

Across State

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Inside

12 Dead As Passengers Jump Off Pushpak Express, Run Over By Another Train at Maharashtra's Jalgaon

Jalgaon

At least 12 train passengers were killed after they jumped off their train panicky over a fire alarm and fell on the other track on which they were run over by another train. The tragic incident took place near the Paranda railway station in North Maharashtra's Jalgaon district on Wednesday evening, 400 km away from Mumbai, officials said.

The fatalities occurred as the passengers jumped off the train due to fear of fire in the Lucknow-Mumbai Pushpak Express, which halted on its track after someone raised a fire alarm around 5 pm. They jumped to save their lives but the oncoming Karnataka Express heading from Bengaluru to Delhi, ran over them, said Central Railway's chief spokesperson Swapnil Nila.

"Our preliminary information is that there were sparks inside one of the coaches of Pushpak Express due to either hot axle' or 'brake-binding' (jamming), and some passengers panicked. They pulled the chain, and some of them jumped down. At the same time, Karnataka Express was passing," a senior railway official told media.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis expressed shock and grief over the train accident. In a post on X in Marathi, he said (rough translation): "The tragic incident of the loss of lives in a very unfortunate incident near Pachora in Jalgaon district is deeply distressing. I pay my heartfelt tributes to them. My colleague Minister Girish Mahajan and the Superintendent of Police have reached the spot, and the District Collector will



reach there shortly. The entire district administration is working in coordination with the railway administration, and immediate arrangements are being made for the treatment of the injured."

Fadnavis said that 8 ambulances have been dispatched and the general hospital as well as other nearby private hospitals have been

kept ready for the treatment of the injured. "Emergency equipment like glass cutters, floodlights etc. have also been kept ready. We are monitoring the entire situation and all necessary assistance is being provided immediately. I am in touch with the district administration," he said.

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'Don't Worry About the Fare': Saif Ali Khan Jokes With Auto Driver Who Took Him to Hospital

Mumbai

A day after Saif Ali Khan was discharged, pictures of the auto-rickshaw driver Bhajan Singh Rana posing with the Bollywood star in the hospital before he left for home started to do the rounds on social media.

Rickshaw driver Bhajan Singh Rana was the one who took Saif to Lilavati hospital on January 16 after the Bollywood star was stabbed multiple times during a robbery attempt in his house in the wee hours. Before leaving the hospital for home, Saif personally called the rickshaw driver to meet him at the hospital.

In one image, the auto-rickshaw driver is sitting next to Saif on the hospital bed as they smile at the camera.

Saif's bruised hand is on Bhajan Singh Rana's shoulder. In another photograph, the duo is standing and smiling at the lens. The 54-year-old star, who is married



to Bollywood actor Kareena Kapoor Khan, thanked the rickshaw driver and told him to feel free to ask for help whenever he needed.

Saif along with his veteran actor mother Sharmila Tagore, expressed their gratitude towards Bhajan Singh Rana. As per sources, Saif praised the rickshaw driver for his

work and said: "Keep helping others like this. And as for the fare that day, don't worry, it will be taken care of." He jokingly added: "If you ever need help in life, remember me."

When Bhajan Singh Rana was asked how he reached the hospital, as all the media personnel were present, he told a newswire, "I entered the hospital wearing a mask." The auto-rickshaw driver

said that he had first got a call from Saif's personal assistant. He said that he 'just prayed' that the actor gets well. "I took a few selfies with him. I took a few photos with him." The driver recalled the night, when Saif was stabbed and said that the actor asked him to drive slowly as it was a 'little painful.'

Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde Invited to Sawantwadi Mega Convention

The Third Convention of the Digital

mega convention to be held in Sawantwadi, Sindhudurg district, at Bhosale Knowledge

briefed him about the organization's activities. Shinde graciously accepted



Media Editors and Journalists Association

Mumbai
The Digital Media Editors and Journalists Association, Maharashtra, has extended an invitation to Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde for their upcoming

City. The invitation was presented to Shinde last night by a delegation led by the organization's founder-president, Raja Mane.

The delegation included State Vice President Satish Sawant and Mahesh Chivate, among others. They handed over the formal invitation letter to Deputy Chief Minister Shinde and

the invitation and assured the delegation that he would confirm the date of his visit soon. On behalf of the association, the delegation presented Shinde with a statue of Lord Vitthal and Goddess Rukmini as a token of goodwill and extended their best wishes.

Saif Ali Khan's building gets security upgrade: Police protection, private security, better CCTV

Mumbai
Satguru Sharan, the building where actor Saif Ali Khan resides, has got a security upgrade following an attack on the actor in a robbery attempt gone wrong last week. The police had earlier expressed the lax nature of the security at the building that houses high profile people with hardly any CCTV cameras in the building and just few security guards.

Ace Security and Services owned by actor Ronit Roy will now be providing security to the building. The security agency has in the past provided security to top actors like Shah Rukh Khan and Salman Khan. A senior official at the agency confirmed, "Yes we will be providing them security."

Apart from the security agency, the CCTV network in the building that was found lacking during the attack has also been upgraded. Other

tweaks have also been made to the building security to ensure no easy entry into the building.

Apart from private security, Saif Ali Khan has been granted two police constables as security cover. An official said that to provide categorised security it would take time so they have provided two constables unofficially for now.

Police said that they will also be conducting meetings with housing society members in Bandra to ensure proper security measures are in place.

On Wednesday, the police team took accused Mohammad Shariful Islam, 30, to Bandra talao (pond) around where police suspect he may have thrown the butt of the knife he had used to attack the actor, which got lodged in his back.

While the tip of the knife was recovered from Khan's body, another piece was found at his residence.

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Ajit Pawar directs his ministers to hold their tongue on policy-related matters



with NCP ministers at the party headquarters on Tuesday evening. "He told ministers to avoid controversial public comments regarding state government schemes. Instead he has asked them to first consult with the Chief Minister and deputy CMs before making policy

Mumbai

Deputy Chief Minister and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) president Ajit Pawar has directed his ministers to avoid controversial comments on policy matters and instead speak with the Chief Minister and DCMs before making comments relating to policy. Pawar held a meeting

issue related comments," said an NCP functionary. The meeting held significance amid comments made by Agriculture Minister Manikrao Kokate on the alleged irregularities in crop insurance schemes. Kokate had mentioned that there was 3-4 percent corruption in every government scheme.

BMC to implement air pollution measures in Mumbai's Shivaji Park area

Mumbai

Following concerns of suspended dust from the red soil at Shivaji Park causing increased air pollution in the same locality, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has called for mitigation measures to be

urgently implemented, including compaction with a roller and applying water to settle the dust. The move came after IIT-Bombay experts submitted a list of recommendations to combat the crisis in a presentation earlier this month.

With aggrieved local residents voicing concerns over the suspended particles blowing in the air, the chairman of Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB) visited the site and instructed the civic body to implement effective mitigation measures in the precinct. In a bid to seek solutions, the BMC had then roped in IIT Bombay Professor Virendra Sethi, who had submitted a list of recommendations on January 13.



In light of the report, the civic body has now launched an immediate set of mitigation measures while also calling for a long-term comprehensive study into the matter. Speaking about the immediate measures, a civic official said that the BMC was set to compact soil with a roller at Shivaji Park as well as spray water to settle the dust and stabilise the soil. The BMC has also appealed IIT Bombay to conduct a detailed long-term investigation to identify a sustainable solution to mitigate air pollution. Earlier in his presentation, civic officials said that professor Sethi had called for the need for study of wind flow patterns, activity based planning and other related parameters.

Investment MOUs Worth Rs 16 Lakh Crore Signed In Davos: CM Fadnavis



Davos

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Wednesday said his state has signed MOUs worth nearly Rs 16 lakh crore in Davos during the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting.

The chief minister said these MOUs have been signed across various sectors and would help the state in achieving its goal of taking its GDP to USD 1 trillion.

For India to become USD 5 trillion economy, Maharashtra has to become USD 1 trillion economy and we will achieve that target by 2030, Fadnavis told PTI in an interview here.

Fadnavis said investors' confidence in policy continuity at the Centre and in the state as also their trust in Prime Minister Narendra Modi has led to this record level of investment commitments. He said the state government would track these MOUs to ensure their conversion into actual investments.

Later, addressing a press conference along with other Indian leaders, he said it is important for

all states to grow together for the country to grow further. At the same conference, Telangana minister D Sridhar Babu said he is confident that his state would become USD 1 trillion.

Kerala minister P Rajeev said his state has come to Davos for the first time and it has invited global investors to Invest Kerala summit to be held next month. Tamil Nadu minister T R B Rajaa said India is the knowledge powerhouse of the world and if India puts up a united face it can write policies for the entire world and an event like WEF can be held in any Indian city.

For the first time, all Indian leaders including from the Centre and various states, came together. Their pavilions were also housed within two Indian pavilions. Rajaa said that the next time it should be just one pavilion for everyone from the country.

Civil Aviation Minister K Ram Mohan Naidu said a "deadly mix of experience and youth" has come here from India and the credit for that goes to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Cidco extends registration deadline for 26,000 affordable homes in Navi Mumbai

Mumbai

The City and Industrial Development Corporation (Cidco) has announced an extension for registrations under its My Preferred Home scheme, which offers 26,000 affordable homes in Navi Mumbai. Applicants can register until January 25, while the last date to select and prioritise 15 housing options is January 26. This marks the fourth extension since the scheme's launch in October 2024. Around 55,000 applicants have paid the registration fee. Under the scheme, Cidco is offering homes for the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) and low-income group (LIG) categories in Navi Mumbai's nodes, including Vashi, Bamandongri, Kharghar, Taloja, Mansarovar, Kharkopar, Khandeshwar, Panvel, and Kalamboli. These homes are being sold under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY).

Vice-President Dhankhar bats for Uniform Civil Code

New Delhi

Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar today said the Uniform Civil Code must be realised and the country could no longer be influenced by narrow considerations of voting patterns in the matter.

The VP's comments came a day after the Uttarakhand Cabinet cleared rules to implement the UCC that the Assembly had passed in February 2024. Interacting with students of the NIT, Raipur, the IIT, Bhilai, and the IIM, Raipur, at Raipur today, Dhankhar said, "The UCC is in the Directive Principles of State Policy. An obligation has been cast on governance to have law, to have the

UCC. One state — Uttarakhand — has done it. How can you object to something which is written in our Constitution? We cannot be influenced day in and day out, only with the narrow considerations of voting pattern. Framers of the Constitution were wise, focused. They gave us certain fundamentals, but they indicated that as democracy matures, as we progress, we must also realise for our people certain goals, one of them is the UCC."

He also called for illegal migration to stop saying, "It has become a festering wound (nasoor) and is assuming unmanageable dimensions."

Parties should have code of conduct for their lawmakers: Birla

New Delhi

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Tuesday said political parties should have a code of conduct for their lawmakers to uphold the dignity of legislative bodies.

Addressing the valedictory session of the 85th All-India Presiding Officers' Conference in Patna, Birla said, "All political parties should cooperate in upholding the dignity of the legislative bodies. This will be possible only when political parties have a code of conduct for its lawmakers."

Birla said parliamentary debates from 1947 to the present will soon be made available in all 22 languages recognised under the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.

He said the presiding officers also resolved to bring in more efficiency in the functioning of legislative bodies by using technology.

In the event, Bihar Governor Arif Mohammad Khan said those in constitutional



positions must set high standards of propriety. He said priority must be given to national interests in delivering duties.

"Those in constitutional positions must exemplify their conduct by high standards of propriety and dignity. They must understand that any attack on them is an assault on the Constitution and democratic setup," Khan said.

He said Bihar was the cradle of democracy known for its "forward-thinking perspective

and commitment to social justice".

"Bihar has been the land of the world's first democracy. The world's first republic, Vaishali, is in Bihar. This is the land of Buddha, and it's a known fact that Bihar played a crucial role in the making of the Constitution," the Governor said.

He said, "Bihar played a significant role in shaping the Constitution, with notable figures like Dr Sachchidananda Sinha, Dr Rajendra Prasad, Anugrah Narayan Sinha and Krishna Sinha making invaluable contributions to the Constituent Assembly. Even Mahatma Gandhi began his Satyagraha movement in Bihar."

Khan said the Constitution is the supreme legal authority that binds the legislative, executive and other wings of the government adding that the authorities must follow the Constitution in letter and spirit.

Scholar of Saint Literature

Pune

Kisan Maharaj Sakhare was renowned as a "walking and talking university" of Maharashtra's saint literature, particularly the Dnyaneshwari. Yesterday, at the age of 86, after living a life enriched by devotion and authoring and interpreting over 100 texts, he left behind an invaluable legacy.

Kisan Maharaj carried forward the scholarly tradition established by his grandfather Nana Maharaj and father Dada Maharaj, elevating it to remarkable heights. Despite not attending formal school, he possessed profound knowledge, making academic coursework unnecessary. He continued the family's tradition of deep study, engaging earnestly in saint literature from a young age. At the Sadhak Ashram in Alandi, following the traditional guru-shishya (teacher-student) lineage, he immersed himself in Dnyaneshwari, spreading its wisdom and devotion throughout his life.

He was not only an erudite scholar but also a thinker with a profound understanding of various languages, creating many new words. As an advocate of value-based education, he conceptualized free childhood development camps, imparting lessons through practical implementation. As a scholar and promoter of saint literature, he embodied the qualities of a saint himself.

Kisan Maharaj believed that spirituality and science must progress hand in hand. He held that spirituality is essential for ultimate happiness in life, just as science is indispensable. He opined, "Without spirituality, science is blind, and without science, spirituality is lame." His philosophy bridged the gap between scientific inquiry and spiritual devotion, making them complementary rather than opposing forces.

His contributions to saint literature were so significant that despite having no formal academic



degree, Maharashtra's Tilak University awarded him an honorary D.Litt. degree. The Maharashtra government also honoured him appropriately. He elevated the Sakhare family tradition of studying texts like the Vedas, Gita, Bhagavata Purana, and Upanishads to unparalleled heights.

Kisan Maharaj authored notable works like Sarth Shri Dnyaneshwari, Sarth Amritanubhav, Sarth Changdev Pasashti, Soham Yoga,

and Navvidha Bhakti. He was not only a Marathi scholar but also proficient in Sanskrit. Dnyaneshwari or the Bhagavad Gita was his lifeblood.

He presided over the All-India Keertankar Conference held in Hivra, Buldhana district, and was actively involved in many other prestigious institutions. He dedicated his life to propagating Vedantic philosophy and the literary works of saints. His kirtans (devotional discourses) were a beautiful blend of devotion and language, offering both spiritual nourishment and aesthetic pleasure.

The passing of this great ascetic and seeker is undoubtedly a sorrowful loss. Though he has departed physically, his name will remain immortal through the 115 texts he authored, analysed, and interpreted. With heartfelt devotion, we bow to his sacred soul.

India Bloc Will Take On NDA Unitedly During Budget Session, Says Congress

New Delhi

The INDIA bloc was intact and would unitedly take on the NDA government over key issues during the Budget session of parliament starting Jan 31, the Congress strategists said on Wednesday.

Congress parliamentary party chairperson Sonia Gandhi will hold a strategy meeting with floor leaders of both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha on Jan 30 and leader of the opposition in the Rajya Sabha and Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge along with leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi will hold a strategy meeting of the INDIA bloc floor leaders on Feb 2 to discuss the group's strategy against the NDA government during the session.

"The INDIA bloc is intact. We will unitedly take on the NDA government over any anti-democracy bill or issue during the budget session of parliament. The opposition wants to seek answers to some key issues affecting the people, especially the stress on the economy, price rise, lack of jobs and the plight of students and farmers," Congress Working Committee member and Rajya Sabha member Syed Naseer Hussain told ETV Bharat.

The issue of unity within the INDIA bloc had surfaced recently as the Congress launched a strong campaign against the ruling aap in Delhi ahead of the Feb 5 assembly polls. The two had fought the Lok Sabha elections together.

Reacting to Congress's move, not only the aap but other bloc allies like TMC, NC and Shiv Sena UBT also started questioning the validity of the INDIA bloc.

When asked, the CWC member played down the issue saying the Congress was a national party and was helming the bloc while the regional parties had their agendas.



"The regional parties sometimes make statements based on their local agenda. The Congress is a national party and is anchoring the INDIA bloc which was formed for the 2024 national elections. As far as the state elections are concerned, the Congress takes a call on alliance based on ground-level feedback," said Hussain.

He noted the aap had contested the Lok Sabha elections in Punjab separately and was the first to announce it wanted to go solo in the Delhi assembly polls.

"The AAP must first come clean on what it did during the past 11 years as far as development in Delhi is concerned. We are only flagging the concerns raised by the locals," said Hussain.

Interestingly, the budget session of parliament is starting days ahead of the Delhi polls and days after a key Congress rally in Mhow in Madhya Pradesh on Jan 27 where the grand old party will announce a year-long nationwide agitation to save the Constitution.

"Today there is a need to take the message of saving the Constitution across the country. We are committed to constitutional democracy and will uphold it at any cost," said Hussain.

As the INDIA bloc had unitedly demanded the resignation of Union Home Minister Amit Shah over his controversial remarks on BR Ambedkar, architect of the Constitution, the CPP strategy meeting will review the issue.

Kejriwal Raises Election Heat on BJP, Urges Centre To Present Special Budget For Middle Class

New Delhi

Aam Aadmi Party's national convener and former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who described the country's middle class as 'victims of tax terrorism', put forward seven major demands before the central government. The middle class pays more than 50% of its income in various types of taxes, but in return, it does not get anything special from the government, he said.

In a video message on Wednesday, Kejriwal said that now the time has come to raise the voice of the middle class in Parliament to make sure that priority is given to their issues.

Kejriwal raised seven demands in the middle-class manifesto, which include a hike in the education

budget from the current 2 per cent to 10 per cent, subsidies for higher education and a ceiling on private school fees. He also sought scholarships for higher education, an increase in healthcare spending, removal of taxes on health insurance premiums and an increase in the income tax exemption limit to Rs 10 lakh.

He wanted GST to be removed on essential goods to address inflation and sought more robust retirement plans and free healthcare for senior citizens.

Middle-Class Manifesto Arvind Kejriwal said that they have prepared a manifesto



exclusively for the middle class. "If you agree with it, then sign on it on our website middleclassmanifesto.com. The middle class will have to unite and raise its voice. If the entire middle class stands together, then the government will have to listen to them," he said.

Arvind Kejriwal questioned the indifference of successive governments towards the issues of the middle class. He said that in the 75 years of independence, the middle class has been considered as only a tax-paying machine and that governments have done nothing for them. Whenever the government needs money, taxes

are collected from the middle class, he said, adding that this section of society has to struggle for the education, health, and security of their children. "If a middle-class family earns Rs 10-12 lakh annually, half of it goes into taxes. Despite spending on education and health, the governments have failed to give them relief," he said.

Brain Drain

Arvind Kejriwal said that due to the burden of tax and inflation, young middle-class families are being forced to leave the country. Presenting the figures, he said that in 2020, 85,000 Indians had left the country, while in 2023 this number increased to 2,16,219, which is a big loss for our country, he said.

Maha Kumbh Mela 2025: PM Modi Likely To Visit On Feb 5, Shah Set For Holy Dip On Jan 27; Prez On Feb 10

New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to visit the Maha Kumbh on February 5, two days after the third 'shahi snan', ritual holy bath, scheduled on February 3 on the occasion of Basant Panchami, sources said. His visit will be followed by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who is scheduled to attend the mela on January 27. Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar is expected to take part in the celebrations on February 1.

Shah will participate in the Maha Kumbh, according to his schedule, where he will be taking a holy dip at the Sangam, performing 'Ganga Puja', and holding meetings



with officials.

Security agencies have increased vigilance in anticipation of his visit, with special surveillance at key intersections and event

venues in the city. Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar is scheduled to take a holy dip at the Sangam on February 1. President Droupadi Murmu is also expected to

visit Prayagraj and she will visit the mela five days after Modi's proposed visit.

During her visit on February 10, the President is expected to participate in major events being held in the city. Administrative and security preparations are being strengthened to ensure smooth and secure visits for these leaders. Earlier on Tuesday, devotees gathered in the Maha Kumbh Mela even as dense fog engulfed the area. The inclement weather conditions did not seem to affect the footfall of pilgrims.

The footfall of the pilgrims is expected to increase in the upcoming days which will see four key Shahi Snans.

Maha Kumbh Mela began on January 13 and will continue until February 26. The next key bathing dates include January 29 (Mauni Amavasya - second shahi snan), February 3 (Basant Panchami - third shahi snan), February 12 (Maghi Purnima), and February 26 (Maha Shivaratri).

As per the data of the Uttar Pradesh government, more than 1.597 million devotees took a dip at Triveni Sangam in Prayagraj on the ninth day of the Maha kumbh. As of January 20, over 88.1 million have already taken a dip in the sacred confluence of Ganga, Yamuna and mystical Saraswati.

UP CM Yogi Adityanath, cabinet ministers board special boat to take holy dip in Triveni Sangam

Prayagraj

After holding a Cabinet meeting in Prayagraj on Wednesday, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, along with his cabinet ministers boarded a special boat to take a holy dip in Triveni Sangam during the ongoing Mahakumbh 2025, reported ANI.

Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath along with Deputy CMs Keshav Prasad Maurya, Brajesh Pathak and other cabinet ministers also offered prayers at Triveni Sangam during the ongoing Mahakumbh in Prayagraj.

According to an official release, all 54 ministers of the Uttar Pradesh cabinet were invited to the meeting, in which it was expected several significant proposals and schemes for the state would get approval, added the report.

"To create a sustainable development for Prayagraj and surrounding areas, we will develop a development region... For its infrastructure, an extension of the Ganga Expressway would be given. Ganga Expressway will go



from Prayagraj to Mirzapur to Bhadohi to Kashi, Chandauli and connect to the Purvanchal Expressway in Ghazipur," ANI quoted Yogi telling the media after the meeting.

Initially, the meeting was planned to be held at the Mela Authority Auditorium, but the venue was shifted to the Triveni Sankul in Arail. The location was changed to avoid inconvenience to pilgrims visiting the Sangam due to the VIP security.

The ministers travelled from Arail VIP Ghat to the Sangam by motorboats. Yogi and the cabinet members will perform the worship rituals

and take the holy dip in Sangam.

It will be the second time Yogi will lead his cabinet to the Sangam. Earlier in 2019, Yogi took a ceremonial dip along with his ministers, Akhada Parishad President Narendra Giri, and other saints during the Kumbh Mela.

According to other reports, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to visit Mahakumbh on 5 February. He is expected to take the holy dip in the Ganga, perform aarti of the river and offer prayers. He may visit Akshayvat, Saraswati Koop and Bade Hanuman Mandir to offer prayers.

600, Including 100 Women Renounce Worldly Life, Initiated As Naga Saints



Prayagraj

The Maha Kumbh, the world's largest spiritual gathering, saw 600 individuals, including 100 women, initiated as Naga saints in a grand ceremony. Over 500 monks from Niranjani Akhara and about 100 from Juna Akhara participated in the sacred rituals on Sunday. This initiation marks their complete renunciation of worldly life. The process began with the 'Vijaya Havan Sanskar' and 'Mundan Sanskar' (tonsure ceremony). After these preliminary rites, the aspiring Naga saints were taken to the banks of the Ganges for a ritual bath, accompanied by Vedic mantras. Speaking on the initiation, a senior saint from Niranjani Akhara said, "This transformation signifies complete detachment from worldly desires and a lifelong dedication to spirituality." Under the Akhara's flag, the initiates performed rituals, listened to Guru teachings, and sang bhajans. Each monk and Sanyasin took an oath 108 times, pledging to renounce family life and devote themselves to the propagation of Sanatan Dharma. They vowed not to marry or return to domestic life, with violations leading to expulsion from the Sanyasi tradition.

UP tableau to highlight Maha Kumbh

Prayagraj

The Uttar Pradesh tableau at the Republic Day Parade will showcase the theme “Maha Kumbh 2025: Golden India — Heritage and Development.” Over the past week, more than 9.25 crore devotees have taken the holy dip at the Sangam.

In the front of the tableau stands a leaning replica of the ‘Amrit Kalash’, symbolising the flow of divine nectar. Surrounding it are scenes of saints and sages blowing conches, meditating and sipping holy water, along with devotees performing ritualistic dips at the confluence, capturing the event’s spiritual essence.

The trailer panel features murals and LED screens depicting akharas and devotees participating in the ‘Amrit Snan’ (royal bath). The centrepiece showcases the mythological tale of ‘Samudra Manthan’ (churning of the ocean), highlighting the historical and spiritual significance of Maha Kumbh. The rear section presents representations of the 14 divine treasures that emerged from the churning while also emphasising the use of advanced technology, management and digitisation for organising Maha Kumbh 2025.

Meanwhile, the Uttar Pradesh Cabinet met in the Maha Kumbh Mela area on Wednesday,



following which Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath announced several key decisions on development projects and policy changes aimed at boosting the state’s growth.

The CM said the aerospace and defence policy, initially implemented in 2018, has completed five years and will now be revamped.

“The revised policy will include new incentives to attract large investments into the sector,” Adityanath said. The Cabinet also discussed the distribution of incentives under the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and Fortune 500 investments made in Uttar Pradesh.

The Cabinet also approved the construction of three new medical colleges in Baghpat, Hathras and Kasganj districts under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model.

In collaboration with Tata Technologies, the state government has also decided to establish 62 Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and five centres of innovation, invention, incubation, and training.

The state government granted in-principle approval for the 320-km long Vindhya Expressway and the 100-km Vindhya-Purvanchal Link Expressway which will improve connectivity between Paschimanchal, Madhyanchal, Purvanchal and Bundelkhand.

Galwan Valley In Ladakh To Open For Domestic Tourists

Leh

Galwan Valley is set to become the latest tourist destination in Ladakh with authorities working out the modalities to allow domestic visitors to the place that saw a deadly clash between Indian and Chinese troops in June 2020.

Authorities, in collaboration with the Indian Army and local stakeholders, have initiated plans to open the valley and the Hot Spring area to domestic tourists, with infrastructure development and recce operations already underway.

The move, officially announced by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Army Day, January 15, is expected to boost border and rural tourism in the region, providing economic benefits to local communities. From establishing war memorials to commemorate the sacrifices of Indian soldiers to promoting wildlife and cultural tourism, the initiative holds promise for Ladakh’s tourism industry and regional development.

With an opening date targeted for June 2025, this initiative



marks an important step toward highlighting Ladakh’s heritage, fostering economic growth, and honouring the valour of the armed forces.

Lobzang Vissudha, All Ladakh Tour Operators Association (ALTOA), Executive Member and part of the recce team, told ETV Bharat that a recce of the Galwan area was conducted on January 19 by a 10-member team of Tourism

Enablers representing ALTOA, Taxi Union, Tempo Union, Bike Union, and ALGHA Tourism.

The recce, he said, was organized by the GOC Kharu Division and initially, the plan is to open the area to domestic tourists. Pangong Lake attracted a large number of tourists, and the addition of Galwan as a destination is expected to give a significant boost to tourism, Vissudha said.

“In 2020, during the Galwan conflict, Col. Santosh Babu was martyred, which brought the area into the spotlight even during the pandemic. This initiative is likely to attract a huge amount of patriotic tourism to Ladakh.”

“Two key infrastructure sites are planned—one at a midway point, 56 kilometres from Durbuk, where a cafeteria, souvenir shop, and accommodation for around 30 people are being built, and another at 120 kilometres from Durbuk. Shayok is the last settlement village along the route; beyond that, there are no further settlements,” Vissudha said, sharing exclusive details of the project.

Tashi Namgyal Yakzee, Executive Councillor, LAHDC, Leh, called it a “happy moment” and said they have been striving for it for a long time. “After the 2020 Galwan incident, Galwan Valley gained significant attention, and people have shown great enthusiasm to visit the area. The Defence authorities have also been working on this for the past two to three years, exploring ways to establish a war memorial,” he said.

18K Indians face deportation as Trump admn cracks whip on illegal migrants



New Delhi

Nearly 18,000 Indians staying illegally in the US face deportation as the Trump administration has supplied a list of those it intends to send back.

India will verify the documents of these people. "If they are found to be Indian nationals, they will be accepted back," sources said.

The Trump administration, which rode to power by promising, among other things, deportation of illegal migrants from the US, has officially taken up the matter of deporting nearly 18,000 nationals with India.

The number of deportations could go up to two lakh in the time to come as more cases of illegal migrants are being detected in the US. Among them are a large number of people from Punjab, Haryana and Gujarat.

The sources said verification and deportation were an ongoing process for the past few decades, adding that India had never stood for illegal migration. "Any Indian national found to be living illegally in the US will be accepted back if his or her documents are found in order," the sources said.

The issue of illegal migration was flagged on Tuesday by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio at a meeting with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar.

A US State Department statement said Rubio expressed the Trump administration's desire to "work with India to advance economic ties and address concerns related to irregular migration".

Any slack on India's part in taking back illegal US migrants could potentially impact legal migration from India. New Delhi has, in the past, backed legal migration through student and H-1B visas, a large proportion of which goes to Indian citizens.

Indian citizens accounted for almost three-fourths of the 3,86,000 H-1B visas granted in 2023, according to official US data. In November last year, the "Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange" said 3.3 lakh Indian students went to the US for higher studies in 2024.

The crackdown on illegal migration has been Trump's signature campaign. Within hours of his inauguration, the new President moved to fulfil the promise as he pushed to end the

birthright citizenship and mobilise troops on the US-Mexico border

After meeting Rubio in the US, Jaishankar said in a post on X, "Reviewed our extensive bilateral partnership, of which (Secretary Rubio) has been a strong advocate".

He said, "Looking forward to closely working with him to advance our strategic cooperation." Tammy Bruce, a spokesperson for the US State Department, said Rubio and Jaishankar discussed regional issues and opportunities to further deepen the US-India ties, particularly on emerging technologies, defence cooperation, energy and advancing a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

Jaishankar also met US National Security Adviser Michael Waltz. He posted on X, "Discussed strengthening our friendship to ensure mutual benefit and enhance global stability. Looking forward to working together on an active and outcome-oriented agenda."

Cabinet okays 6% hike in jute MSP

New Delhi

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved a hike of Rs 315 per quintal in the minimum support price (MSP) of jute, taking it to Rs 5,650 per quintal for marketing season 2025-26, an increase of 6 per cent over the earlier price.

Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal told mediapersons after the Cabinet meeting that the decision would benefit jute growers in Bihar, West Bengal, Assam and other North-Eastern states.

The new MSP would ensure

return of 66.8 per cent over all-India weighted average cost of production and would benefit growers, the minister said.

The government has increased the MSP of raw jute from Rs 2,400 per quintal in 2014-15 to Rs 5,650 per quintal for the 2025-26 marketing season.

However, the minister skirted a query on how the move would benefit farmers with jute production having seen a fall, saying that it was common to witness a fluctuation in its output.

Day after Chhattisgarh operation, 2 Naxals killed in Jharkhand

New Delhi

A day after 14 Naxals were killed on the Chhattisgarh-Odisha border, two suspected Naxals, including a woman, were shot in Bokaro by a joint team of the Jharkhand Police and 209 CoBRA (Commando Battalion for Resolute Action) during a search operation on Wednesday.

Preliminary investigations have identified the slain

Naxals as Shanti (area commander) of Chatro village, Giridih district, and Manoj of Dhavatar village, Giridih, which is being further verified. Security personnel have intensified anti-Naxal operations in Jharkhand for the past few days, sources said.

The operation was launched based on a tip-off from the Intelligence Bureau. An AK-47 rifle and two Insas rifles were recovered during the

operation.

On Tuesday, during an operation in West Singhbhum district, security personnel recovered more than 20 country-made IEDs and more than 50 gelatin sticks from the forest. A police officer said these IEDs were planted by suspected members of the Communist Party of India (Maoist) to target security personnel engaged in anti-Naxal operations.

RG Kar case: CBI seeks death sentence for Roy

Kolkata

The CBI filed an appeal on Wednesday before the Calcutta High Court, seeking death sentence for Sanjay Roy, who was sentenced to life imprisonment until death by a Sealdah court in the rape-cum-murder case of an on-duty doctor at RG Kar Medical College and Hospital, officials said.

The agency made the move after receiving a legal advice that the brutal rape and murder of the 31-year-old trainee doctor comes under the "rarest of rare" category deserving capital



punishment, they said.

Officials said the CBI was unanimous that the case deserves nothing but death penalty, seeing the manner in which the doctor was killed in her medical college.

The CBI's plea seeking death penalty for Roy was turned down by the trial court, where

Additional District and Sessions Judge Anirban Das said the crime did not fall under the "rarest of rare" category.

Meanwhile, the West Bengal Government has already approached the HC, challenging the verdict and seeking death penalty for Roy, which took up the matter on Wednesday but did not decide on the appeal. The HC said it would hear the CBI, the victim's family and the convict before deciding on the admission of the state government's appeal. The HC said it will hear the matter on January 27.

Trump Administration Shuts Down White House Spanish-Language Page And Social Media

Washington

Within hours of President Donald Trump's inauguration, the new administration took down the Spanish-language version of the official White House website.

The site — currently <https://www.whitehouse.gov/es/> — now gives users an “Error 404” message. It also included a “Go Home” button that directed viewers to a page featuring a video montage of Trump in his first term and on the campaign trail. The button was later updated to read “Go To Home Page”.

Hispanic advocacy groups and others expressed confusion at the abrupt change and frustration at what some called the administration's lack of efforts to maintain communication with the Latino community, which helped propel him to the presidency.

The Spanish profile of the White House' X, @LaCasaBlanca and the government page on reproductive freedom also were disbanded. Meanwhile, the Spanish versions of other government agencies such as the Department of Labor, Justice and Agriculture remained available for users on Tuesday.

Asked about the changes, White House principal deputy press secretary Harrison Fields responded Tuesday that the administration is “committed to bringing back online the Spanish translation section of the website.”

“It's day two. We are in the process of developing, editing and tweaking the White House website. As part of this ongoing work, some of the archived content on the website went dormant. We are committed to reloading that content in a short timeline,” he said without elaborating.

Trump removed the Spanish version of the page in 2017. At that time, White



House officials said they would reinstate it. President Joe Biden reinstated the page in 2021.

The page's removal coincided with Trump's first-day wave of executive orders highlighted by the launch of an illegal immigration crackdown that was one of his key campaign pledges. Trump on Monday declared a national emergency at the U.S.-Mexico border and announced plans to send U.S. troops to help support immigration agents and restrict refugees and asylum.

According to 2023 Census Bureau estimates, about 43.4 million Americans — 13.7% of the U.S. population age 5 and older — speak Spanish at home. The U.S. has no official language.

Monica Rivera, a brand and communications strategist in New York City of Puerto Rican and Cuban descent, said the shutdown sends a clear signal.

“There are 43 million

Latinos who speak Spanish as their first language and removing access to information directly from the White House draws a distinct line as to who they are serving and more dangerously, signals to the administration's MAGA base that we as Latinos are ‘other’ and a less significant part of this country,” Rivera said.

Anthony Hernandez, a paralegal in the nation's capital, wasn't initially aware of the move and said it suggests what the coming years of a second Trump presidency would look like, with specific issues making headlines while “minor but equally malicious things like that go unnoticed.”

“A move like shutting down the Spanish White House page and X profile serves no purpose other than to cut off resources for millions of Hispanic Americans and immigrants attempting to enter the United States legally,”

Hernandez said. “And it's a slap in the face to the millions of Hispanic voters that supported him in this recent election.”

Trump's secretary of state, Marco Rubio, is Cuban American and speaks Spanish. At his swearing-in Tuesday, he gave remarks in Spanish, thanking God, his family and Trump.

Meanwhile, Hispanic leaders and communication strategy experts expressed surprise at the page's removal, given Trump's popularity with certain Latino voters.

“If the White House is seriously interested in engaging with Latinos, the second largest group in this country, then they need to make sure that updates can also be distributed in Spanish, a preferred language for millions in our community,” said Frankie Miranda President and CEO of the Hispanic Federation.

He called that a way to ensure “everyone is a part of

the civic process.” Kris Klein Hernández, a U.S. historian specializing in race, gender, and sexuality at Connecticut College, said the content removal from official White House websites not only limits the access available to Spanish-speaking U.S. citizens and migrants but leads “some to question which constituencies the administration prioritizes.”

Jeff Lee, former deputy cabinet secretary and deputy director of external and international affairs for former California Gov. Jerry Brown, said the move seems counterintuitive given the opportunity to “showcase” policy changes, especially ones related to economics and border security.

“I didn't see any other language mediums that got the kibosh. So I think that's a really interesting thing to single out — if that's the case,” Lee said.

Letdown for Abhaya

LESS than six months after a doctor's horrifying rape-murder at a state-run hospital in Kolkata sparked a nationwide outrage, a district and sessions court has sentenced convict Sanjoy Roy to life imprisonment until death. Justifying his decision to reject the CBI's demand for the death penalty, the judge has observed that the crime did not fall in the "rarest of the rare" category. The verdict has been given the thumbs-down not only by the victim's parents but also by the ruling Trinamool Congress and its main political rival in West Bengal, the BJP. It's obvious that the last word on this case has not yet been said or written.

Perhaps no other crime has evoked so much anger and revulsion across the country since the Nirbhaya gangrape-murder of December 2012. A doctor duty-bound to save the life of

every patient entrusted to her care was sexually assaulted and killed; it was undoubtedly an act of bone-chilling brutality. Circumstantial evidence



seems to have proved Roy's guilt beyond any doubt. Thus, it's baffling that the Abhaya case was not regarded as the "rarest of the rare". The controversial judgment has left several questions unanswered: Was this really a 'lone wolf' incident? If not, who were the convict's accomplices and

what was their role in the crime? Has the CBI thoroughly probed all aspects of the case? And what about the lapses on the part of the hospital authorities?

Even as the CBI must get to the bottom of the matter, the unsavoury political slanging match should be avoided. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has claimed that had the case been handled by the Kolkata Police, the death penalty would have been a certainty. The BJP, in its turn, has demanded an investigation into the alleged role of then Kolkata Commissioner and the CM in the destruction of vital evidence. This is an unfortunate turn of events. One thing is clear: Abhaya deserves nothing less than complete justice. This must be ensured for the sake of every daughter of the nation.

// sātyāsyā pārāmām nidhānām //

AT SOME POINT,
THE PAIN OF NOT
DOING IT BECOMES
GREATER THAN THE PAIN
OF DOING IT.
-STEVEN PRESSFIELD

H-1B and tariffs

Donald Trump's return to the White House has reignited concerns for US-India relations, with economic policies and immigration reforms taking centre stage. While shared strategic interests like countering China remain strong, India must brace for potential strains over trade tariffs and the H-1B visa programme. The H-1B visa, critical for Indian tech professionals, faces heightened scrutiny under Trump's "America First" policies. During his earlier term, rejection rates soared as regulations tightened. In 2024, H-1B approvals fell, with Infosys and TCS reporting declines of 1,400 and 1,600 clearances, respectively. Compounding these challenges, proposed legislative amendments seek to double application fees and raise minimum wage requirements, potentially making the visa less accessible for Indian talent. Despite a decline in reliance on H-1B visas

— 80 per cent of HCLTech's US workforce now comprises locals — the uncertainty surrounding the programme could disrupt India's \$128-billion IT industry.

On the trade front, Trump's

for \$191 billion in bilateral trade in 2024. Made-in-India generic medicines constituted nearly half of all US prescription drugs in 2022, amounting to approximately \$8.7 billion in exports. However,

Trump's threats of reciprocal tariffs on Indian goods, including pharmaceuticals and textiles, risk destabilising this relationship.

Despite these obstacles, opportunities exist. India's growing role in the US's "China-plus-one" strategy could bolster trade ties. Moreover, Elon Musk's advocacy for H-1B reforms offers a glimmer of hope for skilled workers. As External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar engages

Washington, balancing trade reforms, visa policies and strategic collaboration will be crucial. Proactive diplomacy can ensure that trade and talent remain the pillars of a robust US-India partnership.



stance on tariffs poses another challenge. His earlier revocation of India's Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) and branding of India as a "tariff king" underscore ongoing tensions. As India's largest trading partner, the US accounted

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Middlemen & bribes

The exposure of corruption in Haryana's Revenue Department has laid bare a systemic rot. A government report implicates 370 patwaris and 170 middlemen in widespread bribery, with demands ranging from Rs 200 to Rs 10,000 for essential services like land partition and property mutation. Kaithal, Sonapat and Mahendragarh districts lead in the number of corrupt officials, while Gurugram is home to the highest number of unauthorised middlemen who exploit citizens for profit. The September 2022 findings in Panipat exemplify the extent of the problem. Over 1,500 applications were found pending during a surprise inspection, unauthorised individuals were managing official work and infrastructure deficiencies were glaring. Similarly, a patwari in Kurukshetra was discovered with disproportionate

assets, a reflection of unchecked graft in the system.

The Supreme Court's December 2022 judgment in Neeraj Dutta vs State (NCT of



Delhi) offers a glimmer of hope. By lowering the bar for evidence in corruption cases, it empowers agencies to secure convictions even when witnesses turn hostile. This landmark ruling should embolden the Haryana authorities to take decisive action against those involved in the revenue scandal. Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini's reiteration of a zero-

tolerance policy must be matched by concrete action.

Reforms like digitising land records, introducing biometric attendance systems, installing CCTV cameras in offices and conducting regular audits are critical. Moreover, swift punitive measures, coupled with citizen awareness campaigns and effective grievance redress systems, are essential to curb exploitation and build accountability.

India's 93rd rank in the 2023 Global Corruption Index underscores the urgency for reforms. Corruption in public offices erodes trust and tarnishes governance. Haryana must seize this opportunity to revamp its revenue administration, inspired by the Supreme Court's robust stance. Restoring public trust is not just a goal but a necessity for ensuring a fair and transparent system.

Custodial hell

Conviction of HP cops sends strong message

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.

Shun corruption

Act on the CJI's plainspeak



SO entrenched is corruption in the Indian social and political reality that any resolve to counter it instantly runs into thick clouds of pessimism. A sense of resignation with regard to the status quo runs deep. Yet, for hope to filter through, the significance of terse plainspeak at the highest echelons cannot be overstated. Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sanjiv Khanna's call to reinforce systems of accountability and fairness is a reminder of how the citizen continues to be let down. Corruption as a hydra-headed monster that undermines public trust and hinders the ideals of democracy is an apt description. Equally crucial is the CJI's emphasis that the success of the anti-corruption ombudsman, the Lokpal, hinges on public trust and citizen engagement. It's the ability of the little man or woman to hold the big and powerful accountable, as he put it.

It's indisputable that corruption can be rooted out only with the help

of an educated and engaged citizenry. What's essentially missing — and that's the hydra on the ground — is institutional support. The social contract between the government and citizens to safeguard against corruption remains breached, and the gap is only widening. The referee agencies have been found wanting. Public trust is the sum total of the efficacy of the systemic reaction and action on complaints and grievances at every level. Nothing less will suffice.

What the citizen has come to recognise is the futility of standing up against corrupt practices, small or big. Nothing weakens the national character more than a social sanction to graft and an official stamp, as it were, to the right to cheat. All organs of democracy are to blame. If you truly desire change, revitalise the institutions. Else, expect a more shrivelled moral and ethical fibre in an average Indian.

Gaza ceasefire

The Israel-Hamas ceasefire agreement, reached after months of intense negotiations, provides a much-needed pause in the bloodshed. Yet, it is riddled with uncertainties that overshadow the relief it brings. With over 15 months of conflict leaving Gaza devastated and tens of thousands dead, the ceasefire is a tentative step towards hope amidst unparalleled suffering. The deal's phased approach is both its strength and its Achilles' heel. In the initial six-week phase, hostages and detainees will be exchanged, humanitarian aid will flow and displaced Palestinians will attempt to reclaim their homes. However, the ambiguity in its terms risks igniting renewed conflict. The unresolved details, especially regarding subsequent phases, expose the fragile foundation of this agreement. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, grappling with domestic political fractures, faces immense pressure to deliver a durable solution without empowering

Hamas. Simultaneously, Hamas must balance internal consolidation with an external show of strength, risking its grip on Gaza if the ceasefire falters. The mediating roles of Qatar, Egypt and the US have been pivotal, but sustaining peace demands more than diplomatic acrobatics.

For Gazans, the truce offers a chance to rebuild lives amidst ruins, but the path to reconstruction is marred by logistical and political hurdles. For Israel, the return of hostages is a bittersweet victory, tainted by the staggering cost of human lives and the persistent threat of Hamas. The global community must seize this moment to galvanise a roadmap for lasting peace, integrating humanitarian aid with strategic diplomacy. The coming weeks will test the resolve of all parties, requiring them to prioritise humanity over political gain. While the ceasefire is a step forward, its success depends on bridging deep-seated divides and committing to sustainable solutions.



BCCI talks tough

Strict guidelines worth a try

Indian cricketers, particularly the male of the species, are a pampered lot. Big bucks and adulation come their way, whether they are playing matches around the world or endorsing products ranging from life insurance policies to American pistachios. They are as popular as Indian film stars, if not more. In recent years, they have performed pretty well in all three formats of the game, winning the T20 World Cup in 2024 and reaching the final of the ODI World Cup as well as the World Test Championship in 2023. However, stunning back-to-back losses in Test series against New Zealand and Australia have hit the team where it hurts. The knives are out, and the brickbats have started outnumbering the bouquets.

Signalling that enough is enough, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has issued strict guidelines for the senior men's squad. The measures are apparently aimed at enhancing discipline, streamlining logistics and promoting team unity during domestic and international tours. The players are

now expected to travel with the team for all matches and practice sessions; what's more, they have to adhere to stringent baggage norms. There is also a family travel policy, which will ostensibly "ensure a balance between players' wellbeing and team commitments"; actually, it is meant to minimise distractions for cricketers on foreign tours. Perhaps the BCCI has taken a cue from the L&T Chairman's provocative question: "How long can you stare at your wife?"

It is obvious that the team's no-nonsense head coach, Gautam Gambhir, has a lot to do with these restrictions. The board has also made it mandatory for players to participate in domestic matches to remain eligible for selection in the national team and for central contracts. Non-compliance or defiance could force players to miss the IPL, Indian cricket's biggest cash cow. Overall, this is a bold experiment worth trying to draw cricketers out of their comfort zone. How they cope with the changes will matter a lot.

Ace in space

Docking of satellites a new high for India

Getting off to a flying start in the new year under a new chief, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has achieved yet another milestone by successfully performing the docking of satellites as a part of the Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX). This exercise is expected to make the country better equipped for more ambitious and complex missions such as the Bharatiya Antriksha Station, Chandrayaan-4 and Gaganyaan. India's stature in space has gone up a few notches as it has become the fourth country — after the US, Russia and China — to accomplish the feat. It is remarkable that ISRO has bounced back from the Chandrayaan-2 heartbreak of 2019 to make rapid strides in the past couple of years, especially the Chandrayaan-3 soft-landing in 2023.

The strategic importance of the space sector cannot be overemphasised. The SpaDeX success comes amid a fierce race between the US and China, which are both going all out to send a crew to

the moon — the first since NASA's Apollo programme conducted its final mission in 1972. Just a few weeks ago, China accused America of initiating "dangerous actions" to jeopardise global strategic stability after the US Space Force stationed a unit in Japan. Beijing itself has been speedily expanding its military capabilities in space. President Xi Jinping's "eternal dream" of building China into a space power has an ominous ring to it. This is worrisome not only for the US but also for its ally India, whose relations with China continue to be uneasy despite recent signs of a thaw.

The Chinese challenge makes it imperative for India to develop cutting-edge capabilities to protect its space assets such as satellites and indigenous launch vehicles. This should go hand in hand with greater stress on research and innovation to ensure that the country's space programme remains on course for human spaceflight and other key missions.

Go First flies into sunset, NCLT orders liquidation

New Delhi the NCLT said the



The National Committee of Creditors (CoC) in the legislative scheme is empowered to take the decision to liquidate the corporate debtor, at any time after its constitution and before confirmation of the resolution plan. The order comes a little over two months after the Supreme Court, on November 7, ordered the liquidation of the once-storied airline Jet Airways.

The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) on Monday ordered the liquidation of Go First, the budget carrier that stopped flying nearly two years ago amid financial woes. In May 2023, the airline filed for a voluntary insolvency resolution process. The tribunal, in a 15-page order, said it is ordering the liquidation of the corporate debtor Go Airlines (India) Ltd.

On Monday,

Airtel, Bajaj Finance partner to create digital platforms for financial services

Mumbai

Telecom services provider-Bharti Airtel and Bajaj Finance, one of the largest private-sector Non-Banking Financial Company (NBFC), today announced a strategic partnership to create one of India's largest digital platforms for financial services and transform last mile delivery. The one-of-a-kind partnership brings together Airtel's customer base of 370 million, over 12 lakh strong distribution network, and Bajaj Finance's diversified suite of 27 product lines, and distribution heft of over 5,000 branches and 70,000 field agents. Airtel will initially offer Bajaj Finance's retail financial products on its Airtel Thanks App for seamless and secure customer experience, and later through its nation-wide network of stores. The combined strength of the companies' digital assets will enable Airtel and Bajaj Finance to significantly deepen penetration of financial products and services. Gopal Vittal, Vice Chairman and MD, Bharti Airtel, said, "The combined reach, scale and distribution strength of the two companies will serve as the cornerstone of this partnership and help us succeed in the marketplace. We are building Airtel Finance as a strategic asset for the group."

Budget Expectations: MSMEs want focus on skill development, better credit access, GST simplification

New Delhi

The Union Budget is just around the corner, and the SMEs and MSMEs — the engines of economic growth and employment generation — have high expectations. They are hopeful that the Budget would deliver strategic and structural reforms to support their resilience and enable them to scale new heights.

According to Ratish Pandey, Business Coach and Founder, Ethique Advisory, the current economic slowdown is being influenced by multiple factors such as geopolitical instabilities, reduced capital spending by the government, poor export performance and sluggish growth in the manufacturing sector. However, with the right support measures, the SME/MSME sector, can be reinvigorated for growth. Among the key expectations and predictions in the upcoming budget includes:

SMEs often face significant challenges in



securing affordable and timely credit. Measures to improve access to credit will be essential in enabling their growth and survival in a volatile economy. Industrialists suggested that the upcoming Budget should provide an additional allocation or net to enhance credit flow to the MSMEs, much like the Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE) launched during Covid, which proved to be a lifeline driving the

growth of MSMEs

As the largest employment generator, SMEs require a continued emphasis on skill development initiatives. Programmes that upskill the workforce will ensure enhanced productivity and competitiveness for the sector. Sanjay Nayar, president, ASSOCHAM said there's a need to establish MSME universities to promote skill development and entrepreneurship training. Besides, tax

breaks and subsidies on capital expenditures can provide much-needed relief to the sector.

ASSOCHAM highlighted the need to develop integrated infrastructure townships for MSMEs (a revised version of the old Industrial Estate Development Programme). These townships may include facilities such as common testing and R&D centres, Financial institutions, common service providers and housing.

Infosys leads the industry with the fastest growing CAGR in brand value of 18% over 5 years

Davos

Infosys (NSE: INFY) (BSE: INFY) (NYSE: INFY), a global leader in next-generation digital services and consulting, today announced that Brand Finance, the world's leading brand valuation firm, has recognized the company as a Top 3 IT services brand and the fastest growing IT services brand globally, with a CAGR of 18% over 5 years in its Brand Finance Global 500 2025 report. Infosys' brand value has grown to over US\$16 billion in 2025, and Infosys is ranked as #132 most valuable brand in the world. Infosys CEO Salil Parekh is the No.1 IT services CEO, for the second year in a row, in the Brand Guardianship Index 2025 Infosys Chief

Executive Officer, Salil Parekh, for the second year in a row, tops the IT services ranking in Brand Finance's Brand Guardianship Index (BGI) 2025 for the role of CEO as brand custodian and steward of long-term shareholder value. "Over the last four decades, brand Infosys has been nurtured by our founders and our leadership, carefully balancing purpose, promise and performance. This relentless focus is reflected in the brand's leadership and steady gains in brand value over the years," said Sumit Virmani, Global Chief Marketing Officer, Infosys. "We are delighted with Brand Finance's recognition of Infosys' continued brand momentum and differentiated value creation for businesses in an AI-first world," he added.

Vision 2030: Mumbai as Culinary Capital of India launched by AHAR

New Delhi

Sukesh Shetty, President AHAR said, AHAR (Association of Hotels and Restaurants) was established in 1979 and comprises 66 associations with over 8,000 members in Mumbai alone. In 2029, AHAR will celebrate its 50th Anniversary. AHAR was established by hotel owners, with a primary focus on solving industry problems and empowering its members. AHAR ensures that its operations are controlled exclusively by its members. Globally, certain cities are renowned for their iconic products. For example, Italy is famous for pizza. Mumbai has achieved fifth place on the global list for its iconic product, Vada Pav. Following Mumbai, Amritsar is celebrated for its Chana Masala. Additionally, India takes pride in the invention of Dal Khichadi, a value-for-money dish that reflects the essence of Indian cuisine.

AHAR presented 50 Milestones which work has started to enable the Vision 2030 to become a reality. This was presented at the AHAR AGM held at Hotel Grand Hyatt in Mumbai. This was televised on Times Now, a leading English News Channel. These Milestones were taken up with different office bearers of AHAR and we felicitated them for their efforts as AHAR Super Heroes.

Under the "Mitra Concept," AHAR aims to position Mumbai as the Culinary Capital Of India by 2030. This ambitious vision aligns with the growing global recognition of India's culinary excellence and the hotel industry's potential to lead the charge. Mumbai is the financial capital of India and home to a diverse population with migrants from across the country. This diversity has given Mumbai a rich culinary landscape, offering cuisines from all corners of India. To promote tourism, we need to enhance this culinary heritage and develop it into a strong, recognizable brand. There are various types of tourism, and food tourism is one of the most impactful ways to attract visitors. AHAR is a well-structured and highly communicative organization, which enables it to play a significant role in this transformation. We are committed to staying updated and adapting to the needs of the industry to help Mumbai evolve into a premier tourist destination.

AHAR has initiated a new program



in collaboration with RPH College, a catering college. As part of this program, our staff and hotel teams visit the college to train students in basic preparation techniques and the importance of preserving traditional food. Additionally, we are conducting training sessions for our staff, restaurant owners, and managers to develop creative approaches to presenting and promoting traditional Indian cuisine. This initiative aims to not only preserve India's culinary heritage but also elevate its status on the global stage.

At the AGM, Senior hoteliers, Ex-office Bearer, President awards nominees felicitated on stage with live audience of thousand plus hotel owner. Senior advisors of AHAR spoke about past, present & future trends in the hotel industry.

AHAR Hospitality Summit had notable speaker Bhushan Gagrani - Municipal Commissioner of BMC, Ulhas Ingawale - Joint Commissioner, State Food Safety Commission, Sudhakar Shetty Secretary of AHAR, moderated by Santosh Shetty Senior Advisor.

Bhushan Gagrani's said, "Mumbai is rapidly progressing, and I assure you that within the next 3 to 4 years, all major infrastructure projects will be completed. Projects such as the Coastal Road, metro lines, and the new airport will transform Mumbai into a modern, new age city.

In technical terms, the government is providing the hardware- the necessary infrastructure. However, to run the program smoothly and make it impactful, we also need powerful software. This software comprises Mumbai's rich heritage, diverse culture, and exceptional food scene.

Over the years, significant changes have been made in the food industry, including reforms in licensing and the creation of various forums. Organizations like AHAR are actively supporting the government in these

initiatives to streamline and enhance the industry.

The new generation, often referred to as Gen Z, views dining out as more than just satisfying hunger--it's about the experience. The food industry, currently valued at \$70 billion, has immense potential to contribute to India's GDP. In alignment with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of achieving a \$5 trillion economy, the food industry must play a larger role. This journey of growth and transformation will begin in Mumbai, setting an example for the rest of the country.

To promote domestic tourism & increased hospitality sector the key is maintaining continuous dialogue with stakeholders to understand how we can facilitate growth and make life more comfortable for businesses and tourists alike. Often, government rules, such as those related to licensing, undergo changes, and these processes can be slow. To address this, consistent communication with stakeholders is essential. In the food industry, for instance, we need ongoing discussions with organizations like the BMC, FDA, and police. Directly engaging with every individual is not always feasible, which is why organizations like AHAR, which understand the industry's challenges, play a crucial role. These dialogues help us identify the actual issues, whether we are over-regulating or facilitating the industry appropriately. Recent improvements, such as the availability of online permissions, more user-friendly compliance processes, and the removal of certain outdated requirements (e.g., permits for permit rooms), have all been possible due to continuous engagement with organizations like AHAR. India must take pride in its own food heritage. We should not hesitate to promote the nutritional value and traditional significance of our cuisine. This kind of promotion will help us

showcase the true essence of Indian food.

Additionally, I believe AHAR can play a crucial role in promoting healthy eating among the new generation. With 40% of people being overweight, it's essential to promote a balanced diet alongside the growth of the food industry. We need to ensure that while we promote the richness of our culinary culture, we also encourage healthy eating habits.

I am open to dialogue with AHAR on how we can collaborate to promote both the traditional value of food and healthier eating choices.

Regarding the Lok Sabha elections, our city had a low voter turnout. We were asked to increase voter participation in the assembly elections, and we sought help from AHAR. The AHAR team responded immediately, and as a result, voter turnout increased by 6 to 7%".

Mr. Ulhas Ingawale Joint Commissioner, State Food Safety Commission said, " There have been significant changes in hygiene practices within the hotel industry, driven by evolving customer expectations. Post-COVID, cleanliness and hygiene have become top priorities. Enhanced cleaning protocols have been implemented across establishments to ensure the highest standards of safety and sanitation. Many restaurants have partnered with global health organizations to participate in certification programs, further emphasizing their commitment to hygiene. Additionally, staff training and dedicated hygiene programs have been introduced to maintain consistent cleanliness and meet customer expectations. AHAR plays a significant role in the hotel industry by facilitating FOSTAC training. This training helps restaurant owners understand food safety and compliance requirements. To further enhance this initiative, AHAR could provide online training and resources, particularly for small restaurant owners. Regular refresher workshops and training programs focused on food safety would also be beneficial for small establishments.

So far, AHAR has conducted 100 FOSTAC training sessions, benefiting 4000 restaurants. All expenses for these sessions have been borne by AHAR members.

Adani Energy Solutions secures Rs 25,000 cr Bhadla-Fatehpur HVDC project

Ahmedabad

Adani Energy Solutions Ltd (AESL), India's largest private transmission and distribution company, has achieved a milestone by winning its largest-ever order worth approximately Rs25,000 crore.

The project involves the development of a High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) transmission system connecting Bhadla in Rajasthan to Fatehpur in Uttar Pradesh, aimed at evacuating 6 GW of renewable energy (RE).

This order win brings AESL's total order book to Rs54,761 crore and expands its transmission network to 25,778 circuit kilometers (ckm) with a transformation capacity of 84,186 MVA.

The project, known as the "Transmission System for Evacuation of Power from REZ in Rajasthan (20 GW) under Phase-III Part I," involves establishing a 6,000 MW HVDC system across 2,400 ckm and 7,500 MVA of transmission capacity.

Once operational, it will evacuate renewable energy from Rajasthan's REZs beyond Bhadla-III to demand centers in northern India and integrate it with the national grid.

AESL secured the project under the Tariff-Based Competitive Bidding (TBCB) mechanism, with REC Power Development & Consultancy Ltd (RECPDCL) as the bid process coordinator. The project will be implemented on a Build, Own, Operate, and Transfer

(BOOT) basis and is scheduled for completion within 4.5 years.

Highlighting the significance of the project, Kandarp Patel, CEO of AESL, stated, "By enabling efficient evacuation of renewable energy from some of the most inhospitable regions of the country and connecting them to the national grid, AESL is playing its role in India's decarbonization journey. We will be deploying latest technology and practices to deliver the project in time and with minimal environmental impact."

AESL's Bhadla-Fatehpur HVDC project adds to its legacy as the only private-sector player in India owning an HVDC asset.

India will achieve 20% blending target next month: Union Minister for Petroleum Hardeep Puri

New Delhi

Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas, Hardeep Singh Puri, revealed that India would achieve 20 per cent biofuel blending by next month, well ahead of the original 2030 target, which was later advanced to 2025, at the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) 3rd International Symposium for Thriving Eco-Energy in Mobility. Speaking at the event, the minister

Puri said, "Our target was to achieve 20 per cent blending by 2030, we postponed the target to 2025 and now we will probably do 20 per cent blending of biofuel by next month."

Highlighting India's current energy consumption of 5.4 million barrels of crude oil daily, Puri stressed the critical need to reduce dependence on fossil fuels.

He stated, "One thing that we can say with confidence is that our journey to become the fifth largest economy, and if figures that are in the public domain are to be

believed, we will be the fourth largest economy very soon and thereafter, to move up the economic activity ladder, we will continue to require energy, and we will require all forms of energy."

He pointed out that 67 million people who visit petrol pumps daily are already benefiting from biofuel-blended fuel.

"As our economy grows, our energy requirements are also set to rise. Therefore it is absolutely essential that we reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. Over the past decade, the ethanol branding program has saved approximately US dollars, 14.5 billion in foreign exchange, and reduced CO2 emission by 57.8 million metric tons," Puri stated.

India's energy transition strategy includes a mix of compressed biogas, natural gas, compressed natural gas (CNG), and electric vehicles (EVs).

The minister emphasized that the country's journey to becoming the world's fourth-largest economy would rely heavily on diversified and

sustainable energy solutions.

"Our journey to become the fifth-largest economy, and if figures in the public domain are to be believed, the fourth-largest very soon, will require all forms of energy. We welcome recent global developments, including the lifting of oil drilling bans by the US, which will further boost our energy imports from the region," he added.

The automobile industry, Puri noted, has played a pivotal role in India's economic growth, creating approximately 45 million jobs and revolutionizing mobility and connectivity nationwide.

"The automobile industry has also generated around 45 million jobs and has transformed mobility and connectivity across the country," Puri remarked.

Puri also welcomed recent announcements by the US to lift bans on oil drilling, highlighting the potential for increased energy imports from the region. He emphasized the importance of international cooperation to meet India's growing energy demands.

JSW Group to launch electric vehicles by 2027: Sajjan Jindal



Davos

Sajjan Jindal, Chairman, JSW Steel, announced that JSW Auto is set to launch its own electric vehicles by 2027, marking a significant step into the rapidly growing EV market.

Jindal revealed ambitious plans for the JSW Group's electric vehicle (EV) venture during an interview with ANI at the World Economic Forum in Davos on Tuesday.

"In 2027, hopefully we should be out with our own JSW EV. We are doing a huge amount of research on it and we will bring the car. I think that's one area where as I said, we have to reduce our dependence on imported fuel and electric mobility is one area which can do that," Jindal said, underscoring the group's commitment to sustainable transportation.

Jindal also highlighted JSW's ongoing partnership with MG Motors for EV production, noting plans to scale up capacity.

"JSW MG is already producing EVs, and we are ramping up that capacity. Alongside, JSW Auto will bring its own EV to the market in the next 2-2.5 years," he added.

Discussing the future of the steel sector, Jindal emphasized India's potential to bridge the gap between its current steel consumption and that of China.

Jindal stated, "India is a big country and we are the second largest producer of steel and consumer of steel in the world and going forward India is going to grow quite rapidly."

"China produces close to a billion tons and India is at the moment 150 million. So there can't be that kind of gap. We have to bridge that gap and on one side China is now reducing their consumption because they have picked out on their development or on their consumption of steel. Whereas India is just about to start consuming. So we see a big opportunity in the steel industry," he added.

Jindal noted that as China's steel consumption stabilizes, India is poised to drive global demand with infrastructure projects, urbanization, and industrial growth.

Jindal also lauded Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision for India's industrial expansion, identifying several sectors ripe for investment.

The future of US-led connectivity initiatives under Trump 2.0

As President-elect, Donald Trump, enters the White House, one of the most closely monitored elements of his administration will be his foreign policy. His election rallies, media briefings and cabinet picks denote a certain expected Trumpian worldview, particularly vis-à-vis the United States' (US') principal adversary, China. However, when it comes to his stance on US-led connectivity corridors and international development, his approach is not as clear. However, his first term serves as an effective framework for analysts to forecast potential positions regarding Trump's foreign aid and connectivity policies, as well as the relevance of new trade routes involving the US.

To counter China's lead in connectivity and development, Biden's presidency led a plethora of connectivity initiatives with US transatlantic and Asian partners—through bilateral and multilateral frameworks, as well as through minilaterals.

Trump views foreign assistance and new trade routes as part of a larger strategic and economic competition with China to emerge as the leading world power within the international community. Despite their differences, Presidents Barack Obama, Joe Biden, and Donald Trump have all championed the US "Pivot to Asia" strategy, and over the past 12 years, the US has established a latticework of economic, political, and security partnerships in Asia, aimed at countering Chinese geopolitical influence and belligerence. The US-led connectivity corridors, such as the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGI), the Lobito Corridor and the India Middle East Economic Corridor (IMEC) are a part of this larger bid to counter Beijing in Asia and the Indo-Pacific region.

To counter China's lead in connectivity and development, Biden's presidency led a plethora of connectivity initiatives with US transatlantic and Asian partners—through bilateral and multilateral frameworks, as well as through minilaterals. These initiatives were part of a larger effort by the Biden administration, which eventually consolidated the US pivot to Asia. However, their fate hangs in the balance under the Trump 2.0 presidency. This article analyses the Biden-era connectivity initiatives and presents analyses of their respective futures under the Trump administration.

Biden's connectivity initiatives

In the past decade, infrastructure development and economic connectivity have emerged as a domain of geopolitical competition between the West and China. With US domestic political winds pushing against global leadership since 2016, and with the climate and COVID-19 crises, China has seized space in connectivity cooperation and infrastructure development. Chinese President Xi Jinping's transnational connectivity programme, the Belt and



Road Initiative (BRI), led Beijing's charge in international infrastructure development and connectivity corridors. Today, international BRI investments, loans and contracts are valued at US\$1 trillion across 140 countries. Naturally, any state-backed economic engagement of this magnitude will have geopolitical implications. With the BRI, it is Beijing's growing economic and geopolitical heft in the developing world and the Global South.

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To counter the BRI, address supply chain disruptions, support economic development in the Global South, and re-engage with emerging markets and developing economies, President Biden launched the PGI, which seeks to mobilise private and public funding from the G7 nations worth US\$600 billion till 2027. The European Union's Global Gateway (US\$308 billion), and Italy's Mattei Plan for Africa (US\$8.2 billion) are also under the PGI. The US is spearheading the Lobito Corridor in Africa, which will build two rail corridors between Angola, the landlocked Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Zambia for access to the Atlantic and the Indian Oceans. In Asia, the IMEC is making headwinds by developing a new route between Europe and Asia. The G7 countries have mobilised nearly US\$60 billion between 2022 and 2024, to execute more than 120 projects across 38 countries in the developing world.

Characterised by his 2020 campaign slogan, "America is Back", Biden's international engagement showcased a reinvigorated US internationalism. Ranging from the Quad, a grouping of Australia, India, Japan, and the US, to the G20, Biden's latticework of alliances and partnerships led to multiple connectivity projects such as the IMEC, the Quad Supply Chain Resilience Network, and the subsea infrastructure security network, among others. These projects may face headwinds as a Trumpian foreign policy builds on ideologies of "America First", pragmatic realism, and a reductionist and isolationist version of Ronald Reagan's "peace through strength" doctrine.

Trump 2.0 and US-led connectivity corridors

In his first term, President Trump viewed the global development paradigm as part of a greater struggle for supremacy between the US and China in the broader international relations milieu. However, due to his fragmented, erratic, and often contradictory foreign assistance policies between 2017 and 2021, he left an economic power vacuum, which the Chinese instrumentalised to further the BRI. Budgetary cuts in the US Agency for International Development's (USAID) credit lines, to the tune of US\$6 billion or 22 percent of the total USAID budget in 2019; trade wars and sanctions with developing countries, and Washington's frequently changing policy positions on the BRI itself, led to Beijing consolidating its position as a preferred development partner in the Global South.

Biden reinstated Washington's role as a development partner in the international community to deter and counter further Chinese gains. In his tenure, the US emerged as the largest bilateral development aid provider within the global arena, with investments worth US\$66 billion in 2023.

The incoming administration will also exert pressure on its transatlantic partners to meet their Global Gateway commitments and mobilise investments and aid and also pressure European private companies to contribute to the PGI.

As far as the PGI and the international economic corridors are concerned, the US is highly likely to continue to lead connectivity cooperation under the Trump 2.0 administration. The IMEC, Lobito, and Luzon corridors are all geostrategic corridors with geopolitical underpinnings. In 'realist' principles, the idea is to thwart Chinese economic and geopolitical influence in the global development paradigm, bolster global supply chain resilience, and secure new and old energy sources/minerals for the US economic growth and green transition. Even the Trump-associated and controversial "Project 2025", argues that USAID and the US International Development Finance Corporation (USDFC) should "finance programs designed to counter specific Chinese efforts in strategically important countries and eliminate funding to any partner that engages with Chinese entities directly or indirectly." It also calls for "greater cooperation on development between the US and "pro-free market" Japan, South Korea, Australia, and India, as well as Taiwan". The Quad and its connectivity initiatives could also find continuation in the Trump 2.0 administration, especially as supply chain resilience and undersea infrastructure are emerging as geostrategic and national security priorities in the US. The incoming administration will also exert pressure on its transatlantic partners to meet their Global Gateway commitments and mobilise investments and aid and also

pressure European private companies to contribute to the PGI. Of the US\$60 billion mobilised by the G7 countries under the PGI framework during the Biden administration, US\$ 45 billion was mobilised by the US. Europe's lackadaisical policy implementation paradigm will not sit well with Trump and may present roadblocks to the West's connectivity cooperation in the Global South.

While programmes like the PGI are likely to persist, their execution could face challenges, particularly in fostering multilateral cohesion and securing commitments from transatlantic partners. Ultimately, the continuation of US-led connectivity initiatives will hinge on balancing geopolitical imperatives with sustainable, inclusive development in the Global South—a challenge that will test the Trump administration's ability to sustain meaningful partnerships. It will also be interesting to observe how the new US Department of Government Efficiency views the US global development aid and connectivity projects, as its mandate includes not only streamlining government processes and regulations and increasing government efficiency, but also suggesting measures to reduce government spending and save the US taxpayers' dollars.

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Conclusion

The future of US-led connectivity initiatives under the Trump administration will likely maintain a focus on countering Chinese influence and strengthening global supply chains, albeit with a transactional and interest-driven approach. The geostrategic importance of the aforementioned corridors will remain central, ensuring their continuation. However, Trump's policies may pivot more heavily towards prioritising immediate US economic and security interests, potentially reshaping partnerships and aid paradigms to align with his "America First" ideology.

Ultimately, while Trump 2.0 may sustain or even expand US involvement in strategic connectivity initiatives, their execution will likely reflect the administration's transactional pragmatism. This could result in a more selective and unilateral approach, prioritising geostrategic gains over broader development goals. The challenge will lie in striking a balance between advancing US interests and maintaining the multilateral cooperation necessary for the long-term success of these initiatives. Whether these corridors can adapt to the shifting priorities and remain effective in countering Chinese influence while fostering sustainable growth in the Global South will define their legacy under Trump's presidency.

Shaping China's periphery: BrahMos missiles in Southeast Asia

One of the crucial objectives of Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto's visit to New Delhi in January 2025 as a guest for India's Republic Day celebrations is to explore the BrahMos supersonic missile system's acquisition. After the Philippines and Vietnam, Indonesia is poised to become the third enthusiastic customer in Southeast Asia for this lethal missile. These states are particularly interested in the land- and ship-based anti-ship variants of the BrahMos, whose prominent utility lies in countering Chinese interference in their naval operations in the South China Sea. The missile's proven capabilities have already led to its acquisition by the Philippines, while potential deals with Vietnam and Indonesia are underway. Malaysia and Thailand, meanwhile, are considering it for future procurement. However, the BrahMos missile's induction in China's immediate vicinity, especially in its contested maritime region, has raised concerns within the Chinese leadership.

BrahMos missiles in Southeast Asia

The BrahMos missile system has emerged as a highly successful and in-demand weapon produced and exported by India. Developed through an Indo-Russian joint venture, the BrahMos is based on the Russian P-800 Oniks "Yakhon" missile system, with significant refinements to its features and capabilities. It is a mid-range, ramjet-powered supersonic missile designed for use across all domains—air, sea, and land. The BrahMos can achieve speeds of Mach 2.8 and has a range of up to 800 kilometres; however, export versions are capped at a range of 290 kilometres due to MTCR restrictions. Indian forces have inducted multiple variants of this missile into their own inventory since 2007.

The BrahMos missile system has emerged as a highly successful and in-demand weapon produced and exported by India.

Despite its induction into the Indian military, the BrahMos faced challenges in finding export opportunities. Initially, it competed directly with the Yakhont missile, which Russia supplied to Indonesia (2007), Vietnam (2010–2011), and others during the early 2010s. India also encountered Russian resistance over intellectual property,



complicating export prospects. The Indian government's cautious approach in consideration of Chinese sensitivities also influenced decisions, particularly relevant for Southeast Asian buyers such as Vietnam.

Most of these impediments have diminished as India's technological dependence on Russia for this missile's production has substantially decreased. Moreover, as India-China relations frayed and Beijing intensified its aggressive behaviour, India abandoned its self-imposed restrictions on defence exports. Consequently, the BrahMos missile emerged as a key instrument in India's defence diplomacy in the 2020s.

The Philippines was the first to benefit from this shift, finalising a deal worth US\$375 million in January 2022 to equip its marines with three missile batteries. The agreement included training and maintenance support, and the first missile system was delivered in April 2024. This acquisition seems to have bolstered the Philippines' interest, as its forces are now negotiating for additional missile batteries.

Vietnam, a second potential customer, has shown interest in the BrahMos since the 2010s. The country is now finalising a US\$700 million deal for five missile batteries, with techno-commercial details already shared. Similarly, Indonesia is negotiating a US\$450 million contract, which, once finalised, will further solidify India's Act East Policy for the defence sector in Southeast Asia.

Both Vietnam and Indonesia previously purchased Russian Yakhont missiles, with Vietnam operating the Bastion-P system for coastal defence and Indonesia deploying ship-based anti-ship missiles.

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previously purchased Russian Yakhont missiles, with Vietnam operating the Bastion-P system for coastal defence and Indonesia deploying ship-based anti-ship missiles. Yet, rather than replacing them with similar Russian systems for simpler logistics, both nations have opted for the Indian alternative, reflecting their strategy to diversify defence imports and reduce their dependence on Russia amid global uncertainties. The BrahMos missile's advanced features and reputation have played a crucial role here. Moreover, Indonesia's deal might proceed using a national currency arrangement, potentially setting a precedent for future transactions with other buyers.

The Chinese conundrum

For China, the proliferation of the BrahMos missiles in its immediate neighbourhood, particularly in contested maritime regions, poses a significant challenge. China is acutely aware of the missile's advanced features, including its dart-like shape for strong penetration capability, radar-absorbent coating for stealth, ramjet engine that limits the adversary's response time, and its highly accurate composite guidance system comprising INS (Inertial navigation system), SNS (Sensor Network Simulator) and A/P (anomalous propagation) radar components. Additionally, its anti-interference capabilities make the BrahMos a reliable long-range, fire-and-forget missile. Chinese experts have described it as a potential "troublemaker for international security" due to its capabilities and reach. Notably, in 2021, the BrahMos missile's deployment near India's Line of Actual Control (LAC), following the Galwan incident, provoked heated reactions from China, which viewed the move as an obstacle to bilateral talks.

Chinese experts have described it as a potential "troublemaker for international security" due to its capabilities and reach.

China's concerns regarding the BrahMos are threefold. First, it is dismayed by Russia's agreement to allow BrahMos exports to the Philippines and other Southeast Asian nations, perceiving Russia as indifferent to China's national security concerns.[1] Second, Chinese scholars argue that the BrahMos' deployment in Southeast Asia can disrupt the South China Sea's stability, triggering a

regional arms race and escalating tensions and confrontations in existing hotspots. Third, the potential deployment of BrahMos in Vietnam for coastal defence and anti-ship operations is particularly troubling for China, as it will have a clamping effect on the South China Sea's western side.

In the Philippines case, simulations suggest that the launch of 24–36 BrahMos missiles could significantly damage a Chinese aircraft carrier battle group, giving Filipino forces considerable leverage in their maritime regions. As the Philippines deploys BrahMos missiles in Zambales and Luzon provinces, with potential future deployments in the Calayan, Lubang or Palawan Islands, these missiles could cover critical areas such as the Scarborough Shoal, the Second Thomas Shoal, and the region extending from the Taiwan Strait to the Spratly Islands. China also cannot rule out the possibility of collusion between Vietnam and the Philippines.

In counter, Chinese analysts argue that Filipino and Vietnamese forces lack the long-range radar systems to provide targets for the BrahMos missiles. However, in the case of disputed islands like the Scarborough Shoal, the location of targets is well-known. Furthermore, the Houthis in Yemen have demonstrated that a lack of advanced ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) capabilities cannot deter them from sending missile attacks against Saudi, Israeli and American assets across the Middle East.

In addition, the Philippines has been acquiring radar systems from Japan and Israel, among others, to establish radar bubbles around its maritime periphery. Moreover, the BrahMos missile is a particular threat to China's large naval platforms, namely, landing ships and coast guard vessels lacking sufficient air defence capabilities. China may consider using sea-based, missile, and air firepower to neutralise these missiles on the ground; however, such actions risk triggering the Mutual Defence Treaty between the Philippines and the United States. Therefore, since July 2024, China has begun employing darker grey zone warfare tactics to dissuade the Philippines from becoming a major strategic threat.

Frightening Memories of 'Project Iceworm' and recent disturbing trends raise serious questions regarding the future of the Arctic Region

Increasing militarization and resource exploitation is not good news for any ecologically sensitive and vulnerable region, all the more so for the Arctic region which is reported to be warming at twice the global rate, leading to rapid melting of ice. However with the USA's serious intentions of buying/annexing Greenland, together with an ongoing push for resource grab by several countries including all the three great powers, the region appears to be going in the opposite direction of the protective future that is urgently needed.

Militarization pursued in reckless ways can lead to the most devastating results in such ecological spaces of high vulnerability. In this context disclosures about Project Iceworm, which goes back a long time but whose impacts may be still lingering, should be highlighted as a warning of the kind of reckless and uncontrolled militarization that must be avoided under all circumstances, here and elsewhere.

A recent description of what happened under this project has been provided by Prof. Jeff Colgan of Brown University, speaking to Srijana Mitra Das (see The Times of India 19 January—interview titled 'The resource curse drives petro-aggression'). Colgan says—"After World war 2 the US Army wanted to build a base in Greenland for up to 600 medium range nuclear missiles that would be mounted on a train, riding 3,000 km of track. This train would be buried in tunnels inside Greenland's ice sheet..."

"In the late 1950s-early 60s the US army was very serious about this and actually built Camp Century, the central base for Project Iceworm. They brought a small nuclear reactor to Greenland to power the base. After a few years they realized it was technically unfeasible and gave up, but they left a lot of nuclear wastewater at the base. They also left thousands and thousands of liters of diesel fuel—this stayed in the middle of Greenland's ice-sheet."

But now with climate change and massive ice melting, "The waste material people thought would stay tens of meters below the soil surface will eventually resurface and potentially contaminate water in Greenland."

Actually with nuclear wastewater and other issues the potential of harm can be much higher. Along with concerns regarding this, there should be even higher concern regarding whether this kind of reckless militarization would be pursued again on Greenland once the USA gains

much more complete control. Against whom will this be aimed and what will be the implications if the other side too responds with more or less equal aggressiveness?

Already the people of the region are facing many problems and there are unprecedented threats to various species of the region including the polar bear. Some species are threatened by the shrinking, even vanishing habitats where they have always lived safely and happily, some are threatened by the fast reducing access to their staple



food, while some are threatened by weather extremes.

Despite this there is still relentless march to exploit the vast natural resources of the region, including oil, natural gas, rare earths and other minerals. Partly due to the huge natural resources and partly due to strategic and geo-political reasons, big power confrontation in this remote region is also increasing. In fact melting of ice increases the possibility of higher exploitation of natural resources as well as carving out of new maritime routes with all its strategic and commercial implications. Another complication is the increasing confrontational situation of NATO and Russia which may get extended, tragically, even to the Arctic region with very heavy costs to ecology and to native people.

The Arctic region is spread over 8 countries 7 of which are NATO members. These are USA, Canada, Iceland, Denmark (Greenland), Norway, Sweden and Finland. The eighth country is Russia. While Russia has a well-established military presence here, this is largely defensive as Russia has important strategic interests to protect here spread over a vast area. With increasing NATO

aggression Russia has responded by giving more opportunities to China to acquire a presence here. One move by one side may lead to another move by the other side and very soon the situation may become much more tense and risky.

This should be avoided in the interests of world peace as well as the considerations of protecting Arctic ecology. Not just actual conflict but even large-scale military exercises may prove to be quite harmful for Arctic ecology. Under the Nordic

Response 2024 exercise in Norway, last year tens of thousands of soldiers from 13 NATO member countries were gathered in the Arctic region with frigates, submarines and other vessels, and over 100 aircraft.

The situation in Greenland is particularly serious. Very high rate of ice melting has been reported here. With its strategic location close to Russia as well as the USA, Greenland remains of great military interest to the USA. If USA annexes Greenland then its territorial borders come much closer to several allies, Iceland being the closest but other countries like the UK also come much nearer.

In addition Greenland is a source of precious mineral resources, including gold and rare earths. The opening up of these rare earth deposits to China is something which the western powers will like to stop, given the fact that China already has high levels of control over rare earths.

Greenland has a population of just 57000 people in its vast territory of 836330 sq. miles and has the lowest population density in the entire world. This Arctic region is highly sensitive from the ecological point of view. As ice sheets which cover vast areas melt under the influence of global warming,

buried carbon deposits will be released and sea levels will rise.

Hence there is a strong case for the entire Greenland to be administered by the United Nations as a zone of neutrality, peace and environment protection but there are hardly any chances of this happening. The immediate prospects are more in the direction of annexation by the USA and increasing militarization and resource exploitation. As the ice melts the remains of what was once a nuclear-powered military station (Camp Century) of the USA will open up, requiring a very careful clean-up effort. An even bigger danger exists in the form a nuclear weapon which was lost here in a bomber airplane accident in 1968. This was the peak of the cold war period when some USA bomber planes carrying nuclear weapons used to be in the air all the time and the Thule military base in Greenland was a special place for these operations due to the relative proximity of Russian targets from here. The airplane accident took place when the USA bomber containing nuclear weapons was approaching this military base in Greenland. The USA had obtained the permission of the Denmark government to set up this military base but it is not at all certain whether the Denmark government, let alone the local communities, had been informed about the transactions here involving the transport of nuclear weapons.

Actually the plane contained four nuclear weapons but three could be recovered. In the salvage operation in 1968 thousands of pieces of debris as well as millions of tons of ice, suspected to contain radioactive debris, were collected. Still one weapon could not be found despite the huge research effort. Workers employed in the clean-up work suffered from cancer later and have been claiming compensations till recently

It is by now widely accepted that in this accident as many as four nuclear weapons were endangered, three were recovered more or less intact but one hydrogen bomb was never recovered. One aspect of a UN-administrated protective future should be to remain on constant alert for any tell-tale signs of damage from this so that a potential catastrophic event can still be prevented.

The wider efforts for ensuring an overall protective future for the Arctic region against all odds should also continue.

2024's extreme ocean heat breaks records again, leaving 2 mysteries to solve

The oceans are heating up as the planet warms.

This past year, 2024, was the warmest ever measured for the global ocean, following a record-breaking 2023. In fact, every decade since 1984, when satellite recordkeeping of ocean temperatures started, has been warmer than the previous one.

A warmer ocean means increased evaporation, which in turn results in heavier rains in some areas and droughts in others. It can power hurricanes and downpours. It can also harm the health of coastal marine areas and sea life – coral reefs suffered their most extensive bleaching event on record in 2024, with damage in many parts of the world.

Warming ocean water also affects temperatures on land by changing weather patterns. The EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service announced on Jan. 10 that data showed 2024 had also broken the record for the warmest year globally, with global temperatures about 2.9 degrees Fahrenheit (1.6 Celsius) above pre-industrial times. That would mark the first full calendar year with average warming above 1.5 C, a level countries had agreed to try to avoid passing long-term.

Many regions of the world were much warmer than the 1991-2020 average in 2024, including large areas of ocean. C3S / ECMWF, CC BY

Climate change, by and large, takes the blame. Greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere trap heat, and about 90% of the excess heat caused by emissions from burning fossil fuels and other human activities is absorbed by the ocean.

But while it's clear that the ocean has been warming for quite some time, its temperatures over the past two years have been far above the previous decades. That leaves two mysteries for scientists.

It's not just El Niño

The cyclic climate pattern of the El Niño Southern Oscillation can explain part of the warmth over the past two years.

During El Niño periods, warm waters that usually accumulate in the western equatorial Pacific Ocean move eastward toward the coastlines of Peru and Chile, leaving the Earth slightly warmer overall. The latest El Niño began in 2023 and caused global average temperatures to rise well into early 2024.

Sea surface temperatures have been running well above average when compared with all years on record, starting in 1981. The orange line is 2024, dark grey is 2023, and red is 2025. The middle dashed line is the 1982-2011 average. ClimateReanalyzer.org/NOAA OISST v2.1, CC BY

But the oceans have been even warmer than scientists expected. For example, global temperatures in 2023-2024 followed a similar

growth and decline pattern across the seasons as the previous El Niño event, in 2015-2016, but they were about 0.36 degrees Fahrenheit (0.2 Celsius) higher at all times in 2023-2024.

Scientists are puzzled and left with two problems to solve. They must figure out whether something else contributed to the unexpected warming and whether the past two years have been a sign of a sudden acceleration

Is this a warming surge?

The second puzzle is whether the planet is seeing a warming surge or not.

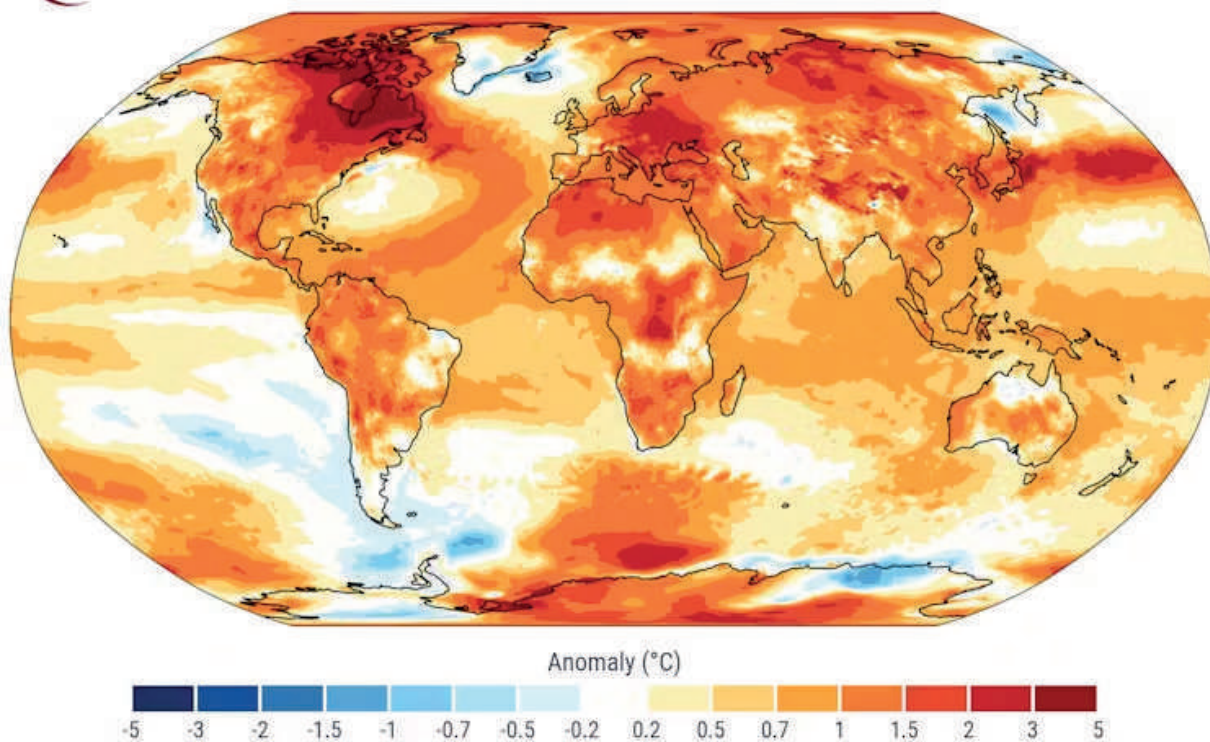
Temperatures are clearly rising, but the past two years have not been warm enough to support the notion that we may be seeing an acceleration in the rate of global warming.

Analysis of four temperature datasets covering the 1850-2023 period has shown



Surface air temperature anomalies in 2024

Data: ERA5 • Reference period: 1991–2020 • Credit: C3S/ECMWF



in global warming.

The role of aerosols

An intriguing idea, tested using climate models, is that a swift reduction in aerosols over the past decade may be one of the culprits.

Aerosols are solid and liquid particles emitted by human and natural sources into the atmosphere. Some of them have been shown to partially counteract the impact of greenhouse gases by reflecting solar radiation back into space. However, they also are responsible for poor air quality and air pollution.

Many of these particles with cooling properties are generated in the process of burning fossil fuels. For example, sulfur aerosols are emitted by ship engines and power plants. In 2020, the shipping industry implemented a nearly 80% cut in sulfur emissions, and many companies shifted to low-sulfur fuels. But the larger impact has come from power plants reducing their emissions, including a big shift in this direction in China. So, while technologies have cut these harmful emissions, that means a brake slowing the pace of warming is weakened.

that the rate of warming has not shown a significant change since around the 1970s. The same authors, however, noted that only a rate increase of at least 55% – about half a degree Celsius and nearly a full degree Fahrenheit over one year – would make the warming acceleration detectable in a statistical sense.

From a statistical standpoint, then, scientists cannot exclude the possibility that the 2023-2024 record ocean warming resulted simply from the “usual” warming trend that humans have set the planet on for the past 50 years. A very strong El Niño contributed some natural variability.

From a practical standpoint, however, the extraordinary impacts the planet has witnessed – including extreme weather, heat waves, wildfires, coral bleaching and ecosystem destruction – point to a need to swiftly reduce carbon dioxide emissions to limit ocean warming, regardless of whether this is a continuation of an ongoing trend or an acceleration.

Oscars 2025: Rachel Sennott, Bowen Yang to Host Nominations After Delay Due to LA Wildfires; Check Out New Date

After multiple delays due to the Palisades fire, actor-writer-comedians Rachel Sennott and Bowen Yang are set to announce the 97th annual Academy Awards nominations, as per an International daily. The nominations will be hosted on Thursday in a live presentation from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' Samuel Goldwyn Theater.

The presentation will feature nominees in all 24 Oscar categories for 2025. It will also be live-streamed on Oscar.com, Oscars.org, and the Academy's digital platforms for audiences across the globe. Apart



from this, it will be telecast on ABC's Good Morning America and streamed on ABC News Live, Disney+ and Hulu.

Regarding the host, Sennott is best known for his role in Saturday Night, helmed by Jason Reitman. It is based on behind the scenes of the 90 minutes leading up to the first broadcast of Saturday Night Live in

1975, later known as Saturday Night Live. The American actor and comedian currently features on NBC's SNL.

She is also known for her work in Shiva Baby, Bodies Bodies Bodies and I Used to Be Funny. On the other hand, Yang is popularly known for Wicked, The Garfield Movie, and Good Burger 2.

The Oscars 2025

nominations saw multiple shifts in scheduling due to LA wildfires that erupted two weeks ago. The announcement of the 97th Oscar nominations was initially scheduled for January 17, however, the damages caused by the wildfires affected many Oscar voters, leading to the postponement.

As the wildfires continued to rage, the dates were rescheduled from January 17 to January 23, with the cancellation of the Oscar Nominees Luncheon. The Oscars 2025 will be hosted by Conan O'Brien on March 2 at the Dolby Theatre as scheduled.

Akshay Kumar's Sky Force to Release on 24 January



Sky Force, an upcoming action drama set against the backdrop of the 1965 India-Pakistan air war, is all set to release on January 24, 2025. Directed by Abhishek Anil Kapur and Sandeep Kewlani, the movie is based on India's retaliatory airstrike on Pakistan's Sargodha airbase, marking India's first airstrike in the Indo-Pakistani war. Starring Akshay Kumar, Sara Ali Khan, debutant Veer Pahariya, and Nimrat Kaur, the film has already generated significant buzz.

The narrative follows Wing Commander K.O. Ahuja (Akshay Kumar) and T. Vijaya (Veer Pahariya), with Sara Ali Khan playing Vijaya's wife and Nimrat Kaur essaying the role of Ahuja's partner. With its plot, Sky Force looks promising, however, several factors make its release crucial for the careers of all involved.

Akshay Kumar has recently faced a string of disappointments at the box office. Films like Raksha Bandhan, Bade Miyan Chote Miyan, Sarfira, and Selfiee have all failed to generate substantial box-office returns. With such a poor run, Kumar's reputation as a reliable box-office draw has taken a significant hit. Akshay's recent failures have raised questions about his star status, and Sky Force serves as a litmus test for his career's next phase.

Sky Force also marks the acting debut of Veer Pahariya, the son of businessman Sanjay Pahadia and grandson of the former Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Sushilkumar Shinde. Veer is no stranger to the film industry, having worked as an assistant director and even as Varun Dhawan's body double for Bhediya. With a privileged background and high expectations riding on his first major role, Veer's debut is being closely watched by both industry insiders and fans.

Priyanka Chopra Visits Chilkur Balaji, Hints at Beginning 'New Chapter' Amid SSMB29 Buzz

Priyanka Chopra's trip to India has everyone talking. The buzz around her coming onboard for SS Rajamouli's magnum opus has skyrocketed of late. When the Desi Girl was seen landing in Hyderabad much to fanfare, the speculations went rife about Priyanka being cast opposite Mahesh Babu in the film which is tentatively titled SSMB29.

Priyanka visited the famous Chilkur Balaji temple near Hyderabad during her visit to India. PeeCee's visit has become a talking point among her fans and the media. The actor took to social media to share pictures of



her sacred journey and thanked Upasana Konidela, wife of Ram Charan, who is said to have recommended the temple visit to her.

Documenting her visit to Chilkur Balaji on social media, Priyanka shared a cryptic post,

stating that she was beginning a "new chapter" in her life. She did not give any more details about what this statement could be, leaving many to think if it might be a way of hinting at her film with Rajamouli and Mahesh Babu. Her post only added to the speculation, and curiosity grew among fans.

On Instagram, Priyanka wrote, "With the blessings of Shri Balaji, a new chapter begins. May we all find peace in our hearts and prosperity and abundance all around us. God's grace is infinite. || ॐ नमो नारायणाय || Thank you @ upasanakaminikonidela.

'You Make Me Feel Special': Shah Rukh Khan Reacts to Chris Martin's Shoutout at Mumbai Concert

Much to the amazement of fans of music and Shah Rukh Khan, Coldplay's Chris Martin on Sunday gave an unexpected shout out to the Bollywood superstar. During his Mumbai concert, Chris said 'Shah Rukh Khan' forever, earning a loud cheer from the audience. Now, SRK has reacted to Coldplay's sweet gesture with an Instagram post.

Sharing a video from the concert where Chris

can be heard mentioning Khan, the latter wrote: "CHRIS MARTIN FOREVER & EVER..." Expressing love for the British singer, SRK wrote a heartfelt caption, which read: "Look at the stars. Look how they shine for you..and everything you do! My brother Chris Martin you make me feel special..like your songs!! Love you and a big hug to your team. You are one in a billion my friend. India loves u, @

coldplay !!!"

The band did not just stop there, they also greeted fans in Hindi. Sending Indian fans into a frenzy, Martin said: "Aap sabka bohot swagat hai. Mumbai mein aakar humein bohot Khushi ho rahi hai." The band consists of vocalist Chris Martin, guitarist Jonny Buckland, bassist Guy Berryman, and drummer and percussionist Will Champion.

TV star Karan Veer Mehra wins 'Bigg Boss 18'

Popular television actor Karan Veer Mehra beat rival Vivian Dsena to lift the "Bigg Boss 18" trophy here at a ceremony, hosted by Bollywood superstar Salman Khan.

Show host Salman presented the trophy and the prize money of Rs 50 lakh to Mehra on late Sunday night.

Mehra, known for his roles in shows such as "Shanno Ki Shaadi", "Virrudh", "Amrit Manthan", "TV Biwi Aur Main" and "Fear Factor: Khatron Ke Khiladi 14", credited his family and fans for supporting him.

"I would like to give credit to a lot of people starting from my family—my mom, my sister, her children, my-brother-in-law and my dad. It is my dad's birthday today. And the Big Boss audience who watched the show and supported me," Mehra told PTI after his win.

Asked how he plans to spend the



winning amount, the actor said, "I will support the education of the kids of my staff." Mehra hoped that his stint on the show will help him get more work outside.

"I will not shy away from asking for work from producers," he added.

Season 18 of the show, which kickstarted on October 6 last year, saw Dsena, also a popular face on television, emerge as the first runner-up.

Dsena said he is not disheartened by losing the trophy to Mehra as he won many hearts during his stint on the show that requires contestants to be holed up in a special house for three months without much contact from the world outside.

"I'm a positive person and look forward to the positive aspects of life. I always say this but whatever happens, happens for the best. I've

got so much love from people. They made me reach the top two, and I was one of the contending champions for the trophy. So I think that's enough of an achievement."

YouTuber Rajal Dalal, a controversial fitness influencer, ended up in the third spot while the fourth and fifth places were won by TV actor Avinash Singh and North East contestant Chum Darang, respectively.

The grand finale also saw Bollywood star Aamir Khan promote his elder son Junaid Khan's upcoming film "Loveyapa", also starring Khushi Kapoor.

Actors Shilpa Shirodkar, Chahat Pandey, Shrutika Arjun, Nyrraa Banerjee, Muskan Bamne, Alice Kaushik, politician Tajindar Bagga, were also amongst the participants on the show.

'Jai Shri Ram', Jasprit Bumrah: Coldplay's Mumbai concert was celebration of music, culture

From asking what 'Jai Shri Ram' means to giving a tongue-in-cheek shout-out to cricketer Jasprit Bumrah, Coldplay's first concert in India in nine years was nothing short of a cultural celebration where the band's frontman Chris Martin captivated the audience with his humour and curiosity.

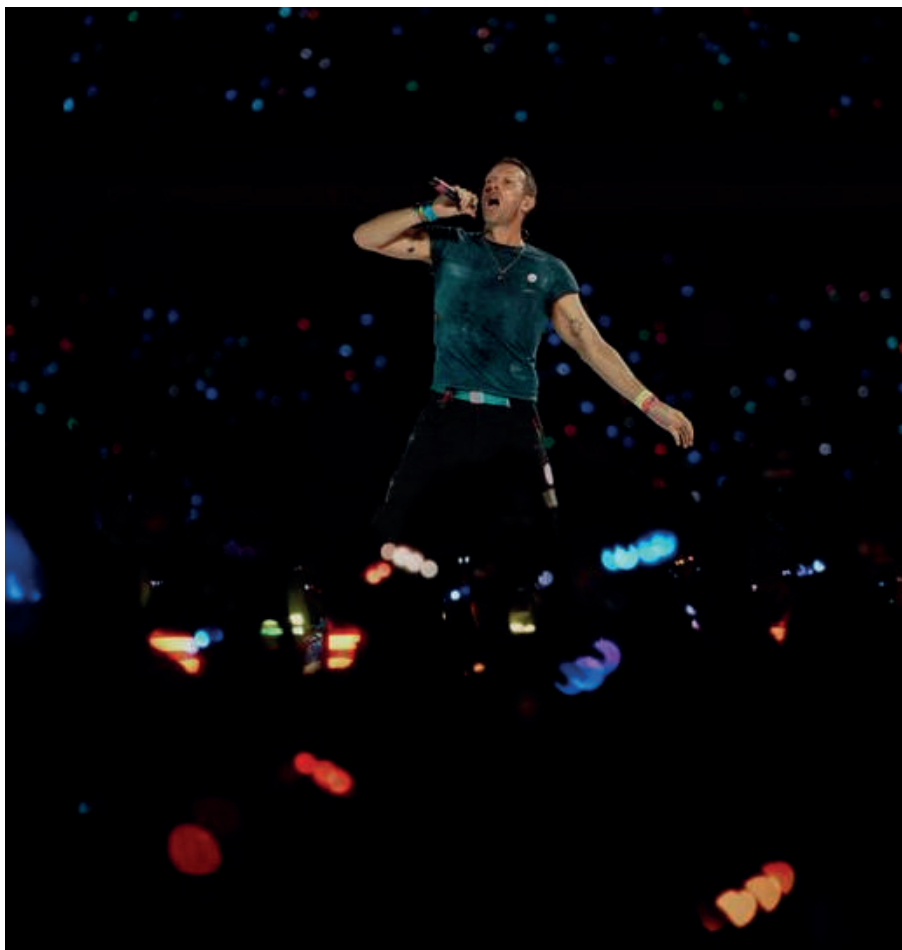
There were plenty of unforgettable moments that resonated deeply with fans at Navi Mumbai's DY Patil Sports Stadium where Coldplay kick-started their 'Music of the Spheres World Tour' in India.

For two hours at the packed stadium, Martin belted out chartbuster tracks, like "Paradise", "Viva La Vida", "Adventure of a Lifetime", "Yellow", "Fix You", and "A Sky Full of Stars".

One of the evening's most stand moments came when Martin noticed a fan holding a placard that read "Jai Shri Ram". Curious, he uttered the phrase, igniting thunderous cheers from the crowd.

He then said, "What does Jai Shri Ram mean? Must be something good."

Martin's innocent inquiry about the meaning of the phrase



only heightened the audience's excitement.

Throughout the evening, Martin made a concerted effort to

connect with the audience in their native tongues. His attempts to speak Hindi and Marathi were met with overwhelming warmth.

At the beginning of the concert, he interacted with the crowd in Marathi, Hindi, and English.

He began by saying in Marathi, "Tumhee saghre aaj chaan distat" (You all look beautiful today)."

He then said in Hindi, "Aap sab ka bahut swagat hai humare show pe. Mumbai mein aakar hume bahut khushi ho rahi hai. (You're all very welcome to our show. We feel happy after coming to Mumbai.)"

"Sorry, my Hindi and Marathi are bad but I tried my best," he said, before switching to English.

The British musician thanked Indian fans for giving him the chance to play in one of "our favourite places in the whole world".

"This is our fourth visit to India, the second time playing, and the first time we played our show, and we couldn't have asked for a better audience. It's amazing the way you welcome us," Martin said.

The singer-songwriter frequently checked on the crowd and made a point to ensure that they were well taken care of, asking about their well-being and hydration.

'Bound By Love'; Neeraj Chopra Gets Married, Shares First Pics On Social Media

New Delhi

Two-time Olympic medalist Neeraj Chopra has got married to his partner, Himani in a dreamy ceremony. Neeraj shared the first pics of his marriage on his social media handle on Sunday, January 19.

"Started a new chapter of life with my family," Neeraj wrote in his social media post.

"Grateful for every blessing that brought us to this moment together. Bound by love, happily ever after," he added.

Neeraj kept the details of his marriage secret and revealed the photos on his 'X' handle. The 27-year-old a heartwarming image of his mother blessing the couple at the ceremony.

Neeraj's uncle Bhim revealed that the couple has left the country for



Honeymoon.

"Yes, the marriage took place in India two days back. I can't tell the place where it took place," Bhim told PTI from his village at Khandra near Panipat in Haryana.

"The girl is from Sonipat and she is studying in the US. They have left the country for honeymoon and I am not aware of the places where they

are going. We wanted to keep it like that," said Bhim, who stays with the Olympic double medallist at Khandra, when asked about the surprise development.

Soon after the Indian athlete made it public that he got married, many celebrities started pouring him with wishes. Olympic medal-winning pugilist Vijender Singh and actor Gajraj Rao were

amongst the first ones to congratulate the Olympic gold medalist on his marriage.

Neeraj won a silver medal in the Paris Olympics just a few months ago. In 2021, he scripted history becoming the first Indian to win an individual gold medal in a track and field event at the Olympics.

Rohit Sharma Returns To Ranji Trophy After Nine Years

Mumbai

India captain and star batter Rohit Sharma

young batter Yashasvi Jaiswal, who shone in the five-match series



will play under skipper Ajinkya Rahane for Mumbai in their next Ranji Trophy game against Jammu and Kashmir. The game will mark the return of Rohit Sharma to the Ranji Trophy, the premier domestic champions, after nine long years.

The Mumbai Cricket Association announced the squad for the upcoming match against J and K to be played at the MCA Sharad Pawar Cricket Academy, Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC) ground in Mumbai from January 23 to 26. Rohit's last Ranji Trophy appearance came against Uttar Pradesh in November 2015.

Rohit had already made clear that he would play Ranji Trophy during the press conference held to announce India's ODI squad against England and for the Champions Trophy.

Apart from Rohit,

against Australia, will also play for Mumbai, the domestic giants.

Star India batter Shreyas Iyer is to be part of the 17-member squad picked by the Mumbai selectors led by Sanjay Patil and with Rohit, Ajinkya, Jaiswal and Shreyas, Mumbai batting looks solid and it could be a nightmare for JK bowlers.

India allrounder Shivam Dube and crisis man Siddesh Lad have the Mumbai batting lineup even stronger.

The bowling attack will be led by Shardul Thakur, popularly known as Lord Thakur, and will comprise the likes of Mohit Awasthi, Royston Dias, Shams Mulani and Tanush Kotian.

Hardik Tamore and Akash Anand have been picked as wicket-keepers in the 17-member squad.

Virat Kohli Likely To Play In Ranji Trophy After 13 Years

New Dehil

Ace Indian batter Virat Kohli is likely to return to the Ranji Trophy after 13 years as he has made himself available for Delhi's final group match against Railways. Delhi will lock horns against Railways on January 30. Kohli last played a Ranji Trophy clash against Uttar Pradesh in 2012. The right-handed batter failed to make it for the clash against Saurashtra due to a neck sprain but he has conveyed DDCA (Delhi Cricket Association) off his availability for the next match according to the news agency PTI.

"Virat has conveyed to DDCA president (Rohan Jaitley) and team management that he is available for the game against Railways," Delhi head coach Sarandeep Singh told PTI.

In a new set of directives issued by the Board of Control



for Cricket in India (BCCI), the board has made it mandatory for all players to participate in domestic cricket.

Kohli's teammate in the national side, Rishabh Pant will also return to the tournament after six years when he will take the field in Rajkot. India skipper Rohit Sharma will also play in Mumbai's fixture against Jammu and Kashmir.

Other Indian cricketers including Shubman Gill,

Yashasvi Jaiswal and Ravindra Jadeja will also be part of their Ranji Trophy teams in the next round of the Ranji Trophy for their respective sides.

Kohli has featured in the 23 fixtures for Delhi and has scored 1574 runs with an average of 50.77. While playing for Delhi in the Ranji Trophy, Kohli smashed five hundreds. He was impressive in the 2009-10 season scoring 374 runs across three fixtures with an average of 93.50.

Double Delight: India Men & Women Crowned As World Champions In Historic First-Ever Kho Kho World Cup

New Delhi

After the women's teams, India's men's team etched their names in sporting history by clinching the inaugural Kho Kho World Cup 2025 title at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium on Sunday night, January 19.

The Men in Blue dominated

this ensured a bright start for the side in Turn 1, preventing the Dream Run for their opponents. At the end of the turn, the scoreline was 26-0 in favor of the Indians — a perfect start for the side.

In Turn 2, Nepal were not able to match Team India's levels but did prevent the side from going on a

the final turn of the match — and the tournament.

Nepal fought hard in Turn 4 in their bid to come back against Team India. But the defenders, once again led by Pratik Waikar and this time Sachin Bhargo — fondly known as Chingari — proved too strong. Mehul and Suman Barman were equally

The team's journey to the championship was nothing short of remarkable. India showcased their dominance throughout the tournament, beginning with convincing victories over Brazil, Peru, and Bhutan in the group stages. Their momentum continued through the knockout rounds, where



the final against Nepal with a commanding 54-36 victory, led by outstanding performances from captain Pratik Waikar and tournament standout Ramji Kashyap. They joined the women's team, who dominated Nepal in another excellent final, sealing their victory with an emphatic score of 78-40.

Attacking first, an exceptional sky dive by Ramji Kashyap got Nepal's Suraj Pujara. Suyash Gargate then touched Bharat Sahu to give India a great start with 10 points in just 4 minutes. Sky dives were the name of the game for the Men in Blue, and

single Dream Run. Aditya Ganpule and skipper Pratik Waikar carried the team through this turn, and despite regular touches from the likes of Janak Chand and Suraj Pujara, the side carried a 26-18 lead into the second half of the clash.

India were in their stride in Turn 3, displaying unwavering confidence throughout. Captain Pratik Waikar shone on the mat with multiple sky dives, and with the support of Ramji Kashyap, another star of the tournament. Aditya Ganpule was also at his finest, and the team's collective effort took the score to 54-18 entering



impressive, and this sealed a much-deserved trophy for Team India as the score read 54-36 at the end of the final.

they outclassed Bangladesh in the quarterfinals before overcoming a strong South African side in the semifinals.

Wankhede Stadium's Golden Jubilee Marked With Gala Celebration; Cricketing Legends Grace Occasion

Mumbai

The 50th Anniversary of the iconic Wankhede Stadium concludes with a gala celebration on January 19, in the presence of cricketing legends and dignitaries. Established in 1974, the iconic stadium has been witness to numerous historic cricketing moments, etching its name firmly in modern cricket history. Cricketing legends and captains, past and present, echoed their sentiments, while groundsmen and support staff were honoured, among other celebratory activities that span a week-long celebration under the aegis of the Mumbai Cricket Association.

The gala concluding evening was graced by Mumbai legends and former and current Indian cricket captains—including Sunil Gavaskar, Sachin Tendulkar, Rohit Sharma, Dilip Vengsarkar, Ravi Shastri, Ajinkya Rahane, and Diana Edulji. Mumbai's legendary men's and women's players from both domestic and international cricket were also present. All echoed the significance



the stadium has had in shaping their career and India's overall cricketing journey. The essence of Mumbai's cricketing legacy which produces talented players year-on-year, also came to the forefront in deliberations among the star players.

In the enthralling evening hosted by Mandira Bedi and Prasanna Sant, performances by renowned artists Avadhoot Gupte and Ajay-Atul, and

a breathtaking laser show, kept the spectators engaged for a memorable experience.

Earlier this week, the Honourable Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Shri Devendra Fadnavis, sent a letter to the Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) and its fans, congratulating them on the 50th anniversary of Wankhede Stadium.

MCA President Shri Ajinkya

Naik said, "Wankhede Stadium is that shining star of Indian cricket that would never be deemed, and the 50-year legacy is testimony to that. As we honour the ones who have been associated with the legacy of Wankhede and have contributed their bit in this glorious journey, we also stand in the threshold of a new era that will nurture the next 50 years of excellence in cricket. Wankhede is as synonymous with Mumbai as is Mumbaikar's association with cricket. I am confident the legacy will only grow multifold in the coming decades."

To mark the occasion, the MCA office-bearers and Apex Council Members released a coffee table book and commemorative stamp celebrating the esteemed legacy of Wankhede Stadium, amidst the presence of cricketing legends and other dignitaries. The evening got even brighter with a photo-op with the ICC Champions Trophy and a cheerful 75th birthday celebration of Sunil Gavaskar.

Across State अक्रॉस मुंबई



युनायटेड महाराष्ट्रीय
साऊथ इंडियन फाऊंडेशन



संजय मंगेश भैरे
संपादक

मुंबई अध्यक्ष
डिजिटल मिडीया संपादक संघटना

