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OF INDIA

India seamer Mohd Shami will not play in two Test matches against South Africa as he fails to regain his fitness while bowler Deepak Chahar has withdrawn from the ODI series, says BCCI

Sheikh Nawaf Al Ahmad Al Sabah, Kuwait's ruling emir, dies at 86 after a three-year, low-key reign that focused on trying to resolve the oil-rich nation's political disputes. **India has announced a one-day state mourning on Sunday** following his demise

Three Israeli hostages mistakenly shot by troops in the Gaza Strip were waving a white flag and were shirtless when they were killed, say military officials in Israel's first such acknowledgement of harming hostages

'Friends' star Matthew Perry's death was an accident caused by the 'acute effects of ketamine', confirm medical officials in Los Angeles

Model held for threat to blow up Doon airport

Megha Sharma, a Mumbai-based model, was arrested for misbehaving with security officers posted at Dehradun's Jolly Grant airport and allegedly threatening to "blow up the building" late Friday evening. Sharma, 32, was later released on bail. Police said Sharma, who was headed for Mumbai, broke into expletives when a CISF sub-inspector requested manual frisking as her handbag was not clear on the scanning system. She allegedly threatened to bomb the airport when the police urged her to cooperate. **P 13**

Cops use drones to keep bride safe from abduction

Meerut police deployed drones and personnel to safeguard a 22-year-old woman's wedding after a man who claimed to be her former husband threatened to abduct her from the marriage venue. Piyush Kumar, 28, of Meerut said he got married with the woman in 2013 and registered it in court. "Despite that, she is getting married again," he said. **P 15**

Assam jumbos kill two, toll 12 since November

A herd of six wild elephants trampled to death two men in Assam's Tamulpur near the India-Bhutan on Friday evening, taking the death toll in jumbo attacks to at least 12 in the state since November. Between May and October, three people were killed by wild elephants in the same area. The men had gone to the forest area to graze cattle. **P 11**

Five men held in Trichy for raping dalit youth

Police on Saturday arrested five men for raping a 24-year-old dalit man at Irungalur in Trichy and abusing him citing his caste. K Vasanth of Irungalur gave lift on his bike to the man who was waiting at the bus stop and took him to a house where he, along with Kavirasan, Yuvaraj, Ravi Bosco and Ayyanar of Irungalur assaulted him. **P 7**

Militants abduct, kill Arunachal former MLA

Former Arunachal Pradesh legislator and BJP leader Yumsem Matey, who recently declared his candidacy for the upcoming April/May assembly polls in the easternmost hill state, was abducted from a social function around 2pm and fatally shot on Saturday near the India-Myanmar border by suspected NSCN (Khaplang Yung Aung) militants. **P 19**

6 wedding guests die in SUV-truck crash in Maha

Six people were killed, and nine suffered serious injuries, when their SUV collided head-on with a truck near Sonkhamb village in Katol tehsil, around 50 km from Nagpur in Maharastra, in the wee hours of Saturday. All the seven passengers were returning to Mendhipatbar village in Katol, after attending a wedding reception in Nagpur. **P 13**

Karti refuses to appear before ED

Congress MP from Sivaganga Karti Chidambaram on Saturday refused to appear before the Enforce-

Suspension of MPs not tied to Parl breach, says Speaker

Linking The Two Unfortunate, He Tells Lawmakers

Akhilesh.Singh
@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla has taken exception to the suspension of opposition members in Lok Sabha being linked to the security breach last Wednesday.

It is indeed unfortunate that some members and political parties are linking the decision of the House to suspend some members to the incident... on December 13, 2023. This is unwarranted. There is no association between them," the Speaker has said in a letter to all MPs, emphasising that similar instances of security breaches in the past had not led to disruptions that have led to proceedings on two consecutive days being washed out. Thirteen LS MPs and an RS MP were suspended a day after the breach as they stalled proceedings, demanding the home minister's statement.

Birla said that the suspension of members was purely to uphold the sanctity of the House, even as he assured the members that all necessary measures to ensure their security will be taken on the basis of recommendations of the high-level committee which has been set up to go into what facilitated the trespass and recommend safeguards against recurrence.

"At the time of inauguration of the new building of our Parliament, we had resolved that we will refrain from bringing placards inside the House; we will not create ruckus in the well of the House," he added.

Seeking cooperation of all MPs and parties in running the Parliament proceedings smoothly, Birla said the House displayed exemplary solidarity and expressed its collective resolve against such incidents in the past.

▶ Formed panel, P 19

'REPORT SOON'

- Speaker Om Birla tells MPs there were **incidents of security breach in the past** as well — when pistol and chilli powder were brought to the House — but Parliament displayed **solidarity**
- Says **high-level inquiry committee** has been set up and report will soon be shared with the House
- Says it is **Parliament's responsibility to formulate action plan**, factoring members' suggestions

6th accused in case sent to police custody

A Delhi court on Saturday sent Mahesh Kumawat, the sixth accused in the Parliament security breach case, to seven days in police custody. The prosecution told the court that the conspiracy was planned for two years and the plotters wanted to create a situation of anarchy in the country to "get their illegal demands met". **P 15**

DEEPTI 'STOKES' A HISTORIC VICTORY

A dominant Indian women's team **destroyed England in the one-off Test** in Navi Mumbai on Saturday, **winning by a world record margin of 347 runs** on the third morning of the four-day contest. **Deepti Sharma**, who's called 'Stokesy' (Ben Stokes) in the dressing room, was the star of the show with an outstanding all-round performance — **scoring 67 in the first innings and then taking a match haul of 9/39.** But it was seamer **Pooja Vastrakar (3/23)** who **provided the early breakthrough** for India on the last day

The jubilant women will next face Australia in a one-off Test at Wankhede from Dec 21

347 winning margin in terms of runs is the highest in the history of women's Tests, outstripping Sri Lanka's 309-run victory against Pakistan in Colombo in 1998

1st win by Indian women in six Tests vs England at home and their third in 15 Tests against them (lost one and drew 11)

6 Tests won by India out of 39 played (lost six and drew 27), a winning % of 15.38

53 overs delivered by Deepti — the fewest bowled by any woman while capturing 5 wickets or more in a Test innings

2nd Deepti is only the second Indian after Shubhangi Kulkarni to score a 50 and bag 5 wickets in the same Test

9 balls/wkts for Deepti is the best strike rate for any bowler with 8 or more scalps in a women's Test

FULL COVERAGE P 18

"I jokingly call Deepti Ben Stokes of our team. She is fantastic... an important cog in the wheel when she comes to bat and also gets wickets"
—Amol Muzumdar, Team India coach

The women's cricket team has pulled off some memorable victories in the past. A look at three such wins P 18

110 BOATS, 615 PEOPLE WORKING TO CLEAR OIL SPILL

A LONG HAUL AHEAD: The oil spill from Manali CPCL refinery has spread into the sea even as 110 boats and 615 people are working to clear it. Two of five shore villages have been cleared and the remaining is set to be completed within three days, said CPCL | P 3

Modi, Oman Sultan talk of two-state solution for peace

Sachin.Parashar
@timesgroup.com

FOR FIRM TIES: PM Narendra Modi with Oman Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Saturday

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the visiting Oman Sultan, Haitham bin Tarik, discussed the Israel-Hamas conflict with focus on the burgeoning humanitarian crisis, terrorism and the need for a two-state solution to facilitate lasting peace. The visit by the Sultan to India, the first in 26 years, saw the two countries signing six MoUs, including one for sharing of intelligence to tackle money laundering and terror financing.

Calling it a historic day in bilateral ties, Modi announced adoption of a new 'India-Oman Joint Vision-A Partnership for Future' with concrete action-points to take forward cooperation in 10 different areas. The PM also expressed hope that the two countries will soon be able to sign a free trade agreement, adding a new chapter to their economic cooperation.

"I am glad that discussions on CEPA agreement are ongoing between the two sides. Two rounds of these talks have been successfully completed in which consensus has been reached on many important issues," said Modi.

▶ International law, P 19

Kerala patient 1st confirmed case of JN.1 variant of Covid in India

New Delhi: The Centre on Saturday confirmed the presence of JN.1 subvariant of Covid-19 in a patient from Kerala, the first such case detected in India. JN.1 is closely related to the BA.2.86 variant, also referred to as Pirola, which has been detected in the US and China recently, **reports Durgesh Nandan Jha.**

According to the government, the sample of one Covid-19 positive patient from Thiruvananthapuram came positive for JN.1 on December 8 as part of the ongoing routine surveillance. "The patient tested positive for Covid-19 on November 18 with mild symptoms of Influenza-Like Illness (ILI) and has since recovered," said officials.

There has been a rising trend in Covid-19 cases from Kerala in the last few weeks. This has been attributed to an increase in the number of samples from ILI cases being referred for testing.

▶ Clinically mild, P 19

Navy warship, patrol aircraft shadowing hijacked vessel

New Delhi: An Indian warship and maritime patrol aircraft are closely tracking a hijacked Malta-flagged vessel, which is now headed towards the coast of Somalia with armed pirates and 28 crew members on board, after swiftly responding to its distress call in the Arabian Sea.

The Indian warship, which was on an anti-piracy patrol in the Gulf of Aden, is following the hijacked vessel named MV Ruen. The overall situation is being closely monitored in coordination with other agencies and the MNF (multi-national force) in the area. The safety of the crew on board the merchant vessel is paramount," a naval spokesperson said. The Navy swung into action after MV Ruen sent a Mayday call on the UKMTO portal on Thursday, with the alert that it had been boarded by "around six unknown persons". TNN

▶ monitoring, P 19

Even before hand in Nijjar, Pannun plots proved, US panel seeks curbs on India

Chidanand Rajghatta | TNN

Washington: Invoking the alleged official Indian hand in the assassination of an overseas Khalistani militant and plots to extend such killings — even before any culpability has been established in the matter — a US religious freedom watchdog has called on the Biden administration to designate India as a "country of particular concern" and sanction it under the US Religious Freedom Act.

In its annual report earlier this year, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, an independent federal government commission, had already recommended that the administration impose targeted sanctions on Indian government agencies and officials responsible for "severe violations of religious freedom by freezing those individuals' assets and/or barring their entry into the United States".

It pushed the case again on Friday, saying, "The Indian government's alleged involvement in the killing of Sikh activist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada and the plot to kill Gurpatwant Singh Pannun in the United States are deeply troubling."

- USCIRF commissioner Stephen Schneck says recent **efforts by the Indian govt to silence activists, journalists & lawyers abroad pose a serious threat to religious freedom**
- This is not the first time the USCIRF has made the sanctions pitch, **it had recommended designating India a country of particular concern in each of its last three annual reports**
- **New Delhi** says the US panel routinely 'regurgitates biased & motivated comments' about India & 'such misrepresentation of facts only serves to discredit USCIRF itself'

▶ Continued on P 19

Kamal Nath out, Jitu Patwari in as MP Cong chief

Days after the electoral debacle in Madhya Pradesh, the Congress on Saturday replaced Kamal Nath with OBC leader Jitu Patwari as state Congress chief, marking a generational shift. Patwari, who has been MLA twice, lost the polls this time.

Tribal leader Umang Singhar, seen as a rival of Digvijaya Singh, will head the legislature party. In neighbouring Chhattisgarh, former Union minister Charan Das Mahant will take over as leader of opposition. Deepak Baij will continue to head the state unit of the party.

The decisions, though not completely unexpected, took many by surprise due to their swiftness following the party's rout in the recently concluded polls. Though Congress was also humbled in Rajasthan, a decision over an organisational overhaul is expected to take longer, owing to internal differences. **P 9**

Jingle bells with ghungroos and bhangra: Christmas gets a twist & desi soundtrack

Sneha.Bhura@timesgroup.com

When you think of the sound of music, you're likely to think of hits like Elvis Presley's 'Blue Christmas', 'Last Christmas' by Wham! or if you like jazz, the wonderfully atmospheric 'Christmas' (1967) by Ella Fitzgerald. Then there is Mariah Carey's 'All I want for Christmas is you' which is more relatable and locally specific ways whether it's singing old Tamil hymns in country music style or adding bhangra beats.

Alfred J D'Souza, director of Mumbai-based Stop-Gaps Cultural Academy which organises 'A Festival of Festive Music' at the National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA) every December, has composed over 50 carols in