional research carried out in a tertiary care hospital in eastern India. The study found that lower haemoglobin levels were linked to greater fatality rates and more severe COVID-19, suggesting that pre-existing anaemia had a major influence on patient outcomes during the pandemic. According to data from the Health Management Information System, all benefit groups saw an improvement in the coverage of Iron and Folic Acid (IFA) supplementation between 2017-18 and 2019-20. Nevertheless, post-COVID-19 pandemic evaluations reveal that, although some progress was achieved, the prevalence of anaemia did not considerably decline over this time.

The majority of Indians eat diets that are "barely sufficient" or "frankly inadequate" in terms

of meeting their daily needs for iron, folate, and vitamin B12. Restrictive diets during pregnancy or the postpartum period might originate from cultural beliefs and behaviours, which can cause dietary deficits that prevent women from getting enough nutrients, leading to anaemia. Anaemia prevalence is often influenced by socioeconomic factors, such as marginalised status,

institutional frameworks, with a focus on bolstering the supply chain, demand generation and strong monitoring to address nutritional and non-nutritional causes of anaemia. AMB is in line with more comprehensive national nutrition plans, including Mission POSHAN 2.0, which combines other nutritional programs and focuses on food fortification, diet diversity, and promoting the use of millets. To bridge dietary gaps, nutrition awareness initiatives under POSHAN 2.0 seek to promote long-term health and well-being via nutritious, regional foods. The food fortification programme seeks to enhance nutritional outcomes by strategically adding vital micronutrients to staple foods and reaching out to vulnerable groups through Public Distribution Systems and Integrated Child Development Services.

A multifaceted approach is required to effectively combat anaemia through nutritional, health, and community interventions. For populations at risk, iron intake can be increased through the increased consumption of foods rich in iron including leafy greens, legumes, nuts, and fortified cereals, as well as through education on dietary diversity. Key foods must be fortified with iron and other minerals to ensure these crucial nutrients are broadly available. Ensuring adherence to Iron folic acid (IFA) supplementation through health education and counselling, along with managing adverse effects can help in the prevention and management of anaemia. Improving anaemia screening techniques by utilising precise diagnostic instruments, such as venous blood samples, will aid in accurate anaemia diagnosis and treatment. Studies have demonstrated the role of empowering community health workers to provide parental counselling for anaemia prevention and cure. Focusing on high-risk groups, including pregnant women, lactating mothers, and children below five years, involves implementing region-specific targeted interventions for anaemia prevention.

India can address the underlying causes of anaemia by adopting a holistic approach that considers all aspects—social, cultural, dietary and economic—alongside clinical components for anaemia prevention and management strategies.

The Anaemia Mukta Bharat (AMB) strategy was introduced in 2018, to lower the prevalence of anaemia in mothers, children and adolescents by using a life cycle approach. The program uses a 6x6x6 strategy, which consists of six interventions, six target beneficiary categories, and six

Putting climate action at the centre of urban planning

Data and analyses from the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) [1] show that the country's cities are facing worsening threats of extreme weather events, including heat waves, cold waves, and floods. Coastal cities, in particular, are likely to experience greater vulnerability from cyclones, extreme precipitation events, and rising sea levels. International agencies such as the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the International Institute for Environment and Development are also sounding the alarm on the climate change-induced weather events that will increase in both frequency and severity.

With the heightened recurrence of climate-related crises in Indian cities, the challenge of building climate resilience has come to the foreground of the national urbanisation discourse.

In 2022, for instance, across 16 states, IMD reported a steep number of heat wave days (about 280) across the country. The IMD also noted that the annual mean land surface air temperature that year averaged +0.51 °C above the long-term average in the 1981-1991 period. The year 2022 was also the fifth hottest since 1901. At the same time, the country recorded 57 cold wave days in 2022, with the state of Haryana experiencing the highest number. Furthermore, many cities suffered from flooding events that caused massive losses in lives and livelihoods.

With the heightened recurrence of climate-related crises in Indian cities, the challenge of building climate resilience has come to the foreground of the national urbanisation discourse. India is also projected to further urbanise in the coming years, and larger proportions of people will live in cities in the future. There is now wide agreement among scholars of urban studies, civil society, and government administrators that cities must take serious steps, informed by science and well-defined, to mitigate the daunting challenges of climate change. As the world is yet far from reaching carbon neutrality, the imperative is to place maximum emphasis on building climate resilience and adaptation.

Climate change has a huge negative fallout for cities. In India, an analysis released in 2021 reported 120,000 deaths in New Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai and Lucknow that can be attributed to air pollution. Extreme climate events spell the destruction of municipal infrastructure and individual livelihoods and are huge anti-catalysts to city economies. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has warned that climate change-related job losses will cause India's GDP to drop

by 4.5 percent by 2030.

Extreme climate events spell the destruction of municipal infrastructure and individual livelihoods and are huge anti-catalysts to city economies.

The question, therefore, is whether Indian cities are considering climate resilience as a key element in governance and preparedness planning.

Overall, India-specific city reports do not paint a rosy picture. Among the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the one that advocates for cities is SDG 11 ('sustainable cities and communities'), and its primary goal is to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient



and sustainable. According to the Sustainable Development Report 2022, India is not on track to achieving SDG 11. The degenerating scenario has been occupying the headlines in recent years, with specific reference to the air quality in India's two most important cities—the national capital, Delhi, and the financial hub, Mumbai. In the case of Delhi, the air quality has sharply dipped well in advance of extreme winter, which has been the general pattern of worsening air. In the case of Mumbai, where it was earlier thought that the sea breeze protects the city, air pollution reached alarming levels beginning November 2023.

The situation in cities like Delhi and Mumbai would show that these urban areas have typically paid little attention to climate resilience. This is despite initiatives such as the National Clean Air Mission (CAM-INDIA), which aims to reduce PM2.5 by about one-third in five years in 100 of India's most polluted cities. The response of

cities appears more callous given their contribution to climate change: they consume about 75 percent of global primary energy and generate about 75 percent of the worldwide global CO2 emissions. It is incumbent, therefore, upon cities to take on a bigger role in the fight against climate change.

State governments have a key role to play in building climate resilient cities. To begin with, approaching climate resilience as a worthy activity that could be taken up in earnest by cities will no longer work. It is too critical a task to be left as a mere option. The preparation and implementation of climate action plans are not mentioned in the laws that govern Indian cities, and city statutes will now need to be

amended to make this a compulsory task to be undertaken by urban local bodies (ULBs).

The situation in cities like Delhi and Mumbai would show that these urban areas have typically paid little attention to climate resilience.

Every city must be mandated to prepare a climate action plan (CAP) and implement it on an annual basis by providing for it in their annual budgets. This is by no means a novel, fanciful idea. Countries such as France, the United Kingdom, Slovakia and Denmark, have already made local climate plans mandatory. Many cities in the United States (San Francisco, Chicago, Boston, Los Angeles), South Korea (Seoul), Japan (Tokyo), Australia (Sydney, Melbourne), Indonesia (Jakarta), and South Africa (Cape Town, Durban) have also prepared CAPs that are compatible with the Paris Climate Agreement.

In Mumbai, the Municipal Corporation (BMC) has taken the lead in preparing a CAP, and Chennai has followed suit. The MCAP 2022 aims at increasing BMC's attention on tackling climate change and strengthening Mumbai's climate resilience. It identifies urban flooding, coastal risks, urban heat, landslides, and air pollution as the biggest threats and outlines ways of garnering resources to move from action planning to implementing strategic projects. The MCAP also suggests an institutional mechanism in the form of a 'Climate Cell' to coordinate the implementation and monitoring of all activities related to climate change. However, the preparation of CAP does not appear to be matched by its commitment in implementation and the BMC would have to do far more. All other cities would have to similarly prepare CAPs and lay down the institutional and financial mechanisms for its implementation.

The larger questions of how much human density a city can sustain, what is the volume of construction that can be permissible, and how much openness must be maintained, should not be dismissed.

For the smaller cities, the state governments would have to do some handholding at critical stages. All tasks that cities perform ought to be compulsorily examined through the climate lens. These include construction practices, waste management, and maximisation of green surfaces and the adoption of green technologies. At the same time, each state should erect a common platform where best practices in climate action could be shared. Educational and capacity-building institutions would have to devote their energies towards multi-stakeholder capacity-building and for the promotion of environmentally responsible behaviour. These would include the inculcation of habits that promote water conservation, minimising waste generation, greater use of public transport, and the practice of urban agriculture in homes and buildings.

While mitigation and adaptation measures are introduced, it is vital that strategies are framed by the principles of sustainability. The larger questions of how much human density a city can sustain, what is the volume of construction that can be permissible, and how much openness must be maintained, should not be dismissed. No city can simply carry on with activities that run counter to sustainability and hope that mitigation and adaptation measures will be able to successfully deal with the negative consequences.

Behind the India-China talks: Unravelling Beijing's deceptive long-term strategy

Sun Tzu's treatise on war offers many stratagems to deal with the enemy. He emphasises deception and patience, cautioning that the general who makes many calculations like a chess player is more likely to win. Unfortunately, endurance is in short supply when it comes to India-China dynamics, especially in the era of 24/7 news cycles.

In December 2024, the 23rd meeting of the Special Representatives (SRs) between India's National Security Advisor, Ajit Doval, and China's Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, took place after a hiatus of nearly five years. The SRs mechanism was constituted in an agreement in 2003, which mandated that ways to resolve the boundary question should be looked into from a political perspective. In the Indian readout, both Doval and Wang Yi underscored the overall India-China bilateral relationship was dependent on the maintenance of peace and tranquillity in border regions. Decks are being cleared for the Kailash Mansarovar pilgrimage in Tibet, trade in border areas, and data sharing on trans-border rivers.

The SRs mechanism was constituted in an agreement in 2003, which mandated that ways to resolve the boundary question should be looked into from a political perspective.

The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs communique refers to the "six consensus"—developments related to the disengagement along the border—as a "solution". It states that the border issue should be "handled appropriately", and should not affect the development of bilateral relations. It cites efforts on both sides to arrive at a "mutually acceptable package solution" to the border issue, based on the SR accord on the boundary issue reached in 2005. The Chinese readout also pledges that the two nations must empower the SRs framework, and strengthen coordination and cooperation in diplomatic and military negotiations. It also refers to the continuation of the SRs mechanism through a meeting in the next year, underlining that a stable China-India relationship is key to peace in Asia. The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs assesses the SR mechanism's revival as "hard-won", giving an impression that it values efforts to normalise ties after the tense military standoff. Yet, like the generals listening to Sun Tzu's counsel, Beijing had other calculations up its sleeve. While all along, China's actions were classified as grey-zone warfare, academics are now increasingly debating the use of the term "ICAD", denoting "illegal, coercive, aggressive and deceptive" behaviour, to explain Beijing's tactics.

China is building on its ICAD strategy, as

evidenced by its large hydro-power project on the Yarlung-Tsangpo river in Tibet, which becomes the Brahmaputra after it enters Arunachal Pradesh. New Delhi has conveyed its concerns to Beijing, insisting that the interests of lower riparian states like Bangladesh be protected. Furthermore, the Xinjiang Autonomous Region announced the formation of two counties in the Hotan prefecture, subsuming territory in Ladakh. This is in line with the cartographic-onslaught strategy under which China earlier unilaterally renamed towns in Arunachal Pradesh, to which it lays claims. Beijing has also published an official map showing large parts of Indian territory as part of China.

China is building on its ICAD strategy, as evidenced by its large hydro-power project on the Yarlung-Tsangpo river in Tibet, which becomes the Brahmaputra after it enters Arunachal Pradesh.



This renewed belligerence might be propelled by China's calculations that New Delhi was too eager to reduce tensions with Beijing, and due to the important divergences in New Delhi and Washington D.C.'s strategic interests. Liu Zongyi, Director of the South Asia Research Center of the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, assesses that India's motivation to mend fences with China is influenced primarily by financial and economic considerations. First, he points to the fact that the military standoff in eastern Ladakh has drained India's finances due to heightened investments in weapon purchases and physical infrastructure development, diverting New Delhi's focus from the Indian Ocean. Second, he adds that Western-led containment alliances around China had led to strategic competition between Washington and Beijing and that India was keen to use this opportunity to develop its economy, for which it needed China as a development partner. Third, there is also a belief that India was relenting

on its "xiè mò shā lú" attitude towards Chinese corporates, which roughly translates 'to kill the donkey after the grinding is done'. The implication here is that New Delhi unjustly curbed Chinese firms doing business in India. Yuan Jirong, who covers India, as a correspondent for a Chinese media outlet, believes India-US compact is fraying due to divergent strategic interests. First, he makes this argument based on an assessment by Washington that India was a "big country" pursuing its own interests, and it would never formally become an ally of the US, thus circumscribing US-India cooperation. Second, he also argues that India's aspiration for global leadership will mean that it may challenge the US. Conversely, he also suggests that Washington's goal is to encourage competition between the two developing powers that are rising parallelly, thus letting its global hegemony continue. This pessimistic outlook on India-US relations does not seem to be rooted in reality, given that US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan visited Delhi in January 2025, meeting the Indian leadership to take stock of the "Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership" between the two nations in sectors like technology, defence, space, civil nuclear, clean energy, semiconductors, and artificial intelligence (AI). Washington has also announced its intent to remove hurdles to cooperation in the field of civil nuclear, including removing regulations for Indian scientific establishments, under which they are subjected to export restrictions with respect to specific goods and know-how.

Chinese strategists feel that India's conceptualisation of a "multipolar Asia" as the basis of a "multipolar world", places India on an equal footing with China in Asia, thereby hindering Chinese ambitions to become the dominant power in Asia.

During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping at the October 2024 BRICS summit in Russia, Modi affirmed that stable India-China relations would contribute to a multi-polar Asia and a multi-polar world. Chinese strategists feel that India's conceptualisation of a "multipolar Asia" as the basis of a "multipolar world", places India on an equal footing with China in Asia, thereby hindering Chinese ambitions to become the dominant power in Asia. Beijing feels that given the power differential between the two, India would be incentivised to join other countries to check and balance China. Thus, China would prefer to keep the border issue alive, and its projection of a rapprochement is only a ruse to further its ICAD strategy.

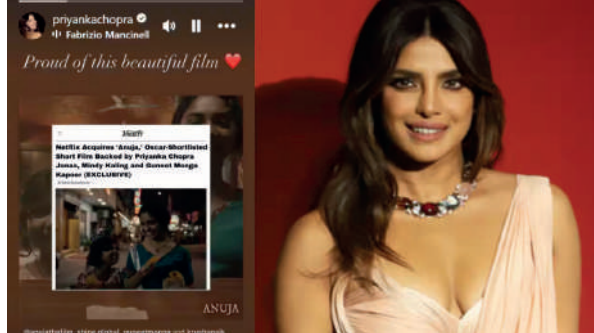
Oscar-shortlisted short film Anuja to stream on Netflix, Priyanka Chopra expresses pride

Oscar-shortlisted short film Anuja, directed by Adam J Graves, will soon be available for streaming on Netflix. The live-action film has received significant backing from Priyanka Chopra, Mindy Kaling, and Academy Award winner Guneet Monga. The film's producer, Suchitra Mattai, is also the wife of director Adam J Graves. Anuja has been shortlisted for the Best Live Action Short Film category at the 97th Academy Awards.

The film tells the heartwarming and inspiring story of two sisters, Anuja and Palak, who face hardships in a world that seems determined to exploit and exclude them.

The narrative focuses on 9-year-old Anuja, who works in a garment factory with her older sister. The film follows Anuja as she faces a difficult decision that will change both her life and the lives of those around her. Adam J Graves has called the film a tribute to the resilience of working children and their untold stories.

Priyanka Chopra, who has supported the film, reacted to the exciting news of its release on Netflix by sharing a post on Instagram. She expressed her pride in the project, writing, "Proud of this beautiful film." Priyanka's support adds to the growing excitement surrounding the film, which is already gaining recognition for its important message.



Guneet Monga, one of the film's backers, shared her thoughts on Anuja's release on Netflix. She described the film as one of "unparalleled courage" and emphasized the empowering message that director Graves conveys. Monga expressed her gratitude for Netflix's involvement in giving the film a platform to reach a global audience. Mindy Kaling also expressed her passion for the project, saying that Anuja is a "powerful, hopeful, and full of life" film. She is excited that the film will now reach even more viewers through Netflix, which will allow the story to have a wider impact.

The film's official release date on Netflix has not yet been announced, but the excitement continues to build as more people look forward to experiencing this powerful and meaningful story.

Akshay Kumar, Paresh Rawal fly kites on Makar Sankranti

Bollywood superstar Akshay Kumar, who was last seen in "Singham Again", is celebrating Makar Sankranti with actor Paresh Rawal while shooting for his upcoming movie 'Bhooth Bangla'.

On Tuesday, the actor took to his Instagram, and shared a video in which he could be seen flying a kite, while Paresh Rawal holds the manjha.

He wrote in the caption, "Celebrating the vibrant spirit of Makar Sankranti on the set of #BhoothBangla with my dear friend @pareshrawalofficial. Here's to laughter, good vibes, and soaring high just like the kites! And sending my best wishes for a joyous Pongal, Uttarayan and Bihu."



Chef Harpal Singh Sokhi believes one should be open to opportunities

The Energy Chef of India, who made namak shamak a household slogan, is on a show spree! Even as Chef Harpal Singh Sokhi enters the eighth season of Punjab De Superchef later this month, he is currently busy shooting for the second season of Laughter Chef Season 2.

Chef Sokhi has already been a part of some popular shows, including Turban Tadka, Grand Trunk Rasoi and Maa Ki Dal, among others. "Laughter Chef got unprecedented love and numbers leading to its Season 2. People have reached out to us sharing how it takes them away from their worries and makes them live in the moment," says one of the very first chefs to take on the Indian telly screen.

Laughter Chef brings together old contestants and new, offering a medley, with names like Krishna, Sudesh, Kashmera Shah, Manara Chopra, Samarth Jurel, Rubina Dilaik, Abhishek Kumar and Samarth. Chef

Sokhi sure is having fun! Abdu Rozik and Elvish have not only won social media but Sokhi's heart too. "They are surprisingly good in the kitchen," he vouches.

Choosing his own path Starting his innings from Centaur Hotel, Mumbai, the opportunity to work and learn in Europe was his first big high. Open to risks, he came and chose to work in a restaurant, much against his well-wishers' advice. He mastered Hyderabad cuisine, not only from his ustad Habib Pasha, but also Sultana of Spices Begum Mumtaz and more, exploring Nizam connections in the gali and kuche of Hyderabad. Chef Sokhi ventured into writing for big publications before establishing his place on TV. A number of shows, he continues to be a restaurateur—ready to open his 11th restaurant—Karigari in Connaught Place, New Delhi. He hopes to take the count to 20 by the year end!



Oscars push back nominations announcement amid California wildfires



California The Oscar nominations are being pushed back almost a week from their original date amid the ongoing California wildfires.

Nominations will now be announced on January 23, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences said Monday.

"We are all devastated by the impact of the fires and the profound losses

experienced by so many in our community," Academy CEO Bill Kramer and Academy President Janet Yang said in a joint statement. "The Academy has always been a unifying force within the film industry, and we are committed to standing together in the face of hardship." With fires still active in the Los Angeles area, the film academy also extended the nominations voting

period for its members through Friday. Originally, nominations were to be announced that morning.

The organisation that puts on the Oscars has also made the decision to cancel its annual nominees luncheon, an untelevised event best known for the "class photos" it produces annually. The Scientific and Technical Awards, previously set for February 18, will be rescheduled later.

The 97th Oscars will still happen on March 2, at the Dolby Theatre, with a live television broadcast on ABC beginning at 7 pm ET and a live stream on Hulu.

Here's what Janhvi Kapoor is refusing to do

There is only one thing that Bollywood actress Janhvi Kapoor is refusing to do.

Janhvi took to her Instagram stories, where she shared a clip of her beautifully decorated and well-lit Christmas Tree.

The actress wrote: "Refusing to take down my Christmas tree."

In other news, on January 7, Bollywood sisters Janhvi and Khushi Kapoor recreated the hook step of the song "Loveyapa Hogaya" from the upcoming film "Loveyapa."

Khushi took to her Instagram, where she shared a reel video. In the clip, the two girls are seen doing the hookstep of the track, originally picturised on Junaid Khan and Janhvi's sister. Boney Kapoor made a hilarious special appearance in the background.

Nikla tha love karne par papa aagaya #Loveyapa," Khushi captioned the post.

It was on January 3, when the track was unveiled. In "Loveyapa", Junaid, who is the son of Bollywood superstar Aamir Khan, will be seen romancing Khushi Kapoor.

"Loveyapa", directed by Advait Chandan, the drama deals with the life of a young couple whose relationship ends up taking a massive turn after they exchange their mobile phones and learn some bitter truths about each other.

On the work front, Janhvi will next be seen in "Sunny Sanskari Ki Tulsi Kumari" with actor Varun Dhawan, Sanya Malhotra, Rohit Saraf and



Maniesh Paul. The film is directed by Shashank Khaitan.

She will also be seen in 'Param Sundari', which is set to release on July 25, 2025.

The film is by production house Maddock Films, directed by Tushar Jalota of "Dasvi" fame. It centers on a love story between a North Indian played by Sidharth Malhotra and a South Indian girl, filmed in Kerala.

The film "promises a heartfelt tale of love, where two worlds collide, and sparks are bound to fly. Set against the breathtaking backwaters of Kerala, this love story is a rollercoaster of laughter, chaos, and unexpected twists you won't see coming," per a description provided by Maddock, reports variety.com.

Tabu joins Akshay Kumar in Priyadarshan's 'Bhooth Bangla'



Superstar Tabu has boarded the cast of Priyadarshan's upcoming horror comedy "Bhooth Bangla", headlined by Akshay Kumar.

Also starring Paresh Rawal,

Jisshu Sengupta, and Wamiqa Gabbi, the film is set to be released on April 2, 2026.

"Bhooth Bangla" marks a reunion for Tabu with Kumar, Rawal and

Priyadarshan after the 2000 superhit comedy "Hera Pheri".

"Hum yahan bandh hain. @priyadarshan. official @balajimotionpictures @akshaykumar @ektarkapoor @jishu.sengupta @ipritamofficial @wamiqagabbi," she wrote on Saturday alongside a picture of the film's clapperboard on Instagram.

Bhooth Bangla" is also the first collaboration between Akshay and Priyadarshan in over 14 years. Their film together was 2010's political satire "Khatta Meetha".

Tabu's latest work was American science fiction series "Dune: Prophecy", in which she essayed the role of Sister Francesca.

Will be back soon: 'Pushpa' star Rashmika shares update after injury

Pushpa 2: The Rule" star Rashmika Mandanna has confirmed that she got injured in her leg recently, saying she hopes to return to work soon. The 28-year-old actress, also known for films such as "Animal", "Bheeshma" and "Geetha Govindam", shared a post on Instagram on Saturday days after reports of her sustaining a leg injury started doing social media rounds.

"Injured myself in my sacred gym shrine," she wrote in the caption alongside a picture of her with a plaster on her right leg.

Mandanna apologised to the directors of her upcoming films "Thama", "Sikandar", and "Kubera" for the delay in the shoots due to her injury. "Now I'm in 'hop mode' for the

next few weeks or months or god only knows, so seems like I'll be hopping my way back to sets for Thama, Sikandar, and Kubera. To my directors sorry for the delay...I'll be back soon enough just making sure my legs are fit for action (or at least fit for hopping). In the meantime, if you need me...I'll be the one in the corner doing a highly advanced bunny hop workout. HOP HOP HOP.." she wrote.

The actress was last seen in Sukumar's "Pushpa 2", co-starring Allu Arjun. The film, a sequel to 2021's "Pushpa: The Rise", has become the highest grossing movie in India with a gross box office figure of Rs 1,831 crore, according to production banner Mythri Movie Makers.



Manu Bhaker Likely To Get 'Damaged' Paris Olympics Medals Replaced

New Dehi

India's star pistol shooter Manu Bhaker is likely to get her two Paris Olympics bronze medals replaced by identical models after her name featured in the list of the large group of athletes who have complained that their medals have already deteriorated.

A lot of athletes from across the world have also posted pictures of their worn-out medals on social media in recent times.

After receiving many complaints about the medals' colour deterioration, the International Olympic

Committee (IOC) said that the damaged medals would be systematically replaced by the Monnaie de Paris (the French state mint) and engraved in an identical way to the originals.

The iron pieces embedded in the centre of each Olympic medal weigh 18 grams (approximately two-thirds of an ounce). The French State Mint, also known as Monnaie de Paris, is a state-owned company responsible for minting coins and currency for France. All damaged and defective medals will be replaced in the coming weeks, as the Paris Olympics



organizing committee collaborates closely with the Monnaie de Paris. The 2024 Olympic and Paralympic medals in Paris feature pieces from the iconic Eiffel Tower.

A total of 5,084 gold, silver, and bronze medals for the Paris 2024 Games were designed by the luxury jewellery and watch firm Chaumet, which is part of

the LVMH conglomerate and produced by Monnaie de Paris. Bhaker is the first Indian athlete since Independence to win two medals in a single edition of the Olympics. She opened India's medal account at the Games by securing a bronze in the individual 10m air pistol event, becoming the first female marksman from the country to win an Olympic medal. Not only this, the 22-year-old then partnered with Sarabjot Singh to win the bronze medal in the 10m air pistol mixed team event, becoming the first Indian pair to achieve an incredible feat.

Rohit Sharma Expected To Travel To Pakistan For Champions Trophy 2025 Opening Ceremony

Mumbai

Although India will play its Champions Trophy matches at a neutral venue -- Dubai International Stadium in Dubai, the Indian cricket team captain Rohit Sharma is expected to visit the original host country Pakistan to attend the opening ceremony of ICC's marquee event, which is marking its return after an eight-year hiatus, IANS sources said.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB)



is organizing a grand opening ceremony for the Champions Trophy, a customary event that marks the beginning of an ICC tournament. This ceremony is tentatively scheduled for February

16 or 17, depending on the warm-up match itinerary. All team captains are expected to participate in the opening ceremony, as is standard practice for ICC events.

Rishabh Pant Set To Play Ranji Trophy For Delhi, Virat Kohli, Harshit Rana Named In 41 Probables

New Delhi

India's wicket-keeper batter Rishabh Pant is all set to be included in Delhi's Ranji Trophy team in their next Ranji Trophy 2024-5 fixture against Saurashtra from 23rd January in Rajkot. Pant was included amongst 41 probable players for Delhi for their next rounds of the Ranji Trophy, along with the Star India batter Virat Kohli and pacer Harshit Rana.

Pant last featured



in the Ranji Trophy in 2017. The southpaw scored 315 runs from 7 matches in his 2017 season and hasn't appeared in India's premier red-ball tournament since his India Test debut in 2018. However, both Kohli and Pant were part of Delhi's Ranji Trophy probable list last year as well.

Pant failed to make an impact in the recently concluded Border-Gavaskar Trophy 2024-25 which he had made in India's last tour to Australia in 2020-21. The southpaw accumulated 255 runs from five matches (9 innings) at an average

of 28.33, including just one half-century, which came in the second innings of the final Test in Sydney.

However, it is also understood that some other Indian team's mainstays including Rohit Sharma (Mumbai), Yashasvi Jaiswal (Mumbai) and Shubman Gill (Punjab) have also been asked to be available for their respective state's next Ranji Trophy fixtures. But with the highly anticipated Champions Trophy 2025 to be held in Pakistan and UAE around the corner, these players might play only one Ranji Trophy game in the current phase.

Bumrah named ICC Men's Player of Month for December 2024

Dubai

Bumrah's sensational performance at the BGT saw him, single-handedly, dismantle Australia's attack recording an outstanding average of 14.22

India pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah was on Tuesday named ICC Men's Player of the Month for December 2024 after his sensational performance

during the recent tour of Australia for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

Leading India's attack single-handedly, Bumrah relentlessly kept Australian batsmen under intense pressure, claiming 22 wickets in three Tests in December last year at an outstanding average of 14.22.

BWF Rankings: Tressa/Gayatri Enter Top 10; PV Sindhu Dropped To Two Places

The Indian women's doubles pair of Treasa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand inked history as they entered the top 10 in the BWF rankings released on Tuesday. With their new World No.9 ranking, they became the highest-ever ranked Indian women's doubles pair. The pair surpassed the previous best rankings by an Indian women's doubles pair of Ashwini Ponappa and Jwala Gutta. Ponappa and Gutta became the world number 10 in 2015.

The duo won Syed Modi India International last year and then performed in an impressive manner at the world tour final. Their performance placed them at No.11 in the BWF rankings.

Earlier, the Indian duo missed out on the qualification for the Olympics but added crucial points to their tally in the Macau Open and Canada Open. Also, a quarter-final finish at the Malaysia Open helped them get an entry in the top 10.

Meanwhile, PV Sindhu's rankings took a hit by two places and she is at World No. 16 after missing out Malaysia Open last week due to her marriage. Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag



Shetty retained their No. 9 rank after a semi-final exit from the Malaysia Open. Lakshya Sen and HS Prannoy have retained their rankings at World No. 12 and World No. 26.

With the Indian Open starting today in New Delhi, the Indian shuttlers will have a chance to improve their rankings. The Indian contingent includes a few young guns along with experienced players in the team.

Kho Kho will compete top sports in future: Indian men's Kho Kho team captain Prateek Waikar



New Delhi

Following the Indian men's Kho Kho team's second victory in the ongoing Kho Kho World Cup 2025, captain Waikar Waikar said that Kho Kho will compete in top sports in the future.

In a thrilling display of strategic prowess, Team India secured a 64-34 victory over Brazil on Tuesday night at the Kho Kho World Cup 2025.

The match, which kept spectators on the edge of their seats at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium, showcased exceptional skill from both sides, with India ultimately proving their mettle in a spectacular finish to Day 2 of the tournament, as a release from the Kho Kho World Cup 2025 stated.

Speaking to ANI, Prateek Waikar reflected on India's performance against Brazil and said that all the players have done well. He also praised his side for executing the plans accordingly.

Prateek further added that he never thought that Kho Kho

would grow so much and will get such a platform.

"I am very happy that every player has performed well against Brazil. We have executed our plans well. We have to stay on the top of the points table...

I have never thought that Kho Kho would grow so much... I have been playing Kho Kho for the last 24 years but haven't seen such a big platform for this sport... Kho Kho will compete in top sports like cricket and football in the future..." Prateek Waikar told ANI.

Indian men's Kho Kho team player Ram Kashyap said that it was a good win for them against Brazil. He also hoped that India would lift the Kho Kho World Cup 2025.

"It was a good win for us against Brazil. Hopefully, in the next game, we will play well. Iran and Nepal have a good team in this tournament. I am hopeful that India will win the Kho Kho World Cup 2025," Ram Kashyap told ANI.

BCCI to limit families' presence during Team India's tours: Report

New Delhi

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) is set to implement stricter protocols during Team India's tours, according to a report from ESPNcricinfo.

The report added that BCCI will limit the players spending time with their families on tours. The players will also be barred from taking independent transport to commute during practice and matches.

For a tour of 45 days, the family members of the players can only be with them for not more than 14 days. Meanwhile, during shorter tours in foreign countries, the immediate family members of a player can stay up to a week.

According to ESPNcricinfo, Team India skipper Rohit Sharma, head coach Gautam Gambhir and chief selector Ajit Agarkar met the BCCI officials in Mumbai last Saturday and were informed of the new protocols.

Team India conceded a disappointing 3-1 defeat to Australia in the recently



concluded Border-Gavaskar Trophy 2024-25 and lost the opportunity to qualify for the World Test Championship (WTC) Final at Lord's.

Skipper Rohit Sharma and star batter Virat Kohli came under fire for an underwhelming Border-Gavaskar Trophy campaign and overall a very disappointing 2024/25 season of Test cricket. Sharma (31 runs in three matches and five innings at an average of 6.20) and Virat Kohli (190 runs in five matches and nine innings at an average of 23.75 with a century) lacked big time

with the bat. Virat fell for the outside-off-stump trap throughout the series, most notably by pacer Scott Boland who dismissed him four times.

The 2024-25 season of Tests has been miserable for 'Ro-Ko' (Rohit and Kohli). While Rohit scored just 164 runs in eight matches and 15 innings at an average of 10.93 with best score of 52, Virat scored a shambolic 382 runs in 10 matches and 19 innings at an average of 22.87, with just a century and fifty each.

When West Meets East: Geographical Identities Blur In Prayagraj Maha Kumbh On Makar Sankranti

Prayagraj

Maha Kumbh, the 45-day religious event which is expected to witness the largest-ever human gathering, with over 40 crore people anticipated to attend, has blurred the contours of geographical identities with thousands of devotees from foreign countries flocking to Prayagraj.

With the commencement of the Maha Kumbh on Monday, Prayagraj has been witnessing a constant flow of devotees from across the world. From Day 1, they began streaming into the Triveni Sangam to participate in the first Amrit Snan (sacred dip) which took place on the occasion of Makar Sankranti on Tuesday.

The confluence of rivers in Triveni, which became a melting pot of cultures, is seeing the fervour of devotees on the second day of the Maha Kumbh Mela. With over 10 million devotees having taken the holy dip so far as per the UP DGP, the place continues to see an ever-growing presence of pilgrims from India and the world.

Nitya Tarangini, a devotee from Russia who has been staying in Vrindavan now, has her share of joy. "I'm very excited because it's such a huge opportunity to take part in this Kumbh Mela because it's very special and many people are coming. We're staying in Vrindavan, we have a temple there, so that's why we came we want to share these books, this knowledge, this Sanatana Dharma," she told new agency ANI.

Another foreign devotee said, "The spirit of India is very powerful at this moment. Jupiter and Saturn are aligned. Maha Kumbh is not an occasion for India, Maha Kumbh is for all world", he expressed enthusiastically.

Makeshwari Dasi, from the United States of America, told ANI, "I feel like we came to a very pure place and I'm anticipating seeing all the people of India, being in the water with them and chanting with them. We're very fortunate that we got to come to not just India but these spiritual places like Prayag".

On Tuesday, Sadhus of the 13 Akhadas of Sanatan Dharm began taking holy dip at Triveni Sangam. Maha Kumbh is one of the largest and most significant religious congregations in the world, held every 12 years at one of four locations in India.

Devotees, both Indian and foreign-origin, immersed themselves in the sacred tradition, contributing to the world's largest spiritual gathering. The atmosphere around the Triveni Sangam was filled with devotion as foreign pilgrims joined in the spiritual energy of the Mela.

Foreign devotees from various parts of the world gathered to sing bhajans, blending into the devotional ambience. They sang 'Om Jai Jagdish Hare' and 'Mahishasura Mardini Stotram,' adding their voices to the sacred chants of the gathering.

Among those present, a devotee from Milan, Italy, shared her connection to India and the Kumbh Mela. "I am very happy to be in India, as I love



India. This is my sixth visit here, and I am thrilled to be part of the Kumbh Mela," she said.

Another devotee from Nepal expressed her joy as she participated in her first Amrit Snan. A devotee from Germany, Thomas said, "I think it (Maha Kumbh) is very well organised. It's very big and people are so friendly. I wanted to feel the spiritual energy and to meet Indian people..."

Foreigners praise hospitality

Jeff, a US citizen, expressed his joy after taking holy dip. "I'm from America, but I live in Lisbon, Portugal," he said. "I find the energy here very calm and relaxing, and everyone seems very friendly. It feels very good to come here." Another devotee, Paula from the United States, expressed her joy at being able to participate in the festival.

"Today is a very good day," she said in broken Hindi. "On this good day, we are getting the opportunity to take a bath with the sadhus. It is our good fortune that we got the opportunity to come to Maha Kumbh and got the company of the sanyasis." A woman from Iran, who was part of a group of 9 people from different parts of the world, also praised the organization of the event.

"We are staying in a very good tent colony. Kumbh is very well organized. It is impressive." As many as 13.8 million devotees have taken a holy dip in the Sangam here till 10.30 am on Tuesday during the first 'Amrit Snan' of Maha Kumbh 2025, according to the officials. Maha Kumbh is one of the largest and most significant religious congregations in the world, held every 12 years at one of four locations in India.

Jeremy from Russia has been following Sanatan Dharma for seven years. She expressed her happiness by visiting Sangam and taking 'Amrit' bath. She said that there is logic in Sanatan Dharma, there is faith in it, not superstition. "It is very beautiful," she quipped.

Foreign devotee Jonathan has come to Kumbh for the first time. He said that his experience was very good. "The people here are very sweet, the food is amazing and I am overwhelmed by seeing the pilgrimage sites and temples. I have taken 'Amrit

Snan' for the first time. It is very exciting," added Jonathan.

Claudia, who came from Poland, described 'Amrit Snan' as the most wonderful pleasure of life. She said that she was very happy to come here. "I had never felt like this. I never thought that I would ever get such an experience in life," added Claudia.

Devotee Manjarika, who came from Australia, said that she is a teacher and has been in India for 40 days. When she came to India, she had decided that she would definitely go to the Maha Kumbh Mela. "Because it is amazing in itself. I am having a great experience after coming here. One does not get such an experience every time," she quipped.

Masaji, who came from Japan, said that he has come to Kumbh Mela for the second time. "I am very happy to come here any feelings cannot be expressed in words. There is a mesmerising atmosphere here. Maha Kumbh Mela is very unique. I am not a Hindu, yet it is very important for me. I feel happy to come here," he added.

Misaki, another devotee from Japan, also admitted that she is feeling peace here. Nikki, who came from Cape Town, South Africa, is overwhelmed by the glory of Maha Kumbh. She said that this place is very powerful. "Amrit Snan gives amazing power. We are feeling blessed to be on the banks of the river Ganga. It is very beautiful. The roads are clean, people are very friendly and happy," she said.

Jose from Spain has gone on a spiritual journey with his friends. Jose said, "I took a holy dip and I enjoyed it a lot, I am very lucky that I got the opportunity to take Amrit bath. This is giving him a new energy and peace."

The Maha Kumbh-2025, which is the Poorna Kumbh, will resume till February 26, 2025. Key 'snan' dates include January 14 (Makar Sankranti - First Shahi Snan), January 29 (Mauni Amavasya - Second Shahi Snan), February 3 (Basant Panchami - Third Shahi Snan), February 12 (Maghi Purnima), and February 26 (Maha Shivaratri).