

Behera takes OERC charge Akhilesh Yadav 'Cycles' away after EC's nod

Bhubaneswar (KCN): Upendra Nath Behera was today took over as the Chairman of the Odisha Electricity Regulatory Commission (OERC).

Mr. Behera, a 1983 batch IAS officer was administered Oath of Office by the Governor S C Jamir at Raj Bhawan in a simple ceremony.

Mr. Behera, who was Additional Chief Secretary to Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik was to superannuate from services in July, 2017 but he applied for VRS, which was accepted by the Government.

After that he went to Raj Bhawan and took oath of office in presence of several senior Mandarins.

Agriculture Production Commissioner Gagan Kumar Dhal, Principal Secretary Home Asit Tripathy, Principal Secretary Energy Rajesh Verma, Principal Secretary Higher Education, GVV Sarma, Principal Secretary to Governor C J Venugopal, CMD GRIDCO & OPTCL

Hemant Sharma, Secretary ST & SC Development & Information & Public Relations, Surendra Kumar, Special Secretary General Administration and Finance, Ashok Kumar Meena and others were present.

Mr. Behera was earlier appointed as the Chairman of the OERC on the recommendation of the Selection Committee, official sources said.

The Selection Committee headed by Justice of Odisha High Court, Justice Vinod Prasad along with the Members as Chief Secretary Aditya Prasad Padhi and the Chairman of the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission Gireesh B Pradhan recommended the names for selection of OERC Chairman and Member.

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on 27 October accepting the recommendations appointed U N Behera as Chairman and Sourji Kanta Parhi, former Air Vice Marshal, as a Member of the OERC.

The post of selves to fixing of



OERC Chief was lying vacant as the Chairman, S P Nanda's tenure ended on 8 October. Mr. Parhi has already taken over a Member OERC.

So the Team headed by Mr. Behera takes charge of the Power Regulator Body.

The scope of Electricity Regulatory Commission is much beyond fixing of Tariffs.

While most Regulatory Commissions of the country have limited them-

Tariffs only, much more can be achieved in development of this sector.

Issues like utilization of new energy resources and improvement in consumption of electricity, which is an index of development are needed to be addressed by OERC.

In order to improve the quality of life electricity is required to reach all the remote villages and all the households.

There, OERC has a major responsibility to look into.

It is expected that

with a strong technical background, and wide experience in different development sectors including Finance and Planning, Mr. Behera will give a new look to the Power Regulator and help in achieving broader objective of Commission, for which it has been constituted.

A lot needs to be done in the areas of cutting down transmission and distribution losses, improving on revenue collection and checking unauthorized tapping. OERC, which is the first Regulatory Commission in the country was the pioneer in unbundling the electricity sector segregating the responsibilities of generation, transmission and distribution.

With the presence of a down to earth Mandarin at the helm of OERC a lot is expected, said a former Chairman of the Commission.

In what comes as the biggest development in the ongoing feud over the Samajwadi party symbol, the Election Commission has reportedly decided to give the party symbol, 'cycle' to Akhilesh Yadav-led SP ahead of the

be taken only by Akhilesh Yadav.

Election Commission says group led by Akhilesh Yadav is the Samajwadi Party and is entitled to use the 'Bicycle' symbol

Mulayam may head Lok Dal if he

son Akhilesh

As soon as the Election Commission's verdict came late on Monday evening, the party workers erupted in celebrations with many thanking the poll panel for its decision in the favour of



Uttar Pradesh polls.

The Akhilesh camp representatives thanked the poll panel. Ramgopal Yadav, senior SP leader told the reporters that they are certain that Akhilesh Yadav will emerge as the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh. He said that he hopes for a grand alliance, but the final decision will

fails to get 'bicycle' Ram Gopal hobnobbing with rivals to break the party, says Mulayam

No dispute between Akhilesh and me, says Mulayam

SP feud refuses to die down as Mulayam says 'I am still the boss'

Yadav feud: Mulayam says he might contest against

Akhilesh Yadav. Some of them said that it was very important for the party to have cycle as their symbol.

Earlier in the day, party supremo Mulayam Singh Yadav had said that it was up to the EC to decide on the party symbol, but the fight will "reach the court"

Verma joins CMO

Bhubaneswar(KCN): Rajesh Verma has taken over as the Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik.

After the Government of Odisha in the Department of General Administration has brought out the notification here today in this regard, Mr. Verma took charge of the office.

After U N Behera, ACS to CM left the office today to join as Chairman of Odisha Energy Regulatory Commission (OERC), the post was vacant.

1987 batch IAS, Mr. Verma was Principal Secretary Energy for last one year and has been able to streamline the Power Development system in the State.

With Mr. Verma moving to Chief Minister's Office (CMO), 1995 batch IAS Hemant Sharma has been given additional charge of the Department of Energy.

Mr. Sharma is

now Chairman and Managing Director of

honest, unassuming and a quiet performer

time in his career going to the highest political office of the State.

His rapport with the senior officers in the Union Government will be helpful for the State in solving the problems of the State Government.

Mr. Verma has excellent equation with the Chief Secretary Aditya Prasad Padhi as both are impartial, honest and sincere.

Both of them work in equal wave length with sole interest to serve the State and having no agenda of their own.

Equally Mr. Verma is also close to Development Commissioner R Balakrishnan and work in tandem with the Top Mandarin.

So there will be seamless connectivity between CMO and State Administration, which will be beneficial for the State, pointed out a Principal Secretary.



GRIDCO and OPTCL. He is not only efficient but also has a tremendous delivering capacity.

He has in-depth knowledge in the Power Sector as is the longest serving Boss in GRIDCO and OPTCL.

Mr. Verma, an

is a work minded Mandarin has been working in the State for last few years after he returned from the Union Government serving for long seven years.

Known as the most impartial and truthful IAS Officer, Mr. Verma for the first

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'We are not promoting sex'

Do you think the film industry is welcoming to newcomers like you?

It's really difficult to get into Bollywood - it's a matter of time and the luck factor counts too. It's tough; and it was tough for me. It has been a very long and difficult struggle for me, I have enjoyed my journey though because it was not like I was just struggling and doing nothing ... I have taken a little long to do the kind of film I really wanted and desired. But it has finally happened and I am here.

Wajah Tum Ho

can be termed as your proper debut film. What are your expectations from it?

My expectations are very high because this film has given me everything that I have ever dreamt of. I feel amazing as I have experienced everything I wanted in this film - being a solo lead, performing to the best songs, playing a very strong character. The first teaser poster was my solo poster! Moreover, I have taken a good chemistry with director Vishal Pandya - at most times, newcomers lack this when you cannot match up with the director. Like we

say - uparwala jab bhi deta hai, chhappar faad ke deta hai.

The steamy scenes in the film have created a major buzz. What is your reaction?

It's no big deal in the industry. Every film has a kiss - no matter how big the names in the film. It's according to the requirements. It's necessary to show a little romance because a pure thriller gets boring. It's okay and there should be no big halla as if people have never seen anybody kissing on screen before.

Some people are just overreacting. I

don't care as long as We are not promoting



it is creating a buzz. Once people watch the film in the theatre, they will understand that whatever is done, is done rightly. It's not like there's nothing to do so we are doing those scenes.

sex. The film has lots more to offer.

So many people come on social media and say 'What did you do!' Arrey why are you wasting your time by coming to my

page and following me? Just do your own work. If you don't like it, keep it to yourself.

Which hero would you like to work with next?

The only dream in my life is to work with Shah Rukh Khan that's it. He is my childhood love.

You said you are a very animated person. Tell us more about what you are like in real life? I am the way people have seen me in Bigg Boss - there is not even one percent difference between me and the girl on that show.

Natalie Portman looks forward to strong female leads

LOS ANGELES(KCN): Actress Natalie Portman says she is "not interested" in watching movies without women in strong roles.

The "Black

point of view because it is a totally legitimate point of view - I'm glad to get insight into how straight white male minds work. It's just that we're not having

I'm kind of not interested in watching it," she added.

However, the 35-year-old appreciates that "desire is the language of cinema" and because of the uneven ratio of men to women filmmakers, it causes an imbalance of the stories shared.

"It's hard because desire is the language of cinema. And because it's been so male-dominated, the story of cinema is male desire and a female object of desire.

"I don't necessarily have a problem with that, it's just that we don't have the counter, we don't have the expression of female desire. We become the object of desire, not the subject of desire. Women have been made to feel guilty or bad for desiring food, or sex, or power," Portman said.



Swan" star is disappointed that there is a lack of movies in Hollywood that feature women in leading roles. As an audience member, she finds it is "really hard" to watch any films which don't feature many women, reports femal-efirst.co.uk.

"I don't have a problem with that

other points of view," Portman told Culture magazine.

"As a female audience member, it's really hard for me to watch these movies where women don't exist. There are so many movies where it's literally 20 men and no female character, or there's a female character who's, like, the wife on the phone.

Just Go To Hell Dil: Dear Zindagi's breakup song

Gentle, soft and relatable, Dear Zindagi's new song is out!

Sung by Sunidhi Chauhan, the second single track features Alia Bhatt, who is trying to do away with her emotions.

Beautifully written by Kausar Munir and composed by Amit Trivedi, the song has a unique melody that gets you hooked to it. Just Go To Hell Dil is a feeling we all have gone through in our lives and it is very well portrayed by Alia.

A budding cinematographer, Alia plays Kaira, who is in search of a perfect life. A chance encounter with Jug, an unconventional



thinker, helps her gain new perspective about life. She discovers that happiness

is all about finding comfort in life's imperfections.

Dear Zindagi has

been helmed by Gauri Shinde, the director of the critically acclaimed English

Vinglish, Gauri Shinde and has been jointly produced by her along with Gauri

Khan, Karan Johar. The film will woo movie buffs on November 25.



NEW DELHI(KCN) : Karan Johar seems very keen on knowing the relationship status of all stars

the world will know. I believe you are single until you are married."

PeeCee, who is

abroad said, "The boys back here are cautious. Out there, is more straight up. 'I am free tomorrow

invited on his chat show 'Koffee With Karan' and the ace director posed similar questions to Priyanka Chopra.

When KJo asked the 'Quantico' star about her wedding plans on his show, she said, "When there is a ring on the finger,

known for her extremely busy schedule, will be the next guest to grace the couch of ace filmmaker's chat show.

The 36-year-old, who made a solo entry in the show, when asked about the boys back home and

night, I am in New York, let's go for dinner. Itni forward nahi hu mai." The actress, who has been busy these days shooting for her ABC TV show 'Quantico' of late, will very soon be promoting her Hollywood debut 'Baywatch'.

China's troubled tech firm LeEco wins \$2.2 billion lifeline

BEIJING(KCN): Cash-strapped Chinese tech firm LeEco secured a \$2.2 billion

homegrown Chinese champions Baidu, Tencent, and Alibaba. But the

make Sunac the second-largest shareholder of LeEco, with 8.61 percent equity in

getting closer".

Jia and Sunac Chairman Sun Hongbing were born in the same region of China, northern Shanxi province, and had a positive six-hour meeting last month, Sun said, adding that it gave him the "impetuous urge to invest".

The deal takes Sunac far outside its primary business in buying and developing property.

"Overseas investors see this as relatively negative to Sunac," David Yang, of UOB Kayhian Investment told Bloomberg News. The deal "can hardly bring much profit contribution in the near term."

Sunac last year struck the largest number of deals in China, being involved in 13 deals totaling \$4.2 billion, according to Bloomberg News.

"While we're firmly optimistic about the real estate industry for the next five to 10 years, we've since long ago started an exploration journey to prepare for 10 years later," Sun said.

Natarajan Chandrasekaran's final act at TCS

CHENNAI(KCN): With Natarajan Chandrasekaran taking over as Tata Sons chairman on February 21, his stint as head of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) is set to end on a high note.

TCS, India's largest software services firm by revenues, has beaten market estimates by posting a 10.9 per cent year-on-year jump in profits to Rs 6,778 crore for the October-December 2016 quarter — up from Rs 6,110 crore in the year-ago period. The sequential growth was 2.9 per cent.

This is a notable achievement for the Chandrasekaran-led firm given the fact that the IT sector as a whole has been going through challenging times.

The sector remained one of the worst performers in 2016 bogged down by a fall in demand due to automation as well as the protectionist stance of US President-elect Donald Trump, who reportedly wants to cut down on outsourcing by US companies, and currency volatility, among other factors.

Despite this, TCS added two clients in \$50 million revenue category and

five clients under the \$10 million category.

On TCS' impressive third quarter results, Chandrasekaran said: "The resilience of our business model and strength of our oper-

business.

The company's operating profit was at Rs 7,733 crore in the reported quarter. Revenue was up 8.7 per cent at Rs 29,735 crore from Rs 27,364 crore a year ago. On

the workplace and invest more to develop IP-based platforms and products, he added.

"Alongside a good growth performance, we have been able to keep profit-



investment from a group led by property developer Sunac China Holdings, but shares in the rescuer plunged Monday on news of the deal.

Hong Kong-listed Sunac said Friday it would plough 15.04 billion yuan into the sprawling LeEco empire, which has interests in various sectors including self-driving cars, smartphones, film making, and TV-set manufacturing.

Its diverse ventures pit the company against Apple, Netflix, and Tesla and

company's relentless expansion has put a strain on its cash flow, and in November billionaire founder Jia Yueting told employees the company grew too quickly and was short of funds.

Shares in its Shenzhen-listed LeShi affiliate dived more than 36 percent last year and in December were suspended from trading before restarting Monday. It ended down 1.12 percent at 35.40 yuan in Shenzhen.

The deal will

LeShi Internet, 15 percent in LeShi Pictures, and 33.5 percent in the TV unit Leshi Zhixin, Sunac said in an announcement to the Hong Kong stock exchange.

But shares in Sunac plunged as much as 10 percent in Hong Kong Monday before paring the losses to end 7.96 percent lower at HK\$6.71.

At an event Sunday in Beijing, Jia was full of optimism, declaring that "though the road is bumpy, our dream is

Market makes tepid recovery, banks take the lead

MUMBAI(KCN): The stocks today showed resilience in the face of lurking in-

earlier budget and the additional requirement will reflect in the final batch of

cent, at 8,412.80. Intra-day, it moved between 8,426.70 and 8,374.40.

Nair, Head of Research, Geojit BNP Paribas Financial Services.

There were expectations that Finance Minister Arun Jaitley may address the transient pain of demonetisation by lowering corporate tax rates in the upcoming Budget for 2017-18, which backed the recovery.

SBI surged 1.93 per cent. HDFC Bank, too, rallied 1.21 per cent, in line with the overall upmove, while Axis Bank rose 1.07 per cent. ICICI Bank gained 0.62 per cent.

Asia closed lower and European indices weakened in early session.

Overseas, Asian stocks ended lower, reversing initial gains. Key indices in China, Japan and Hong Kong dropped by up to 1 per cent.

Europe was also trading lower in early deals and key indices like France, Germany and the UK fell by up to 0.75 per cent.

Foreign investors

extended their selling and sold shares worth a net Rs 117.59 crore last Friday, as per provisional data released by stock exchanges.

The recovery in Sensex was supported by gains in Tata Steel, Tata Motors, Adani Ports, Hero MotoCorp, HDFC, Lupin, Power Grid, Asian Paints, L&T, Bajaj Auto and Cipla, rising by up to 2.69 per cent.

Infosys, ONGC, RIL, Sun Pharma, GAIL, Bharti Airtel, M&M, NTPC, Coal India, ITC, Maruti Suzuki and Wipro ended lower and capped the gains.

In the Sensex-30 kitty, 17 ended higher while 13 lost.

Sector-wise, the BSE realty index climbed the most, rising 1.61 per cent, followed by consumer durables 0.99 per cent, bankex 0.98 per cent, metal 0.97 per cent and auto 0.56 per cent.

In broader markets, the BSE small-cap rose 0.57 per cent while mid-cap ended 0.27 per cent higher.

ating strategy has been brought to the fore by our performance in Q3, traditionally a quarter of weak demand."

He added that TCS' strengths in digital platforms and cloud, and the deep knowledge of customers' domain were driving the firm's ability to play a strategic role and make a holistic impact on the

a quarter-on-quarter basis, net profit was up 2.9 per cent, while revenue grew 1.5 per cent.

To support and sustain the company's digital business that is growing at 30 per cent on an annual basis, TCS continues to build new capabilities in digital technologies, empower employees to enhance agility in

ability stable in our desired range and deliver over USD 1 billion in free cash flow during the quarter," said Rajesh Gopinathan, chief financial officer of TCS who will take over as CEO on February 21.

Chandrasekaran exuded confidence that the sector will be able to tackle the challenges arising from any change in visa rules.

TCS is known for creating one of the largest avenues of employment in the private sector in India.

With about 3.78 lakh employees, it also has one of the highest retention rates in the industry.

Takata pleads guilty, to pay USD 1B for hiding air bag defect

DETROIT (KCN): Takata Corp. has agreed to plead guilty to a single criminal charge and will pay USD 1 billion in fines and restitution for concealing a deadly defect in its air bag inflators.

The US Attorney's Office in Detroit announced the plea deal today.

Takata will pay a USD 25 million criminal fine, USD 125 million to individuals who were injured by the air bags and USD 850 million to automakers that purchased the inflators.

The US district court in Detroit has appointed attorney Kenneth Feinberg to distribute restitution payments.



SpiceJet strikes Rs 1.5 lakh crore deal with Boeing for 205 planes

NEW DELHI(KCN): In one of the

Rs 1,50,000 crore (USD 22 billion).



biggest deals in the Indian aviation sector, SpiceJet will purchase up to 205 new aircraft from Boeing with the order valued at Rs 1,50,000 crore.

With the earlier order for 55 planes and additional 100 new 737-8 MAX aircraft, the no-frills carrier now has firmed up order for a total of 155 planes, besides purchase rights for 50 B737-8 MAX and wide body aircraft.

Announcing the deal here today, SpiceJet Chairman and Managing Director Ajay Singh said the total order of 205 aircraft is valued at

"This is one of the largest deals in Indian aviation and the largest for SpiceJet," Singh said.

Currently, the budget carrier has 32 next generation B737s and 17 Bombardier Q400s. "We are honoured to build upon more than a decade of partnership with SpiceJet with their commitment of up to 205 airplanes," Boeing Company Vice Chairman Ray Conner said.

According to Singh, SpiceJet would explore different options for financing the deal.



flation fears as the Sensex edged up to end at 27,288, helped by financial stocks, amid buzz that the finance ministry is likely to finalise the capital infusion plan for public sector banks.

However, global markets turned nervous after reports surfaced about a hard exit of Britain from the European union.

The funds infusion will be more than Rs 25,000 crore as announced in the

supplementary demand for grants to be presented in the upcoming budget session, sources said.

Companies held up well on the earnings front so far, which came as a positive.

The 30-share Sensex ended at 27,288.17, up 50.11 points, or 0.18 per cent. The gauge had shed 9 points on Friday.

The broader NSE Nifty settled 12.45 points up, or 0.15 per

Meanwhile, WPI inflation rose to 3.39 per cent in December 2016, fuelled by rising prices of petrol and diesel, which tempered mood.

"The positive bias for the market is largely due to better than expected third quarter results so far. Going ahead, market will watch the outcome from GST council meet. Any positive signs will provide further push to the current trajectory," said Vinod

Guardiola has plenty to ponder as Man City exposed again

LONDON: For Pep Guardiola, the head-scratching just got a little more intense.

Guardiola's first season in English soccer is not turning out all that well.

games already this season, the most he has lost as a coach in a single campaign.

issues. After a 3-1 home loss to Chelsea in early December, Guardiola said City

Chelsea. Bravo was Guardiola's man after exiling England goalkeeper Joe Hart to Italian club Torino, but City can ill afford to continue to concede as easily as it does.

The spotlight has fallen, in particular, on center back John Stones, the world's second most expensive defender who has been under intense scrutiny since his move from Everton last August.

Stones has yet to make the expected impact and while he has made mistakes, so have the defenders around him. In a BBC interview with a reporter, Guardiola said: "You're the journalist, not me. Ask the referee, not me."

City has made more changes at the back than any other club, an indication perhaps of why it finds it hard to keep the goals out.

Tactically, Guardiola appears to be undecided whether to go with a three or four-man defense. But without a settled backline, City's problems will likely continue.

Arjen Robben signs one-year Bayern Munich contract extension

BERLIN(KCN): Dutch winger Arjen Robben has signed a one-year contract extension that will keep him at Bayern Munich until the end of next season, the Bundesliga giants announced Monday.

Robben, 32, arrived in Munich in 2009 from Real Madrid and was part of the team that has won the 2013 Champions League, the FIFA club world cup, a UEFA Super Cup, five Bundesliga titles and four German Cups.

"Arjen is one of the best players in the world in his position," said Bayern chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge.

"He's played for us for almost eight years now, and has become an important part of our club in this time. We're delighted he's going to pull on an FC Bayern shirt for a further year."

Robben added: "I'm very happy that I'll be playing a further year for FC Bayern. The club is one of the best in the world and Munich has become a second home for me and my family."

"I want to continue playing at the highest level and win as many trophies as possible."



In the aftermath of Manchester City's 4-0 loss at Everton on Sunday, when its defensive frailties were once again exposed, the Spaniard wrote off his side's Premier League title chances.

While that is unlikely to rattle owner Sheik Mansour and director of football Txiki Begiristain — the men who finally lured their long-term target in a major coup for the club —

Sure, City is still in the Champions League and has a winnable showdown against Monaco in the last 16 next month. But in the league, the club has been up and down and the loss at Goodison Park was Guardiola's biggest ever defeat in league competition as a manager.

If that wasn't enough, Guardiola has lost five league

Not what he might have expected after his success with Barcelona and Bayern Munich that made him the most in-demand coach in the world.

Everything appeared rosy when City topped the league after going 11 games unbeaten. But a 2-0 loss to Tottenham at White Hart Lane in early October began to expose City's defensive

was not strong enough "in both boxes."

"This is a problem we have had all season. It is difficult for us to score goals," Guardiola said at the time. "We concede them very easily and this is the same story."

It is a recurring theme that repeated itself on Sunday at Everton, leaving City in fifth place and 10 points behind

Don't call me 'Sir Andy', says Andy Murray

MELBOURNE(KCN): Andy Murray said there was no need to call him "Sir" on Saturday as he took a relaxed approach to his new status as a knight of the realm and world number one at the Australian Open.

The laconic Scot said just being called "Andy" was fine despite a decision by Australia's Channel Seven to refer to him as "Sir Andy Murray" at the tournament.

"I'm more than happy just being Andy. That's enough for me," he said. "Yeah, if they call me 'Andy', that's cool. I'd be happy with that."

Murray is entering his first Grand Slam since being knighted in Britain's New Year Honours, and his first as world number one after he displaced Novak Djokovic late last season.

He appears to have taken both titles in his stride, insisting he didn't feel anyone was treating him differently since he was crowned the world's

top player.

"I haven't really noticed it. It kind of happened for me right at the end of the year, so I haven't been on the tour much as the number one player," he said.

"So I haven't noticed it yet. I don't know if that will come over time, if I'm able to stay there or not."

More importantly, Murray is pondering how to win his first Australian Open title after being an unsuccessful finalist five times.

Last year's appearance was torrid for Murray, as his wife Kim Sears was heavily pregnant with their first child and his father-in-law collapsed while watching a match.

"It was a tough tournament," said Murray, who seriously considered pulling out and bolting for the airport after losing the final to Djokovic in straight sets.

"It was like, I want to be at home

for the birth, but then I'm not just going to leave whilst my father-in-law is also in hospital," he added.

As well as becoming a father, he won his second Wimbledon title and successfully defended his Olympic singles gold medal, before reaching world number one for the first time.

"I obviously feel pretty confident after the way that last season finished," he said.

"I do love it here. I love the conditions. I have played really well here over the years, and just haven't managed to obviously get over the final hurdle.

"But I think I'm in a decent position to do it. I think I have a chance to win here. Obviously nothing's guaranteed. But, yeah, why not?"

He said he was also glad to have Ivan Lendl as his coach as he sets about trying to defend his ranking, chiefly from Djokovic who is showing signs of a re-

Belgium's Mertens wins Hobart WTA International final

HOBART(KCN): Belgian qualifier Elise Mertens

made a nervous start in her first WTA final, losing

Mertens became the third qualifier to win the Hobart title



downed Romanian third seed Monica Niculescu to win the Hobart International for her maiden WTA title on Saturday.

Mertens, ranked 127 and the third qualifier to win the Hobart tournament, defeated the world No.40 Niculescu 6-3, 6-1 in the 74-minute final. The 21-year-old

nine of the first 10 points before settling and taking control of the match.

"I played really well today," Mertens said. "I didn't make a lot of mistakes, mentally I was strong to stay in the rallies and take my chances when it was needed. I think my serve worked pretty well."

following German Mona Barthel in 2012 and Spaniard and subsequent French Open champion Garbine Muguruza in 2014. Mertens is also the third Belgian player to win the event, following her mentor Kim Clijsters in 2000 and current Belgian Fed Cup captain Dominique Monami in 1997.

Murray, Kerber win first Australian Open matches as top seeds

MELBOURNE(KCN): In his first Grand Slam match with the elevated status of having a knighthood and the No. 1 ranking, Andy Murray beat himself when he made mistakes and frequently yelled during a 7-5, 7-6 (5), 6-2 win over Ilya Marchenko.

The five-time finalist started on Rod Laver Arena on Monday, taking the first step in his bid for a first Australian Open title.

Angelique Kerber, who is defending a major title and is also the No. 1 seed at a Grand Slam for the first time, had some nervous moments in her 6-2, 5-7, 6-2 win over Lesia Tsurenko.

Kerber won her first Grand Slam title here last year, beating Serena Williams in the final after saving match point in the first round.

So after wasting a match point before her serve was broken as Tsurenko rallied to win the second set, Kerber said her mind raced back 12 months.

"To be honest, I was thinking about this," she said. "When I lost the second set, and I had match point, I was thinking about my match last year in the first round — first rounds are always tough."

Murray has lost four of the last six finals here — including the last two — to six-time champion Novak Djokovic. But he did take something

off his long-time friend at the end of last year when he replaced Djokovic in the top ranking during a stunning finish to the season.

In Queen Elizabeth II's New Year's honors list, Murray received a knighthood from the British monarch for reaching the pinnacle of the sport.

Murray said the ranking and the civic honors won't change anything, and he faces "the same pressure, same expectations."

He admits there's one thing he desperately wants to change.

"I've never won here — I'm going to try to change that this year," he said.

Two players who could potentially stand in his way — No. 5 Kei Nishikori and No. 10 Tomas Berdych — had first-round wins earlier in the day. Another, Roger Federer, was set to play his first tour-level match in more than six months when he played Jurgen Melzer in a night match.

There are 18 American women in the draw, and two recorded wins in the first two matches on Rod Laver.

Venus Williams went onto main court right after Shelby Rogers' upset 6-3, 6-1 win over fourth-seeded Simona Halep, a result which sent the former French Open finalist out in the first round

again. Williams also lost in the first round last year, and didn't plan to replicate Halep's early exit.

The seven-time major winner beat Kateryna Kozlova 7-6 (5), 7-5 despite making 48 unforced errors.

"It's never easy playing the first round — you're just trying to find the rhythm," Williams said. "She played amazing. It's very satisfying to get through a match against an opponent who is on fire."

Rogers made a surprising run to the French Open quarterfinals before losing to eventual champion Garbine Muguruza last year, when she was ranked No. 108, but only advanced beyond the second round at one other tournament in 2016.

"The biggest thing I took away from that was just that I can compete with the top players in the world and I'm good enough," said Rogers, who was playing just her second main draw match at the Australian Open.

Halep said she'd been hampered by left knee pain that was compounded by the pressure of the match.

Seventh-seeded Muguruza saved a set point in the first set and needed a medical timeout before advancing 7-5, 6-4 over Marina Erakovic.