

Indian economy likely to maintain **STRONG GROWTH**: RBI report

MUMBAI, Dec 31 (PTI)

THE Indian economy is likely to maintain strong growth, underpinned by robust domestic demand, benign inflation, and prudent macro-economic policies despite an uncertain and challenging global economic backdrop, the Reserve Bank said in a report on Wednesday.



sound with strong capital and liquidity buffers, improved asset quality and robust profitability, the Reserve Bank said in its Financial Stability Report (FSR).

The report reflects the collective assessment of the Sub-Committee of the Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) on the resilience of the Indian financial system and risks to financial stability. "The domestic financial system remains robust and resilient, bolstered by strong balance sheets, easy financial conditions, and low financial market volatility. Nonetheless, there are near-term risks from external uncertainties - geopolitical and trade-related," it said. Macro stress test results affirm the resilience of scheduled commercial banks to withstand losses under hypothetical adverse scenarios and maintain capital buffers well above the regulatory minimum. It also confirmed the resilience of mutual funds and clearing corporations, the apex bank added.

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Thailand releases 18 Cambodian PoW as part of truce agreement



Cambodian soldiers are welcomed by villagers upon their arrival at Prum border gate, in Pailin province, Cambodia on Wednesday after being released by Thailand. (AP/PTI)

BANGKOK, Dec 31 (AP)

THAILAND on Wednesday released 18 Cambodian prisoners of war (PoW) held for five months, fulfilling the terms of a ceasefire agreement the two countries signed to end bitter fighting along their border.

The release was stipulated in the ceasefire agreement signed on Saturday by the Defence

Ministers of the two countries at the same border checkpoint between Thailand's Chanthaburi province and Cambodia's Pailin province where the soldiers were released. "The repatriation of the 18 Cambodian soldiers was undertaken as a demonstration of goodwill and confidence-building," Thailand's Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

SC vacation benches including of CJI Surya Kant sits during winter break for first time

NEW DELHI, Dec 31 (PTI)

THE Supreme Court has held vacation courts for the first time with Chief Justice of India Surya Kant himself sitting twice during the winter break to hear urgent matters involving life and liberty as well as those requiring immediate judicial intervention.

The top court holds vacation benches during longer summer break, which has now been rechristened as partial court working days, but this year was the first instance when the apex court held vacation benches even in a shorter winter break.

The Supreme Court was closed for Christmas and New Year holidays from December 22 to January 2, 2026. It will reopen on January 5.

Justice Surya Kant, who was sworn in as Chief Justice of India on November 24, had made it clear on December 19 that vacation benches including him will be sitting during the winter break to hear urgent matters.

On December 22, the first day of the winter break, a vacation bench comprising the CJI and Justice Joymalya Bagchi sat to

hear 17 urgent matters including several criminal and civil cases.

A statement issued by the top court said that special sittings had been arranged to ensure timely consideration of pressing cases that required immediate judicial intervention during the vacation period.

Similarly, on December 29, a three-judge vacation bench headed by CJI Kant sat to hear a



suo motu case on new definition of Aravallis amid public outcry and kept in abeyance its November 20 directions that accepted a uniform definition of these hills and ranges.

It said there is a need to resolve “critical ambiguities” including whether the 100-metre elevation and the 500-metre gap between hills criteria will strip a significant portion of the range of environmental protection.

The vacation bench comprising Justices J K Maheshwari and Augustine George Masih stayed the Delhi High Court order suspending the life sentence of expelled BJP leader Kuldeep Singh Sengar in the 2017 Unnao rape case and said he shall not be released from custody.

SSLV 3rd stage ground test successful

BENGALURU, Dec 31 (PTI)

THE Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has carried out a successful static test of an improved version of the third stage of SSLV at the Solid Motor Static Test Facility of Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota in Andhra Pradesh.

According to ISRO, the test was conducted on Tuesday.

The Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV) is a three-stage all-solid launch vehicle developed by ISRO, which is amenable to industrial production and can meet launch-on-demand with a quick turnaround time between launches, ISRO said in a statement.

“The upper stage or third stage solid motor delivers as high as 4 km/s velocity to the launch vehicle and employs a monolithic composite motor case and a free-standing nozzle divergent to lim-



it the stage inert mass,” it added.

The space agency said the static test validated an improved version of Stage 3 of the Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SS3) with a carbon-epoxy motor case, which has significantly reduced the mass of the stage, thereby improving the payload performance of SSLV by 90 kg.

“The stage also features an improved design for the igniter and nozzle system, making the system more efficient and robust.

The nozzle control is implemented through a fault-tolerant electro-mechanical actuation system with low-power control electronics,” ISRO explained.

It added that the high-strength carbon filament-wound motor case was realised at the Composites Entity of Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre and the solid motor was cast at the Solid Motor production facilities at Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC).

Envoys of QUAD nations hold rare meet in China

■ By K J M Varma

BEIJING, Dec 31 (PTI)

AMBASSADORS of the QUAD nations, consisting of the US, India, Australia and Japan, held a rare publicised meeting in Beijing. The meeting took place on Tuesday at the US Embassy in Beijing, according to a post on X with a photo by the American Ambassador to China, David Perdue.

“The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) is a force for good in maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific region,” Perdue said in his post. “It is a pleasure to meet with the ambassadors of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue countries in Beijing,” he said.



“The relations among the four countries—the United States, Australia, India, and Japan—continue to be stable and strong,” he said and posted a photo of the four envoys, including Indian Ambassador to Beijing Pradeep Kumar

Rawat. The Indian Embassy here has not yet commented on the meeting. China, over the years, has been a strong critic of the QUAD and has not yet reacted to the meeting.

Beijing, in the past while reacting to the QUAD meet-

ings, stated that it is opposed to countries forming cliques, engaging in group politics and bloc confrontation.

In her reaction to the Foreign Ministers meeting of the QUAD countries held in January this year, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said China has always advocated that cooperation among countries should not target third parties. “China believes that cooperation between countries should not target any third party,” she said. “Engaging in group politics and bloc confrontation will not bring lasting peace and security, and is not conducive to peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific and the world as a whole,” she said.