

## Snowfall in Higher Areas of Himachal Including Shimla, Weather Becomes Cool

**Diary Times Desk :** The weather has changed in Himachal Pradesh. Snowfall has started in the high peaks along the Rohtang Pass since Monday morning. Fresh snowfall of up to 10 cm has been recorded in Rohtang. Kullu and Lahaul administration have issued an alert due to the change in weather. At the same time, snow flakes are falling in the capital Shimla as well. Vehicles are also skidding due to snow. There is a wave of happiness among the tourists seeing the snowfall, because tourists reach Himachal with the desire to see snowfall in their mind. Tourists have been instructed not to go to snowy areas. At the same time, a large number of tourists have turned to Kullu-Manali for Christmas and New Year celebrations. On Sunday also, 11,322 vehicles have crossed Atal Tunnel Rohtang. The snowfall has raised the hope of a White Christmas among tourists and tourism businessmen. IMD senior scientist Shobhit Katiyar said, "Today there will be light rain and snowfall at many places in the state. Shimla and its surrounding areas will receive light snowfall. On the 27th, there will be snowfall again in the high altitude areas and on December 28, due to the effect of Western Disturbance, there will be rain and snowfall at many places. Many places in Himachal will see a drop in temperature by 2 to 3 degrees from tomorrow".

**Himachal News: Center wrote a letter, if Himachal Pradesh government implements UPS, it will get help of Rs 1600 crore**

**Diary Times Desk :** The central government has written a letter to the Himachal government asking it to implement the Unified Pension Scheme (UPS) for employees. If this is done, the central government will give special assistance of Rs 1600 crore to Himachal. According to the letter issued by the Center, bringing government employees appointed on contract in the year 2022-23 and 2023-24 to UPS will be beneficial. However, the state government has not yet responded to the letter. It is noteworthy that the state government has implemented the Old Pension Scheme in Himachal. The Center has to give Himachal Rs 9,000 crore. This amount is the share of NPS personnel deposited with the Center.



## Stop hypocrisy, says Ravi Shankar Prasad on Congress protests over remarks on Ambedkar

**Agencies :** The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Monday renewed its attack on the Congress for its continuing agitation over Union home minister Amit Shah's comments on BR Ambedkar in Parliament last week. Senior BJP leader Ravi Shankar Prasad said the Opposition and the Congress should stop its hypocrisy. "They made him lose polls twice, forced him to quit as law minister and did not confer the Bharat Ratna on him. The Congress needs to stop the hypocrisy," Prasad said on Monday, demanding the Congress apologise for humiliating Ambedkar during his lifetime and later, his legacy. The Congress has announced that the party has planned conferences in 150 cities across the country on the controversy around Shah's speech in the Rajya Sabha. During his reply to the debate marking 75 years of the Constitution last week, Shah attacked the Congress and alleged the opposition party repeatedly disrespected Ambedkar. "It has become a fashion to say Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar...If they had taken God's name so many times.



## Bengaluru sees 0.59% rise in forest cover, ranks among India's greenest metros: Report

**Agencies :** Bengaluru has witnessed a notable rise in its forest cover, according to the India State of Forest Report 2023, which highlights a 0.59 per cent increase from the previous evaluation in 2021. As reported by Bangalore Mirror, the city's total forest cover now spans 89.61 square kilometers, positioning it among India's greenest metropolitan areas, following Delhi (194.15 km<sup>2</sup>) and Mumbai (110.84 km<sup>2</sup>). Bengaluru's urban forest area has grown by 2.09 km<sup>2</sup>, ranking second in the country for urban forest expansion, trailing only Ahmedabad, which gained 5.48 km<sup>2</sup>, the report added. However, some other major cities have faced setbacks. Chennai and Hyderabad, for instance, saw reductions in their forest cover, with losses of 2.64 km<sup>2</sup> and 1.61 km<sup>2</sup>, respectively.

## Jaishankar travels to US on Tuesday in 1st visit by Indian side after Trump win

**Agencies :** External affairs minister S Jaishankar will make a six-day visit to the US from Tuesday, the first by a senior Indian functionary since Donald Trump won the US presidential election in November. Jaishankar will meet his counterparts to discuss bilateral and global issues, the external affairs ministry said in a brief statement on Monday without giving details. Jaishankar will visit the United States on December 24-29 and will also chair a conference of India's consul generals in that country, the statement said. "He will be meeting counterparts to discuss key bilateral, regional and global issues," it added. People familiar with the matter said on condition of anonymity that Jaishankar is expected to meet his US counterpart Antony Blinken and other officials in what is likely to be the Indian side's final engagement.

## "No Comment": India On Bangladesh Seeking Sheikh Hasina's Extradition

**Agencies :** India received a note verbale from Bangladesh in connection with an extradition request for Sheikh Hasina, the ousted prime minister of India's neighbouring country where a caretaker government is in charge, sources said. "We confirm that we have received a note verbale from the Bangladesh High Commission today in connection with an extradition request. At this time, we have no comment to offer on this matter," a source said. A note verbale is an unsigned diplomatic message in third person. Earlier, today, Bangladesh's de facto Foreign Minister Touhid Hossain said Dhaka wants Ms Hasina back to face trial. "We have sent a note verbale to the Indian government saying that Bangladesh wants her back here for the judicial process," Mr Hossain told reporters in Dhaka. India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has not commented on the matter. Ms Hasina, 77, left her country on August 5,

## Kerala Removes Biomedical Waste Illegally Dumped In Tamil Nadu

**Agencies :** Four people were arrested for facilitating the illegal dumping of biomedical waste in Tamil Nadu's Tirunelveli district, even as the Kerala government initiated its removal. The removal of 16 truckloads of biomedical waste, including blood samples and hazardous materials, follows a directive from the National Green Tribunal. The environmental body had taken up the issue on its own and ordered the removal of the waste within three days. The incident, involving the illicit dumping of waste from Kerala hospitals in five villages in the Tirunelveli district, had raised serious environmental and public health concerns. The illegal disposal of biomedical waste poses significant risks.



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## Himachal Congress: Pratibha Singh said- Congress will protest until Amit Shah apologizes

**Diary Times Desk** : State Congress President and former MP Pratibha Singh has said that Congress will continue to oppose Amit Shah until he apologizes to the country for insulting Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar in Parliament. She has said that he has not only insulted Ambedkar but also the Constitution of this country. For this, he should immediately apologize to the country. Addressing a joint press conference at the State Congress Headquarters Rajiv Bhawan on Monday, State Congress President Pratibha Singh and All India Congress Committee spokesperson Theog MLA Kuldeep Singh Rathore, Pratibha Singh said that preventing Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi from entering Parliament is a violation of the rights of the elected representative in democracy, which cannot be tolerated at any level. She said that the BJP in a pre-planned manner scuffled at the main gate of Parliament to avoid any discussion on issues like Ambedkar and Adani in Parliament and to divert people's attention.



## PM Modi Meets Yoga Practitioner, Other Influencers In Kuwait

**Agencies** : Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday met Shaikha AJ Al-Sabah, an avid yoga practitioner and founder of the first licensed yoga studio 'Daratma' in Kuwait, and other influencers from the Gulf country. PM Modi, who arrived here on Saturday on a two-day trip - the first to this Gulf nation by an Indian prime minister in 43 years, also met Fahad Ghazi Alabduljaleel, the President of Kuwait Heritage Society, and appreciated his work in preserving the rare manuscripts and artefacts. Met HH Shaikha AJ Al-Sabah in Kuwait. She has distinguished herself for her passion towards Yoga and fitness. She has established her own Yoga and wellness studio, which is quite popular in Kuwait. We talked about ways to make Yoga more popular among the youth," PM Modi posted on X. They discussed ways to further popularise yoga, especially among the youth, the prime minister's office said.

## Protests in J&K over reservation policy, CM Omar Abdullah's son joins stir

**Agencies** : Several political leaders and hundreds of students have gathered outside the residence of Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Omar Abdullah to seek a review of the reservation policy, which was introduced by the lieutenant governor-led administration earlier this year. Present with the students was Abdullah's own party (National Conference) member and MP Ruhullah Mehdi. In a post on X on Sunday, he had called for a protest at Gupkar Road outside the CM's residential office to demand rationality in the reservation policy. Opposition leaders from PDP, Waheed Para and Iltija Mufti, along with Awami Itihad Party leader Sheikh Khurshi (brother of Engineer Rashid), have also joined the protest. On top of all this, Abdullah's son also stepped outside to join Mehdi and the students. Meanwhile, Mufti spoke to the students and later told reporters, "We are not here to do politics." She said the politics in the valley revolves around Article 370 and the restoration of statehood, with no one talking about the "youth". "They have very basic demands - like the reservation must be equitable and not discriminatory... We hope the govt that came to power with a huge mandate and with a promise that they will rationalise the reservation - we hope the NC govt fulfils their promises in a time-bound manner," Mufti told ANI. Hours after the protest began, chief minister Omar Abdullah called in the students.

## Himachal: Finance and Defence Ministry gives green signal to Bilaspur-Manali-Leh railway line; 2200 hectares of land will be acquired

**Agencies** : Bilaspur-Manali-Leh rail line of strategic importance has got the green signal from the Finance and Defense Ministry. Now its file has reached the National Security Advisor (NSA) for approval. After discussion with the NSA, the file will be sent to the PMO. After this, it will be decided when and from where to give budget for the rail line and when the work will start. The operation of Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla rail link is likely to start next month. It is expected that after this the entire focus of the Center will be on Bilaspur-Manali-Leh rail line. The target is to get the train from Bhanupalli to Bilaspur by the year 2027. The DPR of the rail line project has been prepared in the year 2022. According to this, the estimated cost of the project was estimated to be more than one lakh crore, but now it has increased after the amendment. The Railway Ministry has increased the size of the escape tunnels (safety tunnels), due to which the cost has increased. These tunnels will be built along with the main tunnels of the railway line so that people can be evacuated safely in case of emergency. A total of 2200 hectares of land will be acquired in Himachal and Ladakh for the railway.

## CAG Report: Salary reduced by 933.81 crores, pension increased by 838.90 crores; Financial management also questioned

**Diary Times Desk** : Due to financial management, the government spent Rs 933.81 crore less than the budget fixed on salary in the year 2024-25, but the expenditure on pension increased by Rs 838.90 crore. The situation on fiscal responsibility and budget management has been clarified in the report presented by CAG. According to this, the expenditure on grant in aid for salary and non-salary will also increase by Rs 186.25 crore in the current financial year. The total expenditure on payment of salary of employees will be Rs 14533.82 crore and on pension Rs 9961.10 crore. In the current financial year, Rs 1077.88 crore was fixed for giving subsidy, which will become Rs 1851.18 crore. That is, there will be an increase of Rs 773.30 crore in it. However, Rs 6255.34 crore has been fixed for payment of interest. There has been no increase in this. This year, tax collection was proposed to be Rs 15100.69 crore, but it will decrease to Rs 14032.29 crore. That is, there will be an increase of -1068.40 crore rupees. The revenue deficit will also increase by Rs 1493.25 crore from the estimated budget and the fiscal deficit will increase by Rs 2308.11 crore. According to CAG, capital expenditure will increase by Rs 615.16 crore in this financial year. This will be due to works like rural water supply, purchase of e-buses, Chandigarh-Baddi railway line and construction of state guest house in Dwarka etc. Other capital expenditure will also increase by Rs 150 crore. Expenditure on centrally sponsored schemes will also increase by Rs 55.56 crore. Revenue from taxes has increased in the state as compared to previous years. In the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India on state finances for the year 2022-23.

## 'I turned steering wheels to avoid...': Truck driver breaks silence after Bengaluru crash kills six

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## Himachal Tourism: Before Christmas, 90% hotels in Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh, 80% in Shimla, 70% in Manali are packed



**Diary Times Desk :** A large number of tourists have started visiting Himachal Pradesh to celebrate Christmas and New Year. Shimla, Manali, Dharamshala, Dalhousie, Kufri, Narkanda and Kasauli have been packed with tourists since this weekend. The occupancy of hotels in Shimla has reached 80 per cent, while in Manali and Dharamshala it has reached 70 per cent. Up to 90 per cent of the hotel rooms in Kasauli were packed on the weekend. After the weather department forecast snowfall in the state on 27 and 28 December, the number of tourists is increasing rapidly. Tourists from Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and other states are visiting the tourist places of Himachal to celebrate Christmas and New Year. Tourists are also flocking to other tourist places. The problem of traffic jam has worsened as the crowd of tourists has increased in the capital Shimla. For the last two days, there has been a long traffic jam on the city's Cart Road. After snowfall in Rohtang, the number of tourists has also increased significantly in Manali. Tourism businessmen are quite excited due to the increasing crowd of tourists.

## Govt working to strengthen healthcare facilities: Minister

**Diary Times Desk :** Health Minister Dhani Ram Shandil today visited civil hospitals at Fatehpur, Jawali, Nurpur and Indora in the lower region of Kangra district and reviewed the problems and shortcomings in the healthcare institutions. On this occasion, he said the state government was committed to strengthening healthcare services in the various institutions in a phased manner. The government had earmarked Rs 3,415 crore budget for the current fiscal year for expanding health services and was working to provide better facilities to the citizens. During his day-long visit in the civil hospitals, Shandil interacted with the patients undergoing treatment and inquired about their well-being. He directed the hospital administration to provide all necessary facilities to the patients in civil hospitals and ensure their speedy recovery. The minister said the Congress government is committed to providing state-of-the-art health services to the people of Himachal. He said that 68 model health institutions were being set up in every Assembly segment in a phased manner and the government had planned to post six specialist doctors in every institution. He asserted that 45 such institutions had been established across the state.

## Shimla's Christ Church gets makeover ahead of Christmas

**Diary Times Desk :** Shimla's Christ Church, the second oldest church in North India, has been given a complete makeover ahead of Christmas. The church, built in 1857 in the Neo-Gothic style at a cost of around Rs 50,000, has drawn significant attention from both locals and tourists who are making a beeline to get a glimpse of the decked up church. The church's long-dysfunctional clock was recently repaired by Ashwani, an engineer from Chandigarh, who repaired it all by himself. The renovation process, which began in 2023, has been completed with the church's exterior getting refurbished this year. Rev Vinita Roy, Priest in Chief, said, "The Christ Church was in deplorable condition therefore it needed renovation. Funds for the renovation were raised through donations from the local community." Roy said the church has been given a complete makeover with high-quality paint on both its interior and exterior, along with new signboards and lighting provided by the Municipal.

## Himachal: Saksham of Manali made third national record at the age of 5, name registered in OMG Book of Records

**Diary Times Desk :** Saksham of Manali has created history once again. Saksham's name has been registered for the third time in OMG Book of Records Mumbai. At the age of just five, Saksham has memorized the flags of 195 countries, their languages, currencies and capitals of most countries and the spelling of the names of all countries. Not only this, the child also has complete knowledge of which country is where on the map. Saksham's extraordinary achievement has surprised everyone. He has been given the title of miracle child. His talent and hard work has made him the pride of the country. Saksham lives in Manali with his parents. Saksham's father Sagar is a health teacher. Mother Sneha Thakur is a hotelier. Saksham is a student of UKG class. His parents are very happy with this achievement. They thanked God for this. They say that Saksham started holding books at the age of 5 months. At the age of 15 months, he learned the alphabet.

## Solan: Dispute between two communities over construction of a cowshed near the dargah, demand to remove illegal construction; Police stopped the work

**Diary Times Desk :** There has been a dispute between two communities over the construction of a cowshed near the dargah in Bilanwali village of Baddi. The youth of the village say that they had prepared documents to build a cowshed on empty Shamlat land and started the construction work. A particular community raised objections at the construction site. There is a dargah near the place where the cowshed is being constructed. People of a particular community take care of it. People of a particular community opposed the construction of the cowshed and raised objections. As the debate between the two sides escalated, the atmosphere on the spot became tense. During this, the youth also raised slogans. The police, who reached the spot, stopped the construction work and asked to mark the land. On receiving information about the dispute, the police reached the spot and tried to bring the situation under control. The police recorded the statements of the people present on the spot. At present, no official statement has come on this matter. The youth of the village say that the number of animals left on the road in Baddi area is increasing.

## Intimidation of industries will not be tolerated: Himachal Pradesh CM

**Diary Times Desk :** The Himachal Pradesh Government will take strict action against any entity trying to intimidate or harass industries, Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu told a delegation of industrialists which called on him on Monday. As the delegation apprised the Chief Minister about their various demands, Sukhu said the state government is facilitating the industries by creating a conducive atmosphere for their growth in Himachal Pradesh. "Any kind of intimidation or harassment of industries would be dealt with sternly and strict action would be ensured against the culprits," a statement quoting the Chief Minister said. Sukhu also said the state government is promoting green industries in line with the target of transforming Himachal Pradesh into a green energy state by March 31, 2026. Urging the industrialists to invest in information technology, food processing, tourism, and hydropower energy, Sukhu said that climate change is the biggest challenge.

## Centre notifies appointment of Justice Sandhawalia as Himachal HC Chief Justice

**Diary Times Desk :** The Centre on Monday notified the appointment of Justice GS Sandhawalia, the senior-most puisne Judge of the High Court of Punjab and Haryana, as the next Chief Justice of the Himachal Pradesh High Court. "In exercise of the powers conferred by clause (1) of Article 217 of the Constitution of India, the President is pleased to appoint Shri Justice Gurmeet Singh Sandhawalia, Judge, Punjab and Haryana High Court, to be the Chief Justice of the Himachal Pradesh High Court, with effect from the date he assumes charge of his office," a Department of Justice notification read. The notification came more than three months after the Supreme Court Collegium recommended his appointment as the Chief Justice of the Himachal Pradesh High Court. He was supposed to take over on October 18 on the retirement of Justice Rajiv Shakdher but the notification was delayed. On July 11, the top court's Collegium had recommended Justice Sandhawalia to be appointed as the Chief Justice of the Madhya Pradesh High Court but the Collegium's resolution was superseded on September 17 and he was recommended to be appointed as the Himachal Pradesh High Court Chief Justice.

## Three pro-Khalistani terrorists killed in encounter in Uttar Pradesh

**Agencies :** Three Khalistani terrorists were killed in a police encounter in Uttar Pradesh's Pilibhit district early Monday, December 23. The suspects, Gurvinder Singh (25), Virender Singh alias Ravi (23), and Jaspreet Singh alias Pratap Singh (18), were members of the banned Khalistan Commando Force and had allegedly thrown grenades at a police post in Punjab's Gurdaspur district.

## 'Don't Blame Allu Arjun': Husband Of Woman Who Died In Stampede

**Agencies :** The husband of the woman who died in the stampede at the premiere of the movie Pushpa 2: The Rise, says he does not blame Telugu superstar Allu Arjun for the events of December 4 and is ready to withdraw the police case filed in the matter. Bhaskar, whose son is still in coma and admitted in hospital, said he has received full support from the actor regarding the treatment of his son.

## Send Sheikh Hasina Back To Dhaka, Bangladesh Writes To India

**Agencies :** The interim government in Bangladesh has sent a diplomatic note and urged India to send deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina back to Dhaka. The 77-year-old Awami League leader has been living in India since August 5 when she fled Bangladesh amid massive protests that brought down her 16-year-old regime and forced her to flee. The Dhaka-based International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) has issued arrest warrants in names of Sheikh Hasina and her ministers, advisors and former military and civil officials, accusing them of "crimes against humanity and genocide". Touhid Hossain, the foreign affairs adviser in the interim government, told reporters, "We have sent a note verbale (diplomatic message) to the Indian government saying that Bangladesh wants her back here for the judicial process." Earlier, Home Advisor Jahangir Alam said his office has sent a letter to the External Affairs Ministry here to facilitate Ms Hasina's extradition. "We have sent a letter to the foreign ministry regarding her extradition. The process is currently underway," he told the media. Mr Alam said an extradition treaty exists between Dhaka and New Delhi Ms Hasina could be taken back to Bangladesh under that arrangement. The diplomatic communication seeking Sheikh Hasina's return comes weeks after Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri visited Bangladesh.

## "Intention To Dupe UPSC": Ex-IAS Trainee Puja Khedkar Denied Pre-Arrest Bail



**Agencies :** The Delhi High Court has denied anticipatory bail to former IAS trainee officer Puja Khedkar, who made headlines in June and August amid claims she lied about physical and mental disabilities, and changed her name and surname, as well as forging an OBC certificate, to clear the exam. The court said her intentions, prima facie, were to dupe authorities and observed "her steps (were) part of a larger conspiracy. Ms Khedkar, it was also observed, is "unfit for appointment". The charges against her, which include forgery and cheating, are a "classic example of fraud committed not only an authority but also the nation at large", the court said Monday afternoon. "Conduct of the petitioner was purely driven with a motive to dupe the complainant UPSC, or the Union Public Service Commission, and all documents allegedly forged by her were done to reap benefits of schemes meant for the (disadvantaged) groups of the society," the court said.

## 'Why Are BJP Allies Silent?' Congress On Amit Shah Ambedkar Comment Row

**Agencies :** The Congress on Monday questioned the "silence" of BJP's allies TDP and JD (U) on Union Home Minister Amit Shah's remarks on B R Ambedkar. Congress spokesperson and chairperson of the party's social media and digital platforms cell, Supriya Shrinete, demanded that Mr Shah apologise and resign from the Union cabinet. "Shah has committed an unpardonable crime of insulting Ambedkar. He should apologise and resign from the post of Home Minister," Ms Shrinete told reporters in Indore. She alleged the entire machinery of the "anti-Constitution".

## Government schools can now fail Classes 5, 8 students as 'no-detention policy' ends

**Agencies :** The central government has made a major change in education policy, ending the "no-detention policy" for fifth and eighth graders. This means that students in these classes who fail their year-end exams can now be held back and must repeat the grade. "The Union Education Ministry has taken a big decision and abolished the 'No Detention Policy'. Students who fail the annual examination in classes 5 and 8 will be failed," Sanjay Kumar, Secretary, posted today.

## Ex-Supreme Court judge Justice V Ramasubramanian is new NHRC chief

**Agencies :** Former Supreme Court judge V Ramasubramanian was on Monday appointed as the new chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). The post of NHRC chairperson had been lying vacant since Justice (retd) Arun Kumar Mishra completed his tenure on June 1. Mishra, a former Supreme Court judge, was also the first non-CJI to be appointed to the NHRC chief post since the amendment of the Protection of Human Rights Act in 2019. He had succeeded former Chief Justice of India H L Dattu. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani, a member of NHRC, had become its acting chairperson with effect from June 2 after Mishra had demitted office. "Hon'ble President of India appoints Shri Justice V. Ramasubramanian (Retd.) as the Chairperson, and Shri Priyank Kanoongo and Dr. Justice Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi (Retd.) as the Members of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India," the NHRC posted on X.

## Bengaluru Techie Loses ₹ 11.8 Crore After "Digital Arrest"

**Agencies :** A 39-year-old software engineer became a victim to a "digital arrest" scam and lost ₹ 11.8 crore when fraudsters impersonating police officials claimed that his Aadhaar card was being misused to open bank accounts for money laundering, police said on Monday. The fraud occurred between November 25 and December 12, they said. According to police, in his complaint, the victim alleged that on November 11, he received a call from a person who claimed to be an officer of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI).

## PM Modi distributes 71,000 appointment letters at Rozgar Mela

**Agencies :** Prime Minister Narendra Modi distributed 71,000 appointment letters for jobs in government departments and organisations at a Rozgar Mela on Monday. "Today marks a new beginning for thousands of youth in the country. Your years of dreams have come true, years of hard work have paid off. This outgoing year of 2024 is bringing new happiness to you. I extend my heartfelt congratulations to all of you and your families," Modi said as he virtually addressed the Mela. Modi said that in the last one and a half years, the government has offered about one million permanent jobs. In a press release, the prime minister's office said that the Rozgar Mela will be held at 45 locations across the country and recruitments are taking place for central government's ministries and departments. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, however, called the event an "event management stunt". "To hide his promise of giving '2 crore jobs every year', he has to do such whitewashing from time to time. RTI has revealed that 9.56 lakh posts are vacant in 80 departments of the central government alone," he said in a post on X.





## Donald Trump threatens to take over Panama Canal over 'ridiculous fees'

**Agencies :** US President-elect Donald Trump suggested on Sunday that his new administration could try to regain control of the Panama Canal that, according to him, the United States "foolishly" ceded to its Central American ally. Trump said that the ships passing through the vital waterway are charged "ridiculous" fees to do so. "We're being ripped off at the Panama Canal," he said in a rally in Arizona, the Associated Press reported. Trump bemoaned that his country "foolishly gave it away." He said that if the principles, both moral and legal, of this "magnanimous gesture of giving are not followed, then we will demand that the Panama Canal be returned to the United States of America, in full, quickly and without question." I'm not going to stand for it. So to the officials of Panama, please be guided accordingly," he added.

## Pak: Shehbaz Sharif govt seeks list of demands from Imran Khan's PTI

**Agencies :** Pakistan's federal government has sought a charter of demands from the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) as the first round of talks between the two sides concluded in the National Assembly, ARY News reported. The meeting presided over by Pakistan's National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq had the participation of representatives of the government and PTI. During the meeting, PTI and the federal government held talks on the current political situation. For the meeting, the government committee included Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar, Rana Tanveer Hussain, Irfan Siddiqui, Aleem Khan, Raja Pervaiz Ashraf, Naveed Qamar, Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, and Farooq Sattar. The opposition committee comprised Asad Qaiser, Hamid Raza, and Allama Raja Nasir Abbas. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur could not attend the meeting between PTI and the federal government due to his engagement in a cabinet meeting. Furthermore, Opposition leader Omar Ayub could not attend the meeting due to his court appearance.

## Donald Trump makes crypto and defence picks for his second-term team

**Agencies :** President-elect Donald Trump filled out key defense and crypto policy roles in his next administration, making billionaire Stephen Feinberg official as the No. 2 at the Pentagon and picking Michael Kratsios to lead tech policy at the White House. Trump will nominate Kratsios to lead the Office of Science and Technology Policy, a Senate-confirmed position. The managing director of Scale AI served in lower technology-related posts in the first Trump administration and has been helping to staff up the Department of Government Efficiency, the Elon Musk-driven initiative to downsize the federal government. Joining Kratsios in crypto policy roles will be Lynne Parker, Kratsios' former deputy, who will direct the Presidential Council of Advisers for Science and Technology, or PCAST, and Bo Hines, a former North Carolina State and Yale football player and unsuccessful Republican congressional candidate. Hines will direct the new Crypto Council.



## Joe Biden Commutes Death Sentences Of 37 Federal Inmates Ahead Of Christmas



**Agencies :** US President Joe Biden on Monday commuted the death sentences of 37 of 40 federal inmates, taking action ahead of the return of Donald Trump who oversaw a sweeping number of lethal injections during his first term. With less than a month left in office, Biden had faced growing calls from death penalty opponents to commute the sentences of those on death row to life in prison without parole, which the 37 will now serve. The move leaves only a handful of high-profile killers who acted out of hate or terrorism facing the federal death penalty -- for which there has been a moratorium under Biden. These commutations are consistent with the moratorium my Administration has imposed on federal executions, in cases other than terrorism and hate-motivated mass murder," Biden said in a statement. I am commuting the sentences of 37 of the 40 individuals on federal death row to life sentences without the possibility of parole," he said.

## Bashar Al-Assad's Wife Files For Divorce, Wants To Return To UK: Report

**Agencies :** Asma al-Assad, wife of deposed Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, has filed for divorce and expressed her desire to return to the United Kingdom, reports The Jerusalem Post quoting Turkish and Arab media sources. The report said that Asma al-Assad is dissatisfied with her life in Moscow, where the Assads have resided in exile. Asma has allegedly applied to a Russian court seeking special permission to leave the country, with her application currently under review by Russian authorities. Born in London in 1975 to Syrian parents, Asma al-Assad holds dual British-Syrian citizenship. She completed degrees in computer science and French literature at King's College London before pursuing a career in investment banking. Asma married Bashar al-Assad in December 2000.

## Brazil Businessman, 9 Members Of His Family Killed In Plane Crash

**Agencies :** Ten members of a family died early Sunday when their small plane slammed into a commercial district in the city of Gramado in southern Brazil, civil defense authorities said. Officials had earlier put the death count at nine. The plane, a Piper Cheyenne 400 turboprop, was being flown by a businessman named Luiz Claudio Salgueiro Galeazzi, police confirmed to AFP, and the passengers were all family members of his. The aircraft crashed shortly after takeoff from the nearby city of Canela, striking the chimney of a building and then a house before falling onto a furniture store, the Rio Grande do Sul state security secretariat said in a statement. An inn was also damaged, it added. "There are no survivors of the plane," Cleber dos Santos Lima of the state civil police told AFP. At least 17 people were injured on the ground, two of them seriously, while several others were treated for smoke inhalation.

## After Panama Canal, Trump now wants US to buy Greenland: 'Absolute necessity'

**Agencies :** After Donald Trump demanded the return of the Panama Canal under the US's control, the President-elect has now said that he wanted to buy and control Greenland, asserting it was an "absolute necessity". Greenland is a part of the North American continent but is controlled by Denmark. "For purposes of national security and freedom throughout the world, the United States of America feels that the ownership and control of Greenland is an absolute necessity," Trump wrote on Truth Social. While Greenland has autonomous self-rule, it is still a part of the Kingdom of Denmark. The 78-year-old Republican leader made the statement while announcing PayPal co-founder Ken Howery as the US's Ambassador to Denmark. Trump's renewed interest in Greenland is not new as the President-elect had made his desire known to control the territory during his first term from 2017 to 2021. In 2019, Trump indicated that he wanted to purchase Greenland as he was mostly drawn to the country's natural resources and geopolitical relevance. His desire, however, drew severe backlash from leaders in Denmark, with Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen saying that "Greenland was not for sale". "Greenland is not for sale. Greenland is not Danish. Greenland belongs to Greenland."

## 3 Khalistani terrorists involved in Gurdaspur grenade attack killed in UP encounter



**Agencies :** Three terror suspects allegedly involved in the grenade attack in Gurdaspur were killed in an encounter with a joint team of Uttar Pradesh Police and Punjab Police in Pilibhit early on Monday, with Punjab Director General of Police Gaurav Yadav calling it a major breakthrough against Pakistan-sponsored Khalistan Zindabad Force (KZF) module. The accused were identified as Gurvinder Singh (25), Virender Singh alias Ravi (23), and Jaspreet Singh alias Partap Singh (18), all residents of Punjab's Gurdaspur. The encounter took place in Puranpur area of Pilibhit in Uttar Pradesh. Amitabh Yash, Additional Director General (Law and Order), Uttar Pradesh Police, said the trio was involved in the grenade attack on a police check point in Gurdaspur. "The three sustained serious injuries in the encounter and were rushed to the Community Health Centre at Puranpur," he said. The ADG said the three suspects later succumbed to their injuries. Two AK-47 rifles, two Glock pistols, and a huge cache of ammunition were seized from them, he said. In a post on X, the Punjab Police chief said, "In a major breakthrough against a Pak-sponsored Khalistan Zindabad Force (KZF) terror module, a joint operation of UP Police and Punjab Police has led to an encounter with three module members who fired at the police party."

## Out for birthday party, 3 people shot dead in Panchkula's Morni

**Agencies :** Three people were shot dead in the parking of a resort on Morni-Thapli road in Panchkula on Sunday night. The three had left the resort after celebrating a birthday when unidentified assailants fired multiple shots at their SUV. According to a friend of theirs, one of the deceased is Vicky, a resident of Delhi, who, along with his nephew and a woman from Hisar, was here for the birthday celebration. The three were brought to the civil hospital, Sector 6, here, where they were declared dead. Pinjore SHO Sombir said the victims were identified as Vicky and Vipin, both from Delhi; and Nia from Hisar. Assistant Commissioner of Police (Crime), Panchkula, Arvind Kamboj, said Vicky, aged around 30, had a criminal background and faced some cases.

## Jumping red light most common traffic offence in UT, 4.29L fined

**Agencies :** Red light jumping emerged as the leading traffic violation in the UT this year, accounting for 48.41% of the total 8,86,881 challans issued till November 18. A staggering 4,29,355 challans were issued for the offence. The police collected a whopping Rs 19.70 crore as fine for different traffic offences this year. While red light jumping led the chart, speeding wasn't far behind. With 1,29,545 challans, it became the second most common offence followed closely by violation of stopping vehicles on zebra crossing, which saw 94,824 challans. Helmetless riding also remained rampant on the city roads. This year, 81,957 challans were issued to riders and pillion riders without helmet. Among them, women riders were caught in significant numbers – 6,722 were fined for riding without helmet, and 43,852 for riding pillion without the protective headgear. Wrong parking, too, remained a common sight in the city, leading to 30,969 challans. Meanwhile, social media played a significant role in traffic enforcement.

## NIA arrests key aide of Khalistani terrorist Lakhbir Landa

**Agencies :** In a major breakthrough in the Punjab terror conspiracy case, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Monday arrested a key aide of Khalistani terrorist Lakhbir Singh alias Landa and gangster Bachitar Singh alias Pavitar Batala, according to an official statement. Jatinder Singh alias Jyoti of district Gurdaspur, Punjab, had been absconding since the arrest of weapons supplier Baljit Singh alias Rana Bhai in July 2024. He was arrested on Monday from Mumbai after extensive technical and on-ground efforts by the NIA. The anti-terror agency has identified Jatinder as a member of the terror gang formed by foreign-based Landa of the banned terrorist organisation, Babbar Khalsa International (BKI), and an aide of Batala, a close associate of Landa. Jatinder Singh was providing weapons to on-ground operatives of Landa and Batala in Punjab, as per NIA investigations.

## Serial killer held in 11 murder cases over one year

**Agencies :** Police arrested Garhshankar resident Ram Sarup (43), alias Sodhi, for allegedly being involved in 11 murder cases in Rupnagar, Fatehgarh Sahib, and Hoshiarpur in the last year. He was finally arrested in the murder case of Kiratpur Sahib resident Maninder Singh, 37, who was found dead near the Jio filling station on Manali road on August 18 this year. The police said in five out of the 11 cases the victims were confirmed to be dead, while the details in the rest were yet to emerge. Rupnagar SSP Gulneet Singh Khurana said the suspect was arrested from Chauda village in Garhshankar of Hoshiarpur. He was produced in a local court, and police remand was sought for further questioning. Sources said the suspect's modus operandi involved taking lifts from unsuspecting travellers for sexual gratification and killing them after an altercation over payments. Cops suspect the serial killer was sexually active and killed males after disputes over payment. The suspect is married and has three kids. He lives with his parents and is unemployed. Deceased Maninder used to run a tea stall near Mauda toll plaza. A case under Section 103 of the BNS was registered at the Kiratpur Sahib police station on August 19. With his arrest, the police claimed to have solved two murders in Rupnagar. Ghanauli resident Mukadar Singh, 34, a tractor mechanic, was found dead with grievous injuries near Panjhora road on April 5. A case was registered at the Kiratpur Sahib police station on April 6. On January 24, Rupnagar youth Harpreet Singh, alias Sunny.

## Rajnath visits Sirsa, pays tributes to former Haryana CM OP Chautala

**Agencies :** Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday visited Teja Khera in the Sirsa district and paid tributes to former Haryana chief minister Om Prakash Chautala, who passed away last week. Singh reached the Chautala family's farmhouse in the Teja Khera village and met the departed Indian National Lok Dal chief's sons Abhay Singh Chautala, who is an INLD leader and Ajay Singh Chautala, who heads the JJP party. He also met O P Chautala's younger brother and former Haryana minister Ranjit Singh Chautala and offered condolences to the Chautala family. Ex-chief minister Chautala was former deputy prime minister Devi Lal's eldest of the four sons. Chautala, who was a five-time chief minister, died in Gurugram on Friday. He was 89.

## 4 children killed in brick kiln wall collapse in Hisar

**Agencies :** Four children were killed when a wall of a brick kiln collapsed on them while they were asleep in Budana village in Haryana's Hisar district, police said on Monday. A girl was critically injured in the incident that took place on Sunday night in the Narnaund police station area. The deceased were identified as Nisha (3 months), Suraj (9), Nandini (5) and Vivek (9), they said. According to sources, many families of labourers from Uttar Pradesh work at the kiln in Budana. The work of making bricks and installing pillars near the chimney is going on at the kiln.

## 2 die after 4 of family 'take poison' in Haryana's Narnaul

**Agencies :** Four members of a family, including two teenage boys, allegedly took poison in Narnaul here on Sunday evening. Two of them died and the two others have been struggling for life in a hospital. The exact reason behind the step is yet to be ascertained. No case has been registered till the filing of this report. Police have started an investigation. The deceased have been identified as Rupinder Kaur and her younger son Sonu of Mohalla Guru Nanakpura while the condition of her husband Ashish and their elder son Gagan is critical. On getting the information that the four were lying unconscious in a car in Ateli area, the police took them to the civil hospital where Rupinder and Sonu died.



## 12 PSUs incur accumulated losses worth Rs 4901 crore

**Diary Times Desk :** The financial health of the 27 boards and corporation of the Himachal Government continues to remain grim as the cumulative losses of 12 of these loss making enterprises have mounted to Rs 4901.51 crore. As per the latest report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (GAG) for 2022-23 laid during the monsoon session of the Vidhan Sabha, 12 of the 27 boards and corporation are in the red. Only 12 boards and corporations are doing well and have made a profit of Rs 20.21 crore. The total losses of the remaining 14 enterprises rose from Rs 518.60 crore in 2021-22 to Rs 604.94 crore in 2022-23. The highest cumulative losses of Rs 1809.61 crore have been incurred by the Himachal Pradesh State Electricity Board (HPSEB), followed by Rs 1707.12 crore by Himachal Road Transport Corporation (HRTC). Despite the best efforts by the state government, these two corporation continue to suffer losses and have to be given special grants annually.

## Serious charges levelled in House during debate over corruption

**Diary Times Desk :** The four-day winter session of Himachal Assembly held from December 18 to 21 saw many serious issues of corruption in the state being raised. Targeting the state bureaucracy, BJP MLA Satpal Satti said that while they were targeting each other over the issue of corruption, the real culprits were sitting pretty with no one talking about their role in it. The debate over corruption was brought on an adjournment motion moved by BJP MLA Randhir Sharma. Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu urged the Speaker to accept the adjournment motion after which the House debated corruption for two days with no other business being transacted. Most serious allegation that the Chief Minister leveled against the previous BJP government was that they gave 150 bighas of land worth approximately Rs 123 crore to a private company in Malku Majra of Badi area of the state for Rs 1 crore 81 lakh. The Chief Minister alleged that Jai Ram Thakur government gave additional 150 bigha land to a private company.

## Snow in Shimla ahead of Christmas cheers locals and tourists



**Diary Times Desk :** Snow fell in Shimla on Monday bringing cheer to locals as well as tourists. Light snow started falling around 11 am at some places in the capital town and soon it turned heavy. The tourists who are in the hill town for Christmas were delighted and were seen dancing in the snow. "We were planning to leave today but have changed our mind now. We are enjoying ourselves," said a family from Mohali. It also snowed in nearby Kufri and Fagu. According to the weather department, snow is likely to continue in Shimla and adjoining areas in the next few hours. Light to moderate snow is likely at many places in the districts of Kinnaur and Lahaul and Spiti. The weather department has forecast a cold wave at many places in the state.

## Intimidation of industries will not be tolerated: Himachal Pradesh CM Sukhu

**Diary Times Desk :** The Himachal Pradesh Government will take strict action against any entity trying to intimidate or harass industries, Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu told a delegation of industrialists which called on him on Monday. As the delegation apprised the Chief Minister about their various demands, Sukhu said the state government is facilitating the industries by creating a conducive atmosphere for their growth in Himachal Pradesh. "Any kind of intimidation or harassment of industries would be dealt with sternly and strict action would be ensured against the culprits," a statement quoting the Chief Minister said. Sukhu also said the state government is promoting green industries in line with the target of transforming Himachal Pradesh into a green energy state by March 31, 2026. Urging the industrialists to invest in information technology, food processing, tourism, and hydropower energy, Sukhu said that climate change is the biggest challenge and green initiatives can play a pivotal role in mitigating the effects of global warming. Industries Minister Harshwardhan Chauhan was also present at the meeting.

## Tourists throng Lahaul-Spiti to ring in Christmas, New Year

**Diary Times Desk :** In view of Christmas and New Year celebrations, tourist influx has increased to Lahaul valley in Lahaul and Spiti district these days. According to the police, Lahaul and Spiti district has witnessed a significant influx of tourists yesterday, with a total of 6,614 vehicles entering and exiting the region via the Atal Tunnel on the Manali-Leh highway. The district's law enforcement agencies have been monitoring the movement of both local and out-of-state vehicles, ensuring smooth travel through the valley's picturesque and often challenging terrain. According to the data provided by the Lahaul and Spiti Superintendent of Police, Mayank Chaudhary, a total of 3,464 vehicles entered the region between 8.00 am and 8.00 pm on December 21. Out of these, 1,950 were from Himachal Pradesh and 1,514 were from other states. On the flip side, 3,150 vehicles exited the valley, with 1,805 from Himachal Pradesh and 1,345 from outside the state. This brings the total number of vehicles passing through the region to 6,614. "Tourist activity has been notably high, with a total of 18,100 visitors recorded across three key sectors.

## Fresh snowfall brings hope to Kullu-Manali tourism

**Diary Times Desk :** Snow fell in Shimla on Monday bringing cheer to locals as well as tourists. Light snow started falling around 11 am at some places in the capital town and soon it turned heavy. The tourists who are in the hill town for Christmas were delighted and were seen dancing in the snow. "We were planning to leave today but have changed our mind now. We are enjoying ourselves," said a family from Mohali. It also snowed in nearby Kufri and Fagu. According to the weather department, snow is likely to continue in Shimla and adjoining areas in the next few hours. Light to moderate snow is likely at many places in the districts of Kinnaur and Lahaul and Spiti. The weather department has forecast a cold wave at many places in the state.



## Shami ruled out of remaining two Border-Gavaskar Trophy Tests

**Diary Times Desk :** Mohammed Shami will not be considered for the fourth and fifth Tests of the ongoing Border-Gavaskar Trophy due to swelling on his left knee. The BCCI press release on Shami's fitness came days after India captain Rohit Sharma called on the National Cricket Academy to provide an update on the fast bowler's progress upon being asked once again about it at the end of the Brisbane Test. "Shami bowled 43 overs in the Ranji Trophy match for Bengal against Madhya Pradesh in November," the BCCI said in a statement. "Following this, he played in all nine games of the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, where he also engaged in additional bowling sessions on the sidelines to build his bowling volume in order to get ready for the Test matches. "However, his left knee has exhibited minor swelling due to increased joint loading from his bowling workload. The swelling is on the expected lines, owing to the increased bowling after a prolonged period. Based on the current medical assessment, the BCCI medical team has determined that his knee requires more time for controlled exposure to bowling loads. Consequently, he has not been deemed fit for consideration for the remaining two Tests of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy."



## Short TAKES

### Manu Bhaker Surprise Absentee From Khel Ratna Nominations, Report Reveals Reason

**Agencies :** The year 2024 has been a memorable year for Indian sports as many athletes showed their true caliber and brought accolades for the country. From India's magnificent win at the T20 World Cup to Manu Bhaker's historic double medal victory at the Paris Olympics, Indian sports reached new heights. Just like every year, the Indian government will be giving the prestigious Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award to celebrate and honour the achievements of these athletes and some nominees of the same have been revealed. India men's hockey team captain and ace drag-flicker Harmanpreet Singh has been recommended for India's highest sporting honour. Under Harmanpreet's captaincy, India clinched the bronze medal at the Paris Olympics in men's hockey. Para-athlete Praveen Kumar has also been nominated for the Khel Ratna award. Praveen won gold in the men's high jump T64 class with an Asian record at the Paris Paralympics.

### Wanindu Hasaranga returns for New Zealand ODIs

**Agencies :** Sri Lanka leg-spinner Wanindu Hasaranga is back in the ODI squad for the upcoming tour of New Zealand, where the teams play three ODIs and three T20s. The ace spinner missed Sri Lanka's last ODI assignment - the home series against the same opposition in November - due to a hamstring injury. Dunith Wellalage, who lost his T20I spot for the tour, held onto his place in the 50-over squad. Sri Lanka made four changes to the side that played last month, with the quartet of Dushan Hemantha, Kusal Perera, Sadeera Samarawickrama and Dishan Madushanka not getting picked.

Perera, in fact, had made a comeback to the ODI squad for the first time since the 2023 World Cup in the previous series against New Zealand but did not get a game. Hemantha meanwhile, was Hasaranga's replacement in the last ODI series squad. Besides Hasaranga, Sri Lanka have also brought in batter Nuwanidu Fernando, who made his debut against India in 2023 and has featured in five ODIs. Fast bowler Lahiru Kumara makes a return after last playing the format in March.

### Tanush Kotian to join India squad; Shami deemed unfit

**Agencies :** Tanush Kotian, Mumbai's off-spinning all-rounder, is set to join the Indian men's team in Australia for the ongoing Border-Gavaskar Trophy. The move comes after Ravichandran Ashwin announced his retirement from international cricket at the end of the third Test in Brisbane. The 26-year-old Kotian, who is currently a part of the Mumbai team in the ongoing Vijay Hazare Trophy, is expected to join the squad in Melbourne ahead of the third Test. Kotian, who is currently in Ahmedabad, will fly back to Mumbai from where he will take a flight for Melbourne on Tuesday. Since he was recently a part of the India A side which toured Australia, there is likely to be no visa issue for him. Kotian has featured in 33 first-class games, scoring 1525 runs at an average of 41.21 and picking 101 wickets at an average of 25.70. He was awarded the Player of the Tournament in Mumbai's Ranji Trophy-winning campaign in 2023-24, where he amassed 502 runs at an average of 41.83 and picked 29 wickets at 16.96. Meanwhile, Mohammed Shami's much-awaited return to the national side is set to be stalled further after the BCCI Medical Staff declared the veteran pacer unfit for selection for the final two Tests of the ongoing Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

### "Clots In Brain": On Vinod Kambli's Urgent Hospitalisation, Doctor Gives Worrying Update

**Agencies :** Former India cricketer Vinod Kambli has been admitted to a private hospital in Thane district, where medical examinations revealed clots in his brain, doctors treating him said on Monday. Dr Vivek Trivedi, who is treating Kambli (52), said the Mumbai-based former India batter initially complained of urinary infection and cramps following which he was admitted to the hospital in the Kalher area of Bhiwandi town on Saturday. However, after a series of examinations the medical team supervising him at Akruiti Hospital found clots in his brain, Trivedi informed. Kambli's health is being constantly monitored and the team will carry out additional medical examinations on Tuesday, the doctor said. Trivedi also said hospital in-charge S Singh has decided to provide life-long free treatment to Kambli at his medical facility. According to a X post by news agency IANS, Kambli, who is a long-time teammate of Sachin Tendulkar, was admitted at the Akruiti Hospital in Thane late Saturday night. "His condition is now stable but remains critical," the post further said. On Monday, a fan posted a video of Kambli, where the former India batter could be seen giving.

### 'Ashwin has taken retirement...': Cheteshwar Pujara's blunt assessment on India's 'weak' bowling

**Agencies :** Ever since the Border-Gavaskar Trophy against Australia got underway in November, questions have been raised against the Indian team combination, especially the bowling department. Now that Ravichandran Ashwin has announced his retirement from international cricket, the experience is lacking in the spin department, and it does not auger well for the visitors, considering the last two Tests in Melbourne and Sydney can offer some assistance to the slower bowlers. India batter Cheteshwar Pujara has now flagged India's bowling, expressing his concerns. He said that if Ravindra Jadeja and Nitish Kumar Reddy are eventually chosen as the fourth and fifth options, then the bowling will not be that "good." Speaking to Star Sports, Pujara said, "My biggest question and the reason for a little bit of concern is that the Indian bowling is looking a little weak. Batting is a little better, like the top five didn't do well, but the middle and lower middle order, Ravindra Jadeja, Nitesh, and even tail-enders, Bumrah and Akash Deep contributed with the bat."

