

MP will benefit from National Skill Excellence Centres: CM

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has said that Empowering Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan, skill development and employment have been kept at the core in the Union Budget 2025. Madhya Pradesh is ready to take advantage of this opportunity and develop the state as a 'Skill Power State'. CM Dr. Yadav said that under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, we are creating an environment where every youth will get training according to the latest industrial needs. With this, the talent of the state will make its mark not only at the national but also at the global level. Yadav said that Madhya Pradesh will especially benefit from the establishment of 5

National Skill Excellence Centres announced in the Union Budget-2025. Through these centres, the "Make for India and Make for the World" campaign will be strengthened, which will promote advanced training of trainers, certification system and industry-related courses in the state. CM Dr. Yadav has described this initiative as a historic opportunity for the youth of the state. He said that Madhya Pradesh is ready to touch new heights of skill development. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav said that the announcement of a Fund of Funds of Rs 10 thousand crore for start-ups will give a new direction to innovation and entrepreneurship in Madhya Pradesh. The state government is preparing a special action plan to take maximum advantage of this fund, so that local start-ups can

get capital and structural support. Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Skill Development and Employment, Gautam Tetwal said that "This budget not only addresses skill development, but also presents a model of holistic development by linking it with employment. We will give priority to digital learning, AI based education and training programmes in Madhya Pradesh in line with the requirements of new industries. This will open the doors of employment and entrepreneurship for the youth." He said that a comprehensive strategy is being prepared by the Department of Skill Development and Employment to effectively implement the schemes announced in the Union Budget at the state level. The Chief Minister said that

the budget emphasises on the Global Capability Centre (GCC) framework, which will give Madhya Pradesh an opportunity to set up skill centres of global companies in tier-2 cities. This will prepare talented youth in accordance with the global market. Provision of Mudra loan has been made in the tourism and hospitality industry. The government will provide special financial assistance to the youth to promote home-stay and rural tourism, which will bolster the local economy. For the first time, the government is going to connect 5 lakh youth with online capacity building and entrepreneurship training for Scheduled Caste and Tribe women and entrepreneurs of deprived communities. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav said that this budget is a powerful

step towards making Madhya Pradesh a centre of skill and innovation. New skilling hubs, GCC centres and funding for startups in the state will create innumerable employment opportunities. Carrying forward the self-reliant India vision of Prime Minister Modi, Madhya Pradesh is moving towards becoming the "Skill Hub of India". Minister Gautam Tetwal said that the state government will prepare a new strategy in the coming years to link skill development directly with employment, so that every youth can get opportunities according to his ability. This budget is not just a document of financial allocation, but the beginning of a new era where skill will become the foundation of a developed society, developed state and developed country.



A priest helps a child to make her start writing on a slate during Saraswati Puja on the occasion of Basant Panchami at Bengali Association Kalibari, TT Nagar in Bhopal on Sunday. Pioneer photo

CCTV probe launched as accountant loses Rs 2 Lakh

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Accountant of Bansal One company was targeted by four armed masked miscreants robbed of Rs 2 lakh at Agarwal Sweets near Rachna Tower. On Saturday evening, four masked individuals robbed an accountant at knifepoint in the Govindpura area of Bhopal, making off with a bag containing Rs 2 lakh. Despite the police cordoning off the area immediately after the incident, the miscreants have not yet been traced. Deepesh Joshi, a resident of Netaji Enclave Chunabhatti, works as an accountant at Bansal One Company. Every Saturday, he carries cash to the company's workshop in Ashoka Garden to

distribute salaries. On the evening of the robbery, Deepesh left his office at Rani Kamlapati Railway Station with Rs 2 lakh en route to the workshop. When Deepesh reached Agarwal Sweets near Rachna Tower, he was surrounded by four miscreants riding two motorcycles. They threatened him with knives, snatched the bag, and fled the scene. Deepesh attempted to raise an alarm, but by the time anyone reacted, the robbers had already disappeared. The police have formed four teams to investigate the case. Deepesh told the police that he routinely brings cash to pay the workers and had been carrying the money when the robbery occurred. He mentioned that the miscreants blocked his path

near the crematorium close to Agarwal Sweets, where they stole the bag containing Rs 2 lakh. The robbers had cloth tied around their faces, and Deepesh, fearing for his safety, did not resist and handed over the bag. Police believe the robbers had recce the area before the crime, knowing Deepesh's routine of carrying large sums of money every Saturday. The police are currently investigating former employees of the company and other potential suspects. Govindpura ACP Deepak Nayak stated that the route taken by Deepesh has been divided into four parts for investigation, and four teams are reviewing CCTV footage. The police are confident that the culprits will be apprehended soon.

Videos shot before suicide go viral

Bhopal: After ten days of treatment a 26-year-old youth, who committed suicide by jumping in front of a train, in Vidisha on January 22, made three videos, before ending his life. In videos, he alleged girlfriend and cousin harassed him forcing to take extreme level. These videos have surfaced after the death of the young man. Hemant Raikwar, a resident of Bhopal, was found seriously injured near the railway track in the Ramdwara area of the district at around 9 pm on January 22. His family immediately admitted him to the local medical college, where he was referred to Hamidia Hospital in Bhopal in view of his critical condition. He died 10 days later on Saturday. In the video, he has accused his cousin of breaking his marriage with his girlfriend as well as blackmailing and threatening

him. The young man said - these two also distanced me from my parents and sister. I am committing suicide because of these two. He said to former CM Shivraj Singh Chauhan that girls are taking wrong advantage of the law. Get it changed. Before committing suicide, Hemant has also mentioned his family, girlfriend, cousin sister and former Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan in the video. After Hemant jumped in front of the train, his family also reached Vidisha. On the second day of the incident, Hemant's family reached the SP office demanding action against both the girls. Here he demanded action against the accused in the case from the police. Brother-in-law Uday Kewat said that a year ago, Hemant's marriage was fixed with a girl from Bunty Nagar.

Police nab 3 notorious criminals, recover stolen goods

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Kamla Nagar Police have arrested three notorious criminals who resumed their theft spree after being released from jail. The police recovered stolen valuables worth Rs 13.50 lakh, including three motorcycles and gold and silver jewelry. The arrests were made after the suspects were identified through CCTV footage. The criminals had previously served three-year sentences for theft. However, after being released a few months ago, they resumed their criminal activities. During the preliminary investigation, police uncovered their involvement in six theft cases across Kamla Nagar, Kotwali, Piplani, and Taliya areas. Additional DCP Rashmi Agrawal Dubey stated that on January 27, Satish Kumar Nema,

a resident of Sahyadri Complex, Kamla Nagar, left home with his family to attend a religious event. Upon returning, he found the house ransacked, locks broken, and valuables missing. The stolen items included gold bangles, a gold chain, a pendant, three mangalsutras, four gold earrings, silver anklets, silver coins, and ₹25,000 in cash. A case was registered against unidentified suspects, and a special police team was formed to investigate the broad daylight theft. Upon reviewing CCTV footage from the crime scene, police spotted two suspects entering the house. They were identified as habitual offenders Niyaz Khan and Raju Khatri. Later, both were arrested near Shastrī Nagar ground, where they confessed to committing the crime along with their accomplice Abid Khan. Based on their con-

fession, the police recovered three stolen motorcycles and gold and silver jewelry worth ₹13.50 lakh from various locations in Kamla Nagar, Kotwali, Piplani, and Taliya. The arrested individuals have been identified as Niyaz Khan (40), a resident of Bangalore, Karnataka, currently living in Gadde Wali Multi, TT Nagar; Raju Khatri (52), a resident of Gadde Wali Multi, TT Nagar; and Abid Khan (47), a resident of Ashta, Sehore district. The three are long-time associates. Niyaz and Raju had previously been sentenced to three years in prison for theft and were released in October and November last year. According to Kamla Nagar Police Station in-charge Nirup Pandey, the accused would change the number plates of stolen motorcycles before using them for burglary and theft.



Artists paint graffiti as a part of beautification of the city ahead of the Global Investors Summit in Bhopal on Sunday. Pioneer photo

February brings warm days to MP, temperatures expected to soar

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Madhya Pradesh ushered in February with a rise in temperatures, a trend that is expected to continue throughout the month. On the second day of February, several districts recorded temperatures above 32°C, including Mandla (32.4°C), Malajkhand (32.9°C), Khandwa (32.5°C), and Khargone (32°C). Other cities such as Betul, Ratlam, Damoh, Jabalpur, Rewa, Sagar, Satna, Seoni, Tikamgarh, and Umaria experienced temperatures ranging between 30°C and 31°C. As February progresses, daytime temperatures are expected to rise further, with warm days and cool mornings and nights. According to the Meteorological Department, a Western Disturbance will affect the northern parts of

Historically, February in Madhya Pradesh has been characterized by hot days with temperatures exceeding 30°C and cooler nights ranging from 10 to 14 degrees

the state starting on February 3. The disturbance is expected to bring clouds and drizzle, particularly in the Gwalior-Chambal region. However, the system is not expected to be very strong, and heavy rainfall is unlikely. The first week of February will likely see cloudy skies in some areas, but temperatures will remain high during the day. Historically, February in Madhya Pradesh has been characterized by hot days with temperatures exceeding 30°C and cooler nights ranging from 10°C to 14°C. Rain is also common during the month, with showers

expected around February 12-14. Cities like Bhopal, Indore, and Ujjain will experience high daytime temperatures, while Gwalior is likely to be the coldest, with temperatures dipping as low as 6°C in previous years. In contrast to the severe cold that gripped the state in November and December, February marks a return to milder conditions. Both of the previous months set record low temperatures, with Bhopal experiencing its coldest November in 36 years and December breaking records for the lowest temperatures. The cold waves in

December lasted for nine days, prompting changes in school timings and the installation of heaters in places like Bhopal's Van Vihar National Park. January saw a mix of severe cold during the first half of the month, followed by a moderation in temperatures. The lack of strong Western Disturbance activity in January prevented heavy rains or hail, although day temperatures in some areas like Bhopal, Rewa, Sagar, and Jabalpur rose above normal. Nights in January remained colder in several regions, with temperatures dipping below 12°C in areas like Rajgarh (8.4°C), Sehore (9.1°C), and Gwalior (11.6°C). Despite this, February is expected to bring further rises in both daytime and nighttime temperatures as the cold gradually subsides.

Drunk man climbs 80-foot tower in Barkhedi area of Bhopal, rescued

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

A dramatic incident unfolded in the Barkhedi area of the State capital when a 33-year-old intoxicated man climbed an 80-foot mobile tower, causing panic among locals. The bizarre episode, which occurred near the railway station underbridge, was captured on video and quickly went viral on social media. Eyewitnesses stated that the man, identified as Vivek, began scaling the tower while visibly drunk. Despite initial efforts by onlookers to stop him, he managed to reach the top and started shaking the structure, raising fears of a possible accident. Concerned residents immediately alerted the Jahangirabad police and the municipal corporation for assistance. Authorities responded swiftly by dispatching a fire crane to the scene while police officials attempted to talk Vivek down. The negotiation lasted nearly 20 minutes before he finally agreed to descend on his own. As soon as he reached the ground, police

Despite initial efforts by onlookers to stop him, he managed to reach the top and started shaking the structure

took him into custody for questioning. The incident created a spectacle in the area, drawing a large crowd of curious onlookers. Meanwhile, the viral video of the stunt has been widely circulated on various social media platforms, sparking debates about the dangers of intoxication and reckless behavior. Officials have not disclosed whether any legal action will be taken against Vivek. However, the incident has once again highlighted concerns regarding public safety and the risks associated with alcohol abuse. Fortunately, the quick response from authorities prevented a potential tragedy, leaving residents shaken but relieved.

Tiger under treatment at Van Vihar succumbs

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

In a heartbreaking turn of events, Chhota Bhim, a tiger from Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve, passed away on Sunday at the Van Vihar National Park in the state capital. The tiger was rescued in late November 2024 from the Khitauli range, where he was found in a dire state, with a clutch wire noose tightly wrapped around his neck. The injury was grave, and immediate intervention was necessary. Recognising the critical condition of the animal, wildlife authorities rushed him to Van Vihar, where he received extensive medical care. Despite two months of intensive treatment, including heart care and other vital interventions, the tiger's health deteriorated, and he tragically succumbed to heart failure. The news has sent ripples of sorrow through wildlife circles, with many expressing deep sympathy for the lost animal. Post-mortem plans are already underway. A four-member team of veterinarians has been tasked with conducting an autopsy to ascertain the precise cause of death.

Cops crack jewellery heist, recover gold & silver worth Rs 10 lakh

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Behind police arrested three miscreants involved in robbery from a jewellery shop and recovered cash, robbed jewelry and arms used in the crime. Anand Soni, runs a jewellery shop who reported to the Kotwali police regarding robbery from shop Anand Jewelers in Sarafa Bazar, on Saturday at around 7 in the evening, three unknown miscreants on a red motorcycle fired in the air from a 315 bore pistol and took away gold and silver jewellery from shop. Police swung into action and three police teams were formed and received information from Ater police that three persons resembling the appearance of the accused were spotted near Ater Fort towards Chambal, based on which police team surrounded the accused. Two accused opened fire at the police while the third person tried to escape with the bag. The police team warned all the three accused to surrender but the accused fired again at the police team and the police team retaliated in self-defense and fired at the accused.

The accused were identified as Gulli alias Shivam (23), Anshu Shrivats (19) and Mohit Tomar all residents of Morena

On checking with the search light, the accused were found lying in the bushes with bullet wounds in their legs. The accused were identified as Gulli alias Shivam (23), Anshu Shrivats (19) and Mohit Tomar all residents of Morena. On checking the belongings they were carrying cash Rs.2.77 lakh, two gold chains three pendants, two pairs of earrings, one ring, one single earring and 6.95 kg silver, worth Rs. 10 lakh and one 315 bore pistol, one 12 bore pistol, 5 live cartridges and 4 empty shells were recovered from them. The accused accepted to have committed the crime and also confessed to committing such incidents in Ahmedabad, Morena, Mumbai etc. areas which are under investigation.



Union Minister for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Shivraj Singh Chouhan being welcomed by his supporters on his arrival in Morena, Madhya Pradesh on Sunday. Pioneer photo

AIIMS Bhopal organizes CME program on leprosy

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Under the guidance of Executive Director, Prof. (Dr.) Ajai Singh, a significant Continuing Medical Education (CME) program on leprosy was organized for postgraduate students at AIIMS Bhopal on Saturday, February 1, 2025. The event saw enthusiastic participation from postgrad-

uate students of various medical colleges. The primary objective of the CME was to foster collaboration among medical institutions through intercollegiate academic meetings, enabling knowledge exchange and enhanced learning opportunities for students. This year's World Health Organization (WHO) theme "Unite, Act, Eliminate" perfectly resonates with this ini-

tiative. It underscores the need for unity within the medical community, decisive action through early diagnosis and effective treatment, and a collective effort toward eliminating leprosy. During the CME session, experts on leprosy discussed in detail the identification of the disease, the latest treatment methods, and the promotion of the right mindset towards this illness in society.

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RSS-affiliate SJM says Budget of this year 'prudent', addresses key concerns

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Hailing the Union Budget as "prudent budget amidst challenges", the Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM) on Sunday said it has tried to address all the key concerns to take the country's economy forward and also make it self-reliant. The SJM is an affiliate of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Presenting the Union Budget for 2025-26 in Lok Sabha on Saturday, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman made a slew of announcements and also exempted annual income of up to ₹12 Lakh from income tax, rejigging tax slabs. In her budget speech, she laid out a blueprint for next-generation reforms, including raising the FDI limit in the insurance sector, simplification of tax laws and cutting duties on intermediaries while providing enhanced fiscal support for welfare measures. It's a "prudent budget amidst various challenges" the country was facing, the SJM co-convenor Ashwani Mahajan said in a statement. "Concerns were being expressed about health of the economy due to deceleration in GDP growth in last two quarters, depreciating rupee, continuing inflation, decline in consumption, rising trade deficit, declining forex reserves," he said. It was a "real challenge" for the government to spur manufacturing



growth, push for self-reliance in agriculture, support farmers and address imbalance in agriculture production, reduce dependence on foreign countries regarding pulses and edible oils, and also give tax relief to middle-income taxpayers, and address the inflationary concerns at the same time, Mahajan added. "Budget 2025-26 has tried to balance all these concerns and take the economy forward," he added. Mahajan said the Budget has given a push to the manufacturing sector in the country. The MSME manufacturing mission, enhanced credit guarantee for the MSME,

credit card for micro-enterprises, the extension of the PLI beyond an earlier list and several other measures proposed in the Budget to improve manufacturing will insulate the country from "Chinese dominance," he said. "The Swadeshi Jagran Manch was demanding a well-defined manufacturing policy in the country for a long time. The present endeavour of the government will go a long way towards this goal," he added. Mahajan said the Union Budget has also tried to remove obstacles in the clean tech path, by way of push given to lithium batteries, motors for

electric vehicles and other clean-tech manufacturing. "It's important to note that due to our excessive dependence on imported batteries, motors for electric vehicles and also solar cells, our import bill has been rising and in future, the nation could be even exploited due to our dependence on imported components," he said. "Therefore, it is giving a push to Aatmanirbhar Bharat and saving the nation from exploitation by foreigners," he added. The SJM co-convenor said the Budget has also tried to give a push to the health and agriculture sector and bridge the rural-urban gaps as well. "Budget 2025-26 does much more to push rural incomes. Apart from raising the Kisan Credit Card limit, agriculture push, food processing push and many more efforts to raise rural incomes can go a long way to reduce rural-urban disparities," he said. Allocation of ₹98,311 Crore for the healthcare sector in the Budget indicates a "significant push" for growth, Mahajan said. Key measures like customs duty exemptions on life-saving drugs and the establishment of daycare cancer centres are some of the essential steps the Budget has made, he said. "The SJM welcomes the budget announcement for recognising gig workers," Mahajan added.

Mysterious deaths in J-K's Rajouri: AIIMS Delhi team meets patients

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



A five-member team of experts from AIIMS Delhi, including specialists in toxicology, has spoken to 11 patients who are undergoing treatment for a mysterious illness that has claimed 17 lives in Jammu and Kashmir's Rajouri district, and recorded their clinical history. The team would visit Badhaal village on Sunday where three families suffered casualties due to the illness, and collect samples from their sealed homes and surrounding areas. "The samples would be tested to know the cause of toxicity. The experts will also interact with the other villagers," a source said. The AIIMS team headed by its director Dr M Srinivas comprises Dr A Shariff, professor in clinical toxicology, Dr Shailendra Kumar, additional professor, anaesthesia and critical care, Dr Jamahed Nayer, additional professor, emergency medicine, Dr Jagdish Prasad Meena, additional professor, pediatrics, and Dr Javed Qadri, assistant professor, clinical toxicology. According to sources, the team arrived in Rajouri on

Friday night, interacted with the patients and their relatives at the Government Medical College (GMC), and made several queries about the entire episode. They also examined some of the patients who are under observation. The doctors at GMC Rajouri are treating the 11 patients using Atropine, an anti-poison drug, the sources said. Besides the AIIMS Delhi team, a team of experts from PGI Chandigarh is also investigating the cause of toxicity. Meanwhile, no new case has been reported in the past nine days from Badhaal village, which was shaken by the unexplained deaths of 17 people belonging to three families between December 7 and January 19, officials said. To mitigate the situation and prevent further casualties, 87

families comprising 364 individuals were shifted from the village to three isolated centres in Rajouri -- Government Nursing College, Government Boys Higher Secondary School, and Government Medical College where they are under observation. To ensure the safety of the remaining 808 households, comprising 3,700 individuals, in Badhaal, the village has been divided into 14 clusters monitored by multi-department teams of 182 officials, sources said. All shops and establishments in the village have been sealed, and ration is being provided under strict supervision, an official said. The remote village has been declared a containment zone and prohibitory orders have been imposed on all public and private gatherings.

Gangster Joginder Gyong deported from Philippines, handed over to Delhi Police

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Wanted by police and facing Interpol Red Notice, gangster Joginder Gyong was deported from the Philippines to Delhi on Sunday, the CBI said. Joginder Gyong was wanted by Haryana Police in a case of criminal conspiracy and murder registered against him in Panipat. He was handed over to Delhi Police upon landing at the Indira Gandhi International Airport as he was also wanted by the force here, officials said. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) got a Red Notice issued against Joginder Gyong from the Interpol on October 25, 2024, which was circulated to all the law enforcement agencies globally for tracking the wanted criminal, an agency spokesperson said in a statement. "On the strength of the Red Notice, subject Joginder Gyong was deported from the Philippines via Bangkok to Delhi," he said. "The subject is a gangster wanted by the Haryana Police



in the murder of a victim whom the subject suspected of disclosing the real identity and location of his gangster brother Surender Gyong to the police. Surender Gyong was killed in an exchange of fire with the police," the statement said. Joginder Gyong allegedly planned and murdered the victim to avenge the death of his brother, the CBI said. "The subject was also allegedly involved in criminal cases in various states of India, including Delhi and Punjab, for the offences of robbery, murder, attempt to murder, putting person in fear of death or of grievous hurt in order to commit extortion and kidnapping for ransom," the spokesperson said. Meanwhile, Delhi Police said Gyong was apprehended by the Philippines Bureau of Immigration (PBI) from Bacolod City, acting on India's request for his extradition. According to PBI officials, Gyong was identified as an "Indian-Nepalese national" and a key figure in a separatist terror network, Delhi Police said. Gyong was convicted to life imprisonment in Haryana for illegal firearms possession. While on parole, he committed the murder in Panipat in December 2017 and later fled abroad, police said.

SC to hear on February 3 plea seeking safety measures for devotees at Maha Kumbh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a plea seeking implementation of specific guidelines and regulations to ensure safety of devotees attending the Maha Kumbh where at least 30 people were killed and 60 injured in a stampede on January 29. According to the cause list on February 3 uploaded on the apex court website, a bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar is slated to hear the PIL filed by advocate Vishal Tiwari. The petition seeks to prevent stampede incidents and protect the fundamental rights of equality and life under Article 21 of the Constitution. The plea, which made the Centre and all the states as parties, has sought a direction to the Centre and the state governments to work collectively in ensuring a safe and secure environment for devotees at the Maha Kumbh. It said all states should establish facilitation centres at Prayagraj to provide safety



information and assist their respective residents in emergencies. It also sought installation of signage and announcements in multiple languages to help pilgrims navigate the event with ease. "All states shall establish in proper manner their facilitation centres at the Maha Kumbh. These centres shall provide and display the basic information regarding the safety measures and guidelines to the persons coming from their states. In emergency these centres shall be ready for any assistance," it said. The plea said SMSes and WhatsApp messages be used to disseminate safety

protocols to attendees. There is a need for coordination between the Uttar Pradesh government and other states to ensure the availability of doctors and nurses at the venue, it said. The plea also sought regulation of VIP movement and said public safety should be given priority over VIP protocols to prevent congestion and ensure smooth crowd movement. The petitioner has urged the top court to direct the Uttar Pradesh government to submit a status report on the stampede incident and initiate legal action against those responsible for negligence. The stampede took place on January 29 on the occasion of

Mauni Amavasya, one of the most auspicious days of the Hindu calendar. The plea cited several past incidents of stampedes at religious gatherings, emphasising the need for proactive safety measures, and said in 1954, over 800 deaths took place due to overcrowding on a narrow bridge at the Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj. Around 200 people were killed in a stampede triggered by restricted access at Kumbh at Haridwar in 1986, it said, adding 39 deaths and over 140 injuries took place in 2003 at Nashik.

The Kumbh Mela is one of the largest religious gatherings in the world, taking place in rotation among four major locations: Prayagraj (Uttar Pradesh), Haridwar (Uttarakhand), Ujjain (Madhya Pradesh), and Nashik (Maharashtra). Given the massive influx of pilgrims from all states, the petition stresses the need for collective responsibility in ensuring proper crowd management, medical facilities, transportation, and security.

Maha Kumbh stampede: Congress slams BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday asked why the BJP government is not revealing the actual number of those who died in the Maha Kumbh stampede and claimed that the whole matter shows that it is trying to escape blame. In the January 29 stampede at Sangam, at least 30 pilgrims died and 60 were injured with the police blaming overcrowding for the incident. Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh cited a media report which said the state administration has not given an update on the number of deaths even after four days of the incident. "The BJP government, which gives the number of crores of devotees visiting the Maha Kumbh every day, is not revealing the actual number of dead even after five days. It is clear from the whole matter that this government is the culprit and wants to escape blame," Ramesh said.

PIL in Delhi HC seeks CBI enquiry into forgery by Drone Federation India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Drone Federation India (DFI) formerly known as Drone Federation of India is under intense scrutiny following proof of forging official documents to manipulate regulatory approvals had surfaced. As per sources, a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) has been filed on January 29, 2025 before the Delhi High Court seeking a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) investigation against the forgery of government documents by DFI. The PIL, submitted by Right to Information (RTI) activist Tej Pratap Singh, claims that DFI forged the NOC to bypass legal obstacles and change its company name. The fraudulent document, submitted to the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA), aimed to rebrand the organization as "Drone Federation of India," potentially misleading the public into believing it was government-affiliated. The relevant documents are in possession of The Pioneer. In addition to the forgery, DFI is accused of using lobbying tactics to unfairly influence tenders to certain select member companies,



File photo of a drone

thereby suppressing competition in the UAV industry. Further scrutiny has arisen over DFI's occupancy of office space at the former Air India Building, allegedly secured through questionable recommendations. Sources said MCA has initiated an inspection and the PIL calls for urgent action seeking a CBI investigation to ensure transparency and accountability. Drone Federation India now face serious legal consequences under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) for criminal forgery under Section 61, 316, 336, 337, 338 and 340 of BNS, 2023 which are cognizable and non-bailable in nature. When contacted to the company officials, a DFI official said, "DFI is a renowned think tank, not a drone company, and the claim in question is fake," commented the DFI official.

CAG building infra and processes to harness AI and ML: Sanjay Murthy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India's apex auditor is building the necessary infrastructure and processes to harness artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning for auditing processes and to audit AI applications themselves as the country aims to become a USD 30-trillion economy by 2047, CAG K Sanjay Murthy said. Speaking at the World Forum of Accountants hosted by ICAI on Saturday, Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) Murthy said a USD 30-trillion economy will be necessarily digital, as organisations expand into emerging areas, and global champions are born. Accounting and auditing professionals will have to provide the required support. "Adopting new technologies would help bring required efficiencies in the accounting and auditing processes. Taking a leadership role in developing and adapting innovative technological practices would also help Indian firms to become global champions," he said, while addressing the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) programme here on Saturday. Underlining the key role of digital technology as a major enabler as well as disrupter, the CAG said the range of



technological solutions that are now available have transformed the scale and potential at which organisations can achieve higher performance outcomes. "For us, it's an exciting challenge as the India of 2025 moves towards becoming a Viksit Bharat of 2047 which aspires to have an economy of USD 30 trillion. More companies and larger government budgets cannot be handled by physically replicating existing structures and processes. Technology will have to be leveraged to keep up and deliver," he said. The CAG's address covered the gamut of technology and innovation in auditing and accounting, pointing out how AI, machine learning, robotic automation and blockchain technology have revolutionised the field. "The evolution of technology

and adaptation will require a transformation in intellectual and infrastructural capacities," he said. Referring to the recent "The Future of Jobs Report 2025" by the World Economic Forum, Murthy noted how it has highlighted the drivers of transformation and skillsets needed in coming years. "We have embarked upon a comprehensive digitisation journey. We are committed to further integrating advanced technologies to bolster audit capabilities. Recognising the transformative potential of AI and ML, we have already taken the leap of faith and started building necessary infrastructure and processes to harness these technologies to use them in auditing processes and to audit AI applications themselves," he said. Talking about the CAG's digitisation journey, he said a

major development is the implementation of the One IAAD One System (OIOS), an end-to-end Audit Information Management System (AIMS) and a web-enabled IT application that supports multiple languages, offers offline functionality, and includes a mobile application for audits in a fully digital environment. Digital initiatives in areas of internal administration, including eHRMS and eOffice, have also been mainstreamed. He said the CAG has also implemented state-of-the-art data analytic capabilities through its dedicated centre to enable analysis-driven audits. Remote sensing techniques and image analytics have also been widely used. It will be our endeavour to access other applications for smoothening the process of auditing for greater transparency, Murthy added. The World Forum of Accountants is an annual conference, and it was ICAI's turn as host this year. The World Forum of Accountants brings together some of the brightest minds from among accountants, auditors, and finance professionals, business leaders and regulators of the accounting and auditing profession.

SC conference deliberates issues faced by State judiciary

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Identification of bottlenecks in case disposal and strategies to reduce backlog of cases at different levels came up for discussion at a national conference organised by the Supreme Court here on issues faced by the State judiciary. The conference held on Saturday witnessed participation of judges of the top court, the High Courts as well as the District judiciary. "The idea behind this conference was to engage in a meaningful dialogue with different stakeholders and functionaries in the state judiciary, especially the district courts, to first understand the challenges being faced by them and thereafter, chalk out a plan to address the same," the apex court administration said in a release. The conference had four technical sessions which covered diverse topics affecting the performance of state judiciary. The technical sessions were chaired by the judges of the apex court, including Chief Justice of India Sanjay Khanna. It said the first session witnessed discussions on ways to narrow the gulf between institution and disposal of

cases, identification of case types flooding judicial dockets, identification of bottlenecks in case disposal and strategies to reduce backlog of cases at different levels. The statement said in one of the sessions, the feasibility of having a uniform case categorisation in different courts was explored. "In this session, ways to leverage technology and better to optimise the judicial processes were also deliberated upon," the release said. It said discussions were also held on timely recruitment of judicial officers and court staffs, continual recruitment or empanelment of public prosecutors or legal aid counsels, creation of a permanent IT and data cadre in all high courts and district courts and measures to enhance objectivity in the process of recommending suitable candidates from district judiciary for elevation to the high courts. Discussions on career progression and continuous performance evaluation of judicial officers, need for establishing a common curriculum for training and capacity building of judicial officers and ways of ensuring accountability of judicial officers and court staff were also held during the sessions.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Boost for middle class

Tax reliefs, agricultural boosts and support for gig workers define Union Budget 2025, but concerns about economic growth persist

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the Union Budget 2025-26 on February 1, 2025, focusing on stimulating economic growth, supporting the middle class and enhancing agricultural productivity. The Union Budget 2025-26 with a total expenditure of Rs 50,65,345 crore, focuses on economic growth, middle-class relief and agricultural development. On the infrastructure front, capital expenditure there is a modest increase to drive development, though specific figures were not detailed. Meanwhile, the fiscal deficit is projected to be 4.4 per cent of GDP for 2025-26. While the budget lays out ambitious plans to stimulate various sectors, its effectiveness will depend on implementation and overall economic conditions. What must come as big relief for the middle class is raising of the income tax limit. The budget introduced significant tax relief for the middle class by raising the income tax exemption threshold to Rs 12.75 lakh per annum, effectively exempting individuals with an average monthly income of up to Rs1 lakh from paying income tax. This move aims to boost household savings and consumption.

A six-year programme has been announced to increase the production of pulses and extra-long staple cotton and help farmers. The government plans to support farmers by purchasing pulses at guaranteed prices and investing in research and development to enhance cotton yields, thereby reducing dependence on imports. The budget has also proposed registration of one crore gig workers on the e-Shram portal. This initiative aims to formalise the gig economy workforce and improve their access to healthcare and welfare schemes. An allocation of Rs 11.21 lakh crore was made for capital expenditure, reflecting a modest increase from the previous year. This investment is intended to stimulate infrastructure development and economic growth. Some analysts, including Moody's Ratings, have expressed concerns that the tax relief measures for the middle class may have a limited effect on overall economic growth. The effectiveness of these measures in significantly boosting consumption and investment remains uncertain. The budget's capital expenditure increase was modest, which may not be sufficient to drive the desired level of infrastructure development and economic expansion. While the budget outlines ambitious programmes, the success of these initiatives will depend on effective implementation at the ground level. Past challenges in executing government schemes could pose hurdles to achieving the desired outcomes. The Union Budget 2025-26 introduces notable measures to support the middle class and agriculture, but its potential impact on broader economic growth and the effectiveness of implementation remain areas to watch. While the budget's initiatives are promising, concerns linger about their impact on economic growth and the effectiveness of their implementation.

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PICTALK



Visitors at the 'World Book Fair' at Pragati Maidan, in New Delhi

Rethinking the Places of Worship Act 1991

The Supreme Court's interim order barring civil courts from hearing suits related to places of worship has reignited debate over the Places of Worship Act, 1991



SMRITIKA KESRI

A special bench of the Supreme Court led by CJI Sanjiv Khanna, on December 12, 2024, had barred all the civil courts from entertaining any fresh or pending suits related to the places of worship, in effect, validating the Act for an interim period, even before hearing the constitutional challenge to it. The Places of Worship Act was enacted to serve as a legislative firewall against religious disputes over the places of worship. It seeks to bar conversion of places of worship and freezes their religious character as they existed on August 15, 1947, with an exception for the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute.

Judicial Review and the Rule of Law

The abatement of suits and other legal proceedings in relation to the places of worship, as sought to be done through Parliament by a legislative fiat in 1991, goes contrary to the basic feature of the rule of law and judicial review as held in *Indira Gandhi vs Raj Narain*, among others. In India, and other parliamentary democracies, the view of the Parliament, served through its members, often portrayed as an eternal "will of the people," free from all fetters, is misplaced: it is not only anathema to democratic and constitutional thoughts of our republic but also problematic in its philosophical underpinnings from where it stems out. The Parliament's act of granting immunity to certain legal disputes is based on a fallacious hypothesis that Parliament is a symbol of the continuous 'will of the people' and, consequently, not answerable to the courts. However, the Indian constitution establishes the principle of constitutional supremacy, as opposed to unchecked parliamentary sovereignty, which ensures that even parliamentary legislation, though reflecting the will of the people, is subject to judicial review. This is traceable from Article 13(2), which reinforces that parliamentary laws cannot override the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution and remain subject



to constitutional constraints and judicial scrutiny. Hence, an act passed by the Parliament—the Places of Worship Act, in this case—cannot annihilate the fundamental right of freedom of worship enshrined under Articles 25 and 26, as well as the text of the Preamble. **Treating equals as unequal** The Places of Worship Act, nevertheless, made its effect inapplicable to the hitherto Ram Janma Bhumi-Babri Masjid dispute, by way of Section 5, acknowledging its special significance emanating from being present at a particular site while excluding other similarly placed temples, viz Kashi Vishwanath and Krishna Janma Bhumi, also derive their significance from being located at specific sites/places. In this manner, the Act has created an unreasonable and arbitrary classification against Article 14 of the Constitution by treating Ram Janma Bhumi as a separate class in itself. The Supreme Court in *Royappa* has held that "equality is antithetic to arbitrariness. In fact, equality and arbitrariness are sworn enemies; one belongs to the rule of law in a republic while the other, to the whim and caprice of an absolute monarch.



THE PARLIAMENT'S ACT OF GRANTING IMMUNITY TO CERTAIN LEGAL DISPUTES IS BASED ON A FALLACIOUS HYPOTHESIS THAT PARLIAMENT IS A SYMBOL OF THE CONTINUOUS 'WILL OF THE PEOPLE' AND CONSEQUENTLY, NOT ANSWERABLE TO THE COURTS

Where an act is arbitrary, it is implicit in it that it is unequal both according to political logic and constitutional law and therefore violative of Article 14." In addition, under the two-pronged Article 14 test, first settled by the Supreme Court in *Anwar Ali Sarkar*, any legislative classification that provides advantages and disadvantages on a differential ground will be declared as unconstitutional: (a) if there is no intelligible differential between the classification made, which distinguishes those that are grouped from those that have been excluded; (b) if that differential does not have a rational relation to the object sought to be achieved by the statute in question. The classification made under the Act is unconstitutional for two primary reasons: First, the exemption accorded to Ram Janma Bhumi presumes the rights of the parties attached to the Aayodhya dispute to be more equal and holier than the rights of similarly placed parties about the other two religious sites (Kashi & Mathura); secondly, the classification is devoid of any factual basis and based on a premise that abatement of legal proceedings for reclamation of religious sites other

than Ram Janma Bhumi will ease communal tensions in the country. Even assuming so, a routine law and order situation cannot be the basis for the suspension of a constitutional right. The unreasonable classification carved out by the Act and placing a bar on parties attached to disputes concerning places of worship from knocking on the court's door warrant serious re-evaluation. The door of the courts, in a functioning democracy, based on a written constitution, must always be ajar to the victims of wrongdoings. Having said that, invalidating the entire Act, at this stage, may not be the most pragmatic course of action. In that case, following the terms of "ut res magis valeat quam pereat" (it is better for a thing to have an effect than to be void), a more measured approach would entail reading down the Act to extend the benefit of Section 5 [exemption from the Act, as done with *Ram Janma Bhumi*] to two other similarly placed temples (Kashi & Mathura), rather than invalidating it entirely.

(The author is a practising advocate in Delhi, with inputs from Vaidushya Parthi; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PEOPLE-CENTRIC BUDGET

Madam — The Union Budget 2025 may be hailed as the budget of the people, for the people. The FM has admirably identified the middle class's dedication towards nation building, so apart from targeting the indices, ratios and vital parameters to showcase the country's march towards the third largest economy, she has presented a grassroots budget swaying over every aspect of the middle class from largesse on tax benefits, MSMEs, farmers and entrepreneurs. The synergy of the middle class in service, industry and business will have a multiplier effect on the GDP in coming years. The new Income Tax Bill is expected next week and commensurate with the budget, comprehensive amendments and simplification are expected. Our country has unlimited resources, but they need to be tapped through reasonable and promotional tax legislation and encouraged for wealth creation through ease and promotional legislation. The GDP has a fair ratio of revenue collection of more than sixty percent. So the revenue policymakers, particularly the GST administration, should tune their policy by lowering GST slabs and doing away with the irrelevant concepts of luxury goods. The media has missed the defence outlay increase of 9.53 per cent at Rs 681,210 crores, but looking at the huge investments in defence by neighbouring China, the resources have to be mobilised for the modernisation of infrastructure, sixth-generation missiles, aircraft, artillery, and Navy warships. It is now the turn of the state governments to present their budgets conforming with the union budget, targeting the rural industrialisation and infrastructure, modernising their existing industrial estates and promoting the industry.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

END EXPLOITATIVE WORKWEEKS

Madam— The articles 'Beyond the 70-hour workweek: Redefining productivity' (January 30) and 'A 90-hour workweek: Path to success or recipe for burnout' (February 1), both in *The Pioneer*, are

Govt schools show improvement



Undoubtedly, the general public has a negative image of government schools. As soon as the economy improves slightly, people are eager to send their children to pricey private schools. However, the findings of the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER 2024) offer new optimism. The ASER report, which was conducted on pupils from

rural areas, demonstrates that the reading abilities and mathematical skills of youngsters aged six to fourteen in the country improved following the Corona crisis. Students' basic mathematical skills have improved in schools at both the government and private levels.

Children in class five can solve division problems. The good news is that learning standards have increased in schools across the country. This level remained steady until 2010, after which it began to decline. According to the ASER research, as enrolment rates have improved, so has digital literacy. It is encouraging that, following the Corona period, there has been a renewed emphasis on education in schools. Awareness has also been demonstrated among parents.

Abhijit Roy | Jamshedpur

INDIA T20 WIN: 17TH TIME IN A ROW

Madam — India clinched a record 17th consecutive T20 series on home soil with a thrilling 15-run win in the fourth match against England in Pune on Friday. This match will be remembered for a long time for the scintillating batting performance of Hardik Pandya and Shivam Dubey, whose half-centuries helped India bounce back from early jolts. But it was bowler Harshit Rana who stole the show. He made his debut in the match as a concussion substitute for Shivam Dubey and claimed three scalps. However, his impressive performance did not go down well with some foreign players who questioned the entry of Harshit Rana, a bowler, as a concussion substitute for an all-rounder player. But their misplaced criticism does not belittle his feat. These are the same players who seal their lips over bad umpiring against India in their countries.

Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Budget 2025-26: A leap toward 'Viksit Bharat' with fintech at the forefront



S SUNDARARAJAN

Finance Minister has unveiled a forward-looking Budget that reinforces India's commitment to financial inclusion, innovation and sustainable economic growth.

Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman has presented a forward-thinking and progressive Union Budget 2025-26 that reinforces India's steadfast journey toward Viksit Bharat. This year's budget is a reflection of the government's unwavering commitment to fostering financial inclusion, driving innovation and ensuring sustainable economic growth. By laying a robust foundation for a digital-first economy, it not only addresses the present needs of businesses and individuals but also sets a visionary course for the future of India's financial ecosystem. The fintech sector has been a cornerstone of India's digital transformation, playing an instrumental role in expanding financial accessibility, empowering MSMEs, and accelerating the adoption of digital transactions. The government's continued emphasis on fostering a light-touch regulatory environment, strengthening digital public infrastructure, and enhancing credit availability for small businesses and startups is a significant step forward in unlocking new avenues for



fintech innovation. These strategic measures will help fintech companies drive greater financial inclusion and economic resilience across the country. Some of the most impactful highlights of this budget for the fintech ecosystem include: **Green Credit Score Framework** – A groundbreaking initiative aimed at transforming rural financial empowerment by enabling better credit access for Self-Help Group (SHG) members and underserved rural communities. This will facilitate greater participation of rural enterprises in the formal economy. **Revamped Central KYC Registry** – A much-needed step toward simplifying compliance requirements for financial institutions, reduc-

ing redundancies, and enhancing the ease of doing business across banking and fintech sectors. **Expansion of Digital Public Infrastructure** – Initiatives such as BharatTradeNet will play a pivotal role in streamlining trade financing and documentation processes, ensuring seamless digital transactions, and bolstering India's position as a global trade hub. **Higher Credit Availability for MSMEs and Startups** – Enhanced credit card limits for micro-enterprises, alongside expanded guarantee cover programs, will provide vital financial support to budding entrepreneurs and small businesses, fueling economic growth and job creation. As we look ahead, the fiscal year 2025-26 presents enormous opportunities for fintech players like us at i-exceed to drive groundbreaking innovations in banking and financial services. With strong regulatory support and government-led initiatives, we are well-positioned to: Scale digital banking and embedded finance solutions to cater to unbanked and underbanked segments, fostering a

more inclusive financial landscape. Leverage cutting-edge technologies such as AI, blockchain, and automation to enhance regulatory compliance, improve credit risk assessment, and strengthen fraud prevention mechanisms. Accelerate the adoption of digital lending and payment solutions by seamlessly integrating with India's rapidly evolving financial ecosystem, thereby enhancing user experience and operational efficiencies. The budget's strong focus on inclusive growth, digital empowerment, and financial accessibility aligns perfectly with our vision of creating next-generation fintech solutions that bridge gaps, simplify processes, and unlock new growth opportunities for businesses and individuals alike. The year ahead promises to be a transformative one for India's fintech landscape. We must seize this momentum, foster collaboration, and continue to innovate relentlessly. (The writer is co-founder and CEO of i-exceed technology solutions; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

THE SCIENCE OF MUDRAS

Rooted in the five elements, the five pranas and the three doshas, mudras have therapeutic properties



RAVI VALLURI

Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita says, "There is nothing as sacred as knowledge." Knowledge can be acquired by the human mind through the 5 Ds—dedication, determination, dynamism, devotion and discipline and one H—Humility. The science of mudras, is intrinsically related to the esoteric knowledge of yoga and which can be further segregated into the five elements, the five life forces (or subtle forces of energy called the pranas) and the three doshas. The five elements are namely – Akash (ether or space), Vayu (air), Agni (fire), Jal (water) and Prithvi (earth); the five life forces or pranas are Prana, Udana, Samana, Apana and Vyana and the three doshas are Vata, Kapha and Pitta. Humans unconsciously practice mudras. For instance, the Namaste Mudra or a young child begins learning to walk with his thumbs raised which is called the Meru Dand Mudra. An infant even in a deep slumber, his index finger would involuntarily touch the thumb and the other three fingers are on the base of the palm (Chinmaya Mudra). The universe in its auto-mode conjures these processes to take place and we are oblivious to the occurrence. Some other mudras which need to be practised are:

- (a) Jnana mudra: This is performed to increase brain power, improve memory and for the removal of negative thoughts. Thereby one attains peace and bliss.
- (b) Prithvi mudra: This helps in balancing the five sense organs, improves blood circulation and enhances our energy levels. Practice of this mudra assists in increasing our alertness.
- (c) Apana mudra: This facilitates an improved elimination process, revitalising the digestive system, improving the gums and strengthening immunity.
- (d) Prana mudra: This mudra addresses the problem of fatigue; it also



provides essential vitamins to the body besides increasing stamina and vigour to the human body. It also helps in maintenance of the health of our eyes.

(e) Dhyana mudra: Essentially, this mudra helps in making us mindful and wakeful and we are at peace with ourselves. Over a period, we attain peace of mind.

(f) Shunhya Vayu mudra: Practice of this mudra helps in combating problems of flatulence and gastric ailments. The gut houses our solar plexus, which is also referred to as the second brain. We need to take adequate care of our abdomen as most human ailments arise from this part of the body. Therefore, there is enormous merit in the adage, "Health is in your hands".

Sudarshan Kriya: The unique breathing technique of Sudarshan Kriya is the fulcrum of the Happiness Programme of the Art of Living. Su means proper, Darshan implies vision and Kriya is a purifying action. Through the actions of our breath, we appreciate a proper vision of who we are. It is momentous to understand that nature runs on a rhythm. For instance, the sun rises and sets at a particular time, similarly, seasons arrive and exit at predetermined times. Humans feel hungry or sleepy at certain times. Our emotions, feelings and thoughts are all cast in the symphony of rhythm. We are unable to distinguish between cacophony and symphony in this frenetic pace of life which is cannonaded by innumerable thoughts, continuous action and noise. When sounds are harmonised by the syllable of Soham, we can term it as magical music. Enlightenment is not accruing anything providential but harmonising our whole being rhythmically. During the breathing process participants feel varied sensations, emotions, tingling sensations, laughter, weeping among others. This wonderful knowledge and wisdom have triggered humaneness to blossom when every cell is energised.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

Cornered in the wild: Trapped tigers spark conservation debate

As human encroachment, tourism and habitat fragmentation continue to blur the boundaries between nature and civilisation write **BKP Sinha and Arvind Kumar Jha**

A viral video capturing a distressing scene of a tigress and her cubs blocked by a throng of safari vehicles in Maharashtra's Umred Pauni Karhandla Wildlife Sanctuary has recently stirred significant concern and legal action. The Bombay High Court has taken suo-motu cognizance of the incident. Soon after, the Supreme Court sought a uniform national policy for managing the country's tiger reserves. The harrowing sight of the tiger family, seemingly gripped by fear while navigating the available space, serves as a poignant metaphor for the troubling dynamics between humans and wildlife, whether inside a tiger reserve or not. Mankind's relentless drive to dominate and exploit nature has led to a disturbingly eroded sense of ecological sanity. Tigers, magnificent predators endowed with a formidable set of adaptations, have long been revered for their prowess. Their sharp teeth and claws, exceptional vision and hearing, flexible spines and explosive bursts of speed enable them to efficiently stalk and capture prey.

Their striped coats act as camouflage, making them elusive both as hunters and as well as prey. Tigers, being solitary creatures, are known to be fiercely territorial, marking their domains with scents, claw marks, and vocalisations. While frequent and close encounters with tigers may thrill tourists, these experiences come at a significant cost to the animals' well-being. Increased human presence not only exacerbates stress and vulnerability among these majestic creatures but also alters their natural behaviour. After several populist initiatives to regularise forest encroachments, the Forest Rights Act (FRA) was legislated in 2006. It marked an era of mass-scale recognition of habitation, self-cultivation, and community forest resource rights. However, it has also resulted in new encroachments and a notable influx of human populations into forest areas increasing the proximity and chances of conflict between wildlife and humans.

The data from the Ministry of Tribal Affairs shows that by November 2024, an overwhelming 4.35 million (85.7 per cent) out of 5.07 million claims under the FRA had been disposed of. Titles on forest rights in 33 million acres of forest land having been given, illegal occupation continues in the rejected cases which are 36.5 per cent in left-wing affected states and 60 per cent in others. The absence of a final deadline for claim submission, ease of securing recommendations from Gram Sabhas that many times are not held, the prevalent use of the FRA as a political tool, and the quality of scrutiny at the authorities' levels have created an environment encouraging encroachers confident of regularisation. In Gujarat, 434 cases have been disposed of, and Maharashtra accepted 4,322 new individual forest rights claims in November while distributing 498 titles. Triggered by legislation, such a trend of ingress into wildlife habitats is unprecedented. There has been a significant surge in recognition of community forest resource rights (CFRR) after the FRA Rules were amended in 2012. Management rights of forests have been granted to communities by violating the eligibility conditions stipulated in sections 3(1)(i) and 4(3) of the FRA. Not sparing even tiger reserves and National Parks and Sanctuaries, such rights are granted, for example, in huge areas in Chhattisgarh in Dhamtari (5,544 ha), Achankmar and Sitnadi Udanti tiger reserves (12,527 ha), 60 per cent of Billigiri Wildlife Sanctuary in Karnataka, and the



IN AN UNPRECEDENTED MOVE, THE ODISHA STATE GOVERNMENT ISSUED AN ORDER IN 2024 HOLDING FOREST OFFICIALS ACCOUNTABLE FOR TIGER DEATHS WHICH HAS STIRRED CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND CHALLENGES FACED BY FORESTERS IN BALANCING CONSERVATION EFFORTS WITH THE RIGHTS AND SAFETY OF PEOPLE

Tansa Sanctuary in Maharashtra. Such actions do trigger a surge of human presence within wildlife habitats. As regards human casualties resulting from tiger attacks, they were recorded at 110 in 2022 and 82 in 2023. Data from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), however, sheds light on troubling trends in tiger mortality. In 2021 and 2022, tiger deaths within reserves exceeded those outside. However, this pattern reversed in 2023 and 2024, with more tiger fatalities occurring outside protected areas. As of January 2025, 17 tiger deaths have been reported, 12 of which occurred outside reserves. The conversion of spared areas into shared spaces impacts the behaviour of wildlife. Tigers are no exception.

They naturally respect territorial boundaries but get forced to venture into human habitations due to encroachment and habitat degradation. It does result in harm to locals, mostly accidental and out of hunger rather than retaliatory or revengeful. People, however, in contrast to their erstwhile prevalent spirit of tolerance and co-existence, mostly respond now through retaliation or out of vengeance resulting in the escalation of human-wildlife conflict.

In an unprecedented move, the Odisha state government issued an order in 2024 holding forest officials accountable for tiger deaths which has stirred conversations about the responsibilities and challenges faced by foresters in balancing conservation efforts with the rights and safety of people. The interaction between humans and wildlife species that are naturally active during the day (diurnal) or at dawn and dusk (crepuscular) face substantial behavioural changes when their activity patterns overlap with human activities. In the case of recreational activities in parks also, animals that typically forage or hunt during these times may alter their routines due to the presence of people, leading to stress and changes in feeding, mating, and territorial behaviours. Inside and near forests, light pollu-

tion, such as artificial lighting from streetlights, homes and recreational areas disrupts wildlife in numerous ways.

It can interfere with their natural movement patterns, making it difficult for animals to navigate their habitats, find food, or avoid predators. Light pollution can also impact predation, as predators might find it easier to spot prey, or conversely, prey might become disoriented and more vulnerable. Additionally, artificial lighting can affect reproductive behaviours, as many species rely on natural light cues for mating rituals and timing. The current approach of providing electricity etc. to interior forest habitations, seemingly beneficial for human populations, does pose a significant threat to long-term wildlife conservation. Along with this, large-scale proposals such as those recently announced in Telangana and Nagarhole (Coorg district) of Karnataka must consider their potential impact on human-wildlife conflict too.

Mitigating adverse impacts on wildlife necessitates more than merely avoiding times when human activities overlap with wildlife activity periods, the large-scale nature of such disturbances can still have a profound effect on wildlife. These disturbances often displace animals from their natural habitats, causing significant behavioural changes that can threaten even their survival. Instances from the area near Pench National Park in Maharashtra highlight the negative consequences of the changed behaviour of tigers. In one such case, a tiger in Parshiwni village attacked only tethered cattle, easy prey. During the necropsy of this tiger, excessive fat was found due to changes in its behaviour and diet. In the Ramtek area tigers have exhibited a concerning loss of territorial instincts indicating a breakdown in their natural order and social structure. Another tiger from the Kanhan region displayed unusual behaviour by regularly avoiding consuming its kill. Such avoidance

suggests, prima facie, a high level of stress and disturbance. Such instances are alarming as they simply indicate that the natural predator-prey dynamics and status of the health of the tiger population are compromised. Minimising disturbance to wildlife is paramount inside tiger reserves. However, with the current onslaught by humans and the pace of blurring of ecosystem boundaries, a more nuanced approach is necessary which requires a deeper understanding of the spatial and temporal dynamics of wildlife movement, recognition of the varying levels of sensitivity among different species, and consideration of a broader ecological context that includes fragmented landscapes, human settlements, and the impacts of climate change.

While the whole country is eagerly waiting for an early decision in the matter of Wildlife first and Ors Vs Union of India & Ors (109/2008) from the Supreme Court, the need for a national policy framework for not just tiger reserves but for all habitats cannot be overstated. It should be implemented by State Governments while duly considering the local contexts and the unique challenges faced by each region.

Evicting illegal encroachments on forest and wildlife habitats and relocating the genuine right-holders onto non-forest areas with adequate infrastructure should be the first step towards restoration of the ecological integrity of our natural systems. The impacts of climate change and natural disasters are no longer theoretical threats but stark realities. Recognizing the broader public interest in wildlife conservation and ecosystem sustainability, the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, the National Tiger Conservation Authority, and the Ministry of Tribal Affairs must collaborate closely to develop and implement effective conservation strategies that address these challenges.

(The writer are former PCCFs, UP and Maharashtra; views expressed are personal)

Budget 2025 puts sustainability at the forefront, but execution holds the key

With substantial investments in renewable energy, climate-resilient agriculture and afforestation, the budget lays a strong foundation for a greener future

The Union Budget 2025 signals a decisive shift towards environmental sustainability, reinforcing India's commitment to a cleaner, greener future. With a strong focus on renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, afforestation, waste management and climate resilience, the government has intended to balance economic growth with ecological responsibility. Expanding solar, wind, and hydro energy, along with incentives for green hydrogen, is a welcome step toward reducing India's carbon footprint. The emphasis on electric vehicles (EVs) and battery storage solutions will further bolster the transition to clean energy, reducing



RAJ KUMAR SRIVASTAVA

dependence on fossil fuels. However, the challenge remains in efficient implementation and ensuring accessibility to these technologies, especially in rural and semi-urban areas. Agriculture, often at the crossroads of economic and environmental policies, has received a much-needed sus-

tainability boost. The PM Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana and Mission for Aatmanirbharta in Pulses are moving in the right direction, ensuring climate-resilient farming and reducing excessive reliance on chemical fertilisers. However, agroforestry, regenerative farming and watershed management need further integration into mainstream agricultural policy to create a truly sustainable food system. The budget's allocation for afforestation and biodiversity conservation reflects an increased understanding of the role that forests and ecosystems play in mitigating climate change. With the Compensatory Afforestation Fund

Management Authority (CAMPA) receiving enhanced support, there is hope that India's forests will be managed with greater transparency and scientific precision. However, urban greening and nature-based solutions in city planning deserve stronger commitments, given the growing challenges of urban heat islands and pollution.

The circular economy model gets a notable push with incentives for waste-to-energy projects, stricter plastic waste management, and extended producer responsibility (EPR) regulations. These are positive steps, but enforcement remains a crucial hurdle. Ensuring that industries comply with waste management norms and



moving towards a zero-waste economy will require robust monitoring and public participation. The budget's recognition of climate resilience, particu-

larly through disaster management investments and early warning systems, is a commendable effort. Coastal and flood-prone regions will benefit from increased fund-

ing for disaster-resistant infrastructure, but a long-term climate adaptation roadmap needs further detailing.

One of the most promising aspects of Budget 2025 is the expansion of India's Green Finance ecosystem. With tax incentives for Green Bonds and carbon trading markets, the government is encouraging private sector participation in sustainability efforts. However, ensuring that green investments translate into real environmental benefits will require stringent regulatory oversight and transparency. While Budget 2025 takes significant strides in promoting environmental sustainability, its true success will be measured by execu-

tion, enforcement, and long-term commitment.

India has demonstrated political will in tackling climate change, but the challenge remains in aligning policy promises with on-the-ground realities. Sustainability is not just a budgetary allocation; it is a mindset shift. To truly achieve a green future, India needs a whole-of-society approach, where the government, private sector, and citizens work together to ensure that economic growth does not come at the cost of ecological wellbeing. With this budget, India has set the direction—what remains is the resolve to act decisively.

(The writer is a retired IFS officer; views are personal)

TRUMP PUTS TARIFFS ON CANADA, MEXICO AND CHINA

Spurs trade war as North American allies respond

PTI ■ PALM BEACH (US)

President Donald Trump on Saturday signed an order to impose stiff tariffs on imports from Mexico, Canada and China, drawing swift retaliation from the country's North American neighbours in an emerging trade war. The Republican president posted on social media that the tariffs were necessary "to protect Americans," pressing the three nations to do more to curb the manufacture and export of illicit fentanyl and for Canada and Mexico to reduce illegal immigration into the US. The action fulfilled one of Trump's commitments to voters but threw the global economy and Trump's own political mandate to lower prices into turmoil. The tariffs, if sustained, could cause inflation to significantly worsen, possibly eroding voters' trust that Trump could as promised lower the prices of groceries, gasoline, housing, autos and other goods. Trump declared an economic emergency in order to place duties of 10% on all imports from China and 25% on imports from Mexico and Canada. But energy imported from Canada, including oil, natural gas and electricity, would be taxed at a 10% rate. The action provoked an economic standoff with America's two largest trading partners in Mexico and Canada, upending a decades-old trade relationship with the possibility of harsh reprisals by those two nations. Mexico's president immediately ordered retaliatory tariffs and Canada's prime minister said the country would put matching 25% tariffs on up to \$155 billion in US imports. China did not immediately respond to Trump's action. Trump's order includes a mechanism to escalate the rates charged by the US against retaliation by the other countries, raising the specter of an even more severe economic disruption. Canadian Prime Minister

Justin Trudeau on Saturday said that Canadian duties on \$30 billion in trade in American alcohol and fruit will take effect Tuesday, when the US tariffs go into effect. He opened his address to Canadians with a message aimed at American consumers. "It will have real consequences for you, the American people," he said, saying it would result in higher prices on groceries and other goods. Trudeau channelled the views of many Canadians who were feeling betrayed by their neighbour and longtime ally, reminding Americans that Canadian troops fought alongside them in Afghanistan and helped them respond to myriad crises from wildfires in California to Hurricane Katrina. "The actions taken today by the White House split us apart instead of bringing us together," Trudeau said, warning in French that it could bring about "dark times" for many people. He encouraged Canadians to "choose Canadian products and services rather than American ones." Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said she had instructed her economy secretary to implement a response that includes retaliatory tariffs and other measures in defense of Mexico's interests. "We categorically reject the White House's slander that the Mexican government has alliances with criminal organizations, as well as any intention of meddling in our territory," Sheinbaum wrote in a post on X. "If the United States government and its agencies wanted to address the serious fentanyl consumption in their country, they could fight the sale of drugs on the streets of their major cities, which they don't do and the laundering of money that this illegal activity generates that has done so much harm to its population." Meanwhile, the Premier of

Canadian province of British Columbia, David Eby, called on residents to stop buying liquor from U.S. "red" states and said it was removing American alcohol brands from government store shelves as a response to the tariffs. In a televised message, Eby deemed the Trump's administration decision as "a declaration of economic war against a trusted ally and friend" and that he will stand up for his citizens and all Canadians in general. "Effective today, I have directed BC liquor sales to immediately stop buying American liquor from red states," he said. "Liquor store employees will be removing the most popular of these brands from government store shelves." The tariffs will go into effect on Tuesday, setting a showdown in North America that could potentially sabotage economic growth. A new analysis by the Budget Lab at Yale laid out the possible damage to the US economy, saying the average US household would lose the equivalent of \$1,170 in income from the taxes. Economic growth would slow and inflation would worsen — and the situation could be even worse if the countries retaliate. A senior US administration official, insisting on anonymity to brief reporters, said the lower rate on energy reflected a desire to minimise any disruptive increases on the price of gasoline or utilities. That's a sign White House officials understand the gamble they're taking on inflation. Price spikes under former President Joe Biden led to voter frustration that helped to return Trump to the White House last year. The order signed by Trump contained no mechanism for granting exceptions, the official said, a possible blow to homebuilders who rely on Canadian lumber as well as farmers, automakers and other industries. The Trump administration put

the tariffs in place to force the three countries to stop the spread and manufacturing of fentanyl, in addition to pressuring Canada and Mexico to limit any illegal immigration into the United States. The official did not provide specific benchmarks that could be met to lift the new tariffs, saying only that the best measure would be fewer Americans dying from fentanyl addiction. The order would also allow for tariffs on Canadian imports of less than \$800. Imports below that sum are currently able to cross into the United States without customs and duties. "It doesn't make much economic sense," said William Reinsch, senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and a former U.S. trade official. "Historically, most of our tariffs on raw materials have been low because we want to get cheaper materials so our manufacturers will be competitive ... Now, what's he talking about? He's talking about tariffs on raw materials. I don't get the economics of it." The Republican president is making a major political bet that his actions will not significantly worsen inflation, cause financial aftershocks that could destabilize the worldwide economy or provoke a voter backlash. AP VoteCast, an extensive survey of the electorate in last year's election, found that the U.S. was split on support for tariffs. With the tariffs, Trump is honouring promises that are at the core of his economic and national security philosophy. But the announcement showed his seriousness around the issue as some Trump allies had played down the threat of higher import taxes as mere negotiating tactics. The president is preparing more import taxes in a sign that tariffs will be an ongoing part of his second term. On Friday, he mentioned imported computer chips, steel, oil and nat-

ural gas, as well as against copper, pharmaceutical drugs and imports from the European Union — moves that could essentially pit the US against much of the global economy. It is unclear how the tariffs could affect the business investments that Trump said would happen because of his plans to cut corporate tax rates and remove regulations. Tariffs tend to raise prices for consumers and businesses by making it more expensive to bring in foreign goods. Many voters turned to Trump in the November election on the belief that he could better handle the inflation that spiked under Biden. But inflation expectations are creeping upward in the University of Michigan's index of consumer sentiment as respondents expect prices to rise by 3.3%. That would be higher than the actual 2.9% annual inflation rate in December's consumer price index. Trudeau said Canada is addressing Trump's calls on border security by implementing a CDN\$1.3 billion (US\$900 million) border plan that includes helicopters, new canine teams and imaging tools. Trump still has to get a budget, tax cuts and an increase to the government's legal borrowing authority through Congress. The outcome of his tariff plans could strengthen his hand or weaken it. Democrats were quick to say that any inflation going forward was the result of Trump, who is about to start his third week back as president. "You're worried about grocery prices. Don't raise prices with his tariffs," Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer of New York posted on X. "You're worried about tomato prices. Wait till Trump's Mexico tariffs raise your tomato prices. ... You're worried about car prices. Wait till Trump's Canada tariffs raise your car prices," he wrote in a series of posts.



Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau addresses media following the imposition of a raft of tariffs by US President Donald Trump against Canada, Mexico and China, in Ottawa on Saturday. AP/PTI

US businesses brace for rising costs

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

From an ice cream parlour in California to a medical supply business in North Carolina to a T-shirt vendor outside Detroit, U.S. businesses are bracing to take a hit from the taxes President Donald Trump imposed Saturday on imports from Canada, Mexico and China — America's three biggest trading partners. The levies — 25 per cent on Canadian and Mexican and 10 per cent on Chinese goods — will take effect Tuesday. Canadian energy, including oil, natural gas and electricity, will be taxed at a lower 10 per cent rate. Mexico's president immediately ordered retaliatory tariffs and Canada's prime minister said the country would put matching 25% tariffs on up to USD 155 billion in US imports. China did not immediately respond to Trump's action. The Budget Lab at Yale University estimates that Trump's tariffs would cost the average American household USD 1,000 to USD 1,200 in annual purchasing power. Gregory Daco, chief economist at the tax and consulting firm EY, calculates that the tariffs would increase inflation, which was running at a 2.9 per cent annual rate in December, by 0.4 percentage points this year. Daco also projects that the US economy, which grew 2.8 per cent last year, would fall by 1.5 per cent this year and 2.1 per cent in 2026 "as higher import costs dampen consumer spending and business investment." The Penny Ice Creamery in Santa Cruz, California, has had to hike prices of its ice cream — including popular flavours "strawberry pink peppercorn" and "chocolate caramel sea salt" — repeatedly in recent years as an inflationary surge increased the cost of its supplies. "I feel bad about always having to raise prices," said co-owner Zach Davis. "We were looking forward to inflation coming down, the economy stabilizing in 2025 ... Now with the tariffs, we may be back at it again." Trump tariffs, Davis said, threaten to drive up the cost of the mostly made-in-China refrigerators, freezers and blenders he'll need if Penny Ice

Creamery goes ahead with plans to add to its six shops. He still has painful memories of the extra equipment costs the company had to absorb when Trump slapped massive tariffs on China during his first term. The new tariffs will also raise the price of a customer favourite — sprinkles — which Penny Ice Creamery imports from a company in Whitby, Ontario. Tacking a 25 per cent import tax on even something as small as that can damage a small business like his. "The margins are so slim," he said. "Being able to offer that add-on can maybe generate an additional 10 cents in profit per scoop. If a tariff wipes that out, that can really be the difference between being profitable and being break-even and even being underwater by the end of the year." In Asheville, North Carolina, Casey Hite, CEO of AeroFlow Health, expects to take a hit because his company gets more than half its supplies — including breast pumps — from Chinese manufacturers, providing them to American patients through insurance plans. AeroFlow Health gets paid by insurers at pre-negotiated rates, put in place before Trump decided on his tariffs. Hite said the tax on Chinese imports would hit the company's finances, forcing it either to purchase cheaper and lower-quality products or pass higher costs along via higher health insurance premiums. Those might take two years to materialise, Hite said, but eventually they would hit consumers' budgets. "It will impact the patients," Hite said. "In time, patients pay more for the products." Even the made-in-USA absorbent incontinence pads AeroFlow Health buys aren't safe from Trump's import taxes. They may include pulp from tariff target Canada and plastics and packaging from China, according to the AeroFlow Health, which warns of "turbulences" from the tariffs. "Is this going to affect our business? You bet it is," said Linda Schlesinger-Wagner, who owns skinnytees, a women's apparel company in Birmingham, Michigan, north

of Detroit, that imports clothing from China. She said the 10 per cent tax would increase her costs, though she plans to absorb the extra expense instead of passing it along to customers. "I don't like what's going on," she said, referring to the broader impact of the tariffs. "And I think people are going to be truly shocked at the pricing they're going to see on the cars, on the lumber, on the clothes, on the food. This is going to be a mess." William Reinsch, a former US trade official now with the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, said that many companies that stocked up on imported goods ahead of time to avoid the tariffs. They will be able to draw on their piled-up inventories for weeks or a couple of months, delaying their customers' pain. George Carrillo, CEO of the Hispanic Construction Council, an industry advocacy group, said construction companies have been hoarding materials in anticipation of Trump's actions, but he worries about the possibility of inflation spiking in three to six months. "Once that inventory starts to get low, we're going to start feeling the effects," Carrillo said in a phone interview Saturday, ahead of the announcement. "Developers and general contractors need to keep up with the pace and they're going to start buying more products and it's going to be at a higher price point." All that will be exacerbated by an emerging immigration crackdown that is already spooking the construction industry's labour pool, he said. "You put tariffs and you put workforce instability, it's going to create major delays in projects. It's going to create an increase in prices because of the lack of availability," Carrillo said. Then there are the industries that don't have the luxury of stockpiling, including supermarkets whose farm products will spoil. So the impact will show up on grocery shelves within days. "You don't stockpile avocados," Reinsch said. "You don't stockpile bananas."

Israel's Netanyahu heads to US to discuss 'victory over Hamas' with Trump

PTI ■ TEL AVIV

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Sunday he will discuss "victory over Hamas," countering Iran and expanding diplomatic relations with Arab countries in his meeting with US President Donald Trump. Tuesday's meeting at the White House will be Trump's first with a foreign leader since returning to office. It comes as US and Arab mediators begin the daunting work of brokering the next phase of an agreement to wind down the war in the Gaza Strip and release dozens of militant-held hostages. Hamas, which has quickly reasserted its control over Gaza since the ceasefire took hold last month, has said it will not release the hostages slated to go free in the second phase without an end to the war and the full withdrawal of Israeli forces. Netanyahu, who is under mounting pressure from far-right governing partners to

resume the war after the first phase ends in early March, has said Israel is still committed to victory over Hamas and the return of all the hostages captured in the militants' Oct. 7, 2023 attack that triggered the war. It's unclear where Trump stands in all this. He has been a staunch supporter of Israel, but has also pledged to end wars in the Middle East and took credit for helping to broker the ceasefire agreement. The deal has halted the fighting and led to the release of 18 hostages who had been held for over 15 months, as well as hundreds of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. **Netanyahu embraces Trump's call for peace through strength:** In a statement released ahead of his departure on Sunday, Netanyahu said they would discuss "victory over Hamas, achieving the release of all our hostages and dealing with the Iranian terror axis in all its components,"

referring to Iran's alliance of militant groups across the region, including Hamas. He said that by working together, they could "strengthen security, broaden the circle of peace and achieve a remarkable era of peace through strength." The war began when thousands of Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking around 250 hostage. Over 100 hostages were freed during a week-long ceasefire in November 2023, eight have been rescued alive and dozens of bodies have been recovered by Israeli forces. Israel's air and ground war has killed over 47,000 Palestinians, more than half of them women and children, according to local health authorities who do not say how many of the dead were fighters. The war has left large parts of several cities in ruins and displaced around 90% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million people.

Under the first phase of the ceasefire agreement, Hamas is to release a total of 33 hostages, eight of whom Hamas says are dead, in exchange for nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners. Israeli forces have pulled back from most areas and allowed hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to return to devastated northern Gaza. Negotiations on the second phase, in which the war would end and the remaining 60 or so hostages would be returned, are set to begin Monday. If the United States, Qatar and Egypt are unable to broker an agreement between Israel and Hamas, the war could resume in early March. **Aspirations for a bigger deal:** Trump's Mideast envoy, Steve Witkoff, joined the yearlong ceasefire negotiations in their final weeks last month and helped push the agreement over the finish line. He met with Netanyahu in Israel last week and the two were expected to formally begin talks on

the second phase in Washington on Monday. Trump, who brokered normalization agreements between Israel and four Arab countries in his first term, is believed to be seeking a wider and potentially historic agreement in which Israel would forge ties with Saudi Arabia. But the kingdom, which resisted similar entreaties from the Biden administration, has said it would only agree to such a deal if the war ends and there is a credible pathway to a Palestinian state in Gaza, the West Bank and east Jerusalem, territories Israel captured in the 1967 Mideast war. Netanyahu's government is opposed to Palestinian statehood, and a key partner, far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, has threatened to leave the governing coalition if the war is not resumed next month. That would raise the likelihood of early elections in which Netanyahu could be voted out.

India experienced remarkable transformation in last decade: UNGA President Yang

PTI ■ UNITED NATIONS

India has experienced "remarkable transformation" in the last decade, UN General Assembly President Philemon Yang has said, underlining that his upcoming visit to the country will give him an opportunity to see how digital and technological innovation has "fuelled this change." Yang will visit India from February 4 to 8, his first official visit to the country as President of the 79th session of the UN General Assembly. "As the world's largest democracy, the fifth-largest economy and home to one-fifth of humanity, India is an important member of the United Nations," Yang told PTI in an exclusive interview ahead of his trip. Responding to a question on the visit's focus, Yang said he looks forward to "understanding, more deeply, India's priorities and vision for the future of multilateralism." During the visit, he will engage with Indian leadership, includ-

ing President Droupadi Murmu and External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar. Recalling that he had visited India in 2013 as Prime Minister of Cameroon, Yang said that since then, India has experienced a "remarkable transformation" and he expects the visit to give him the "opportunity to see how digital and technological innovation has fuelled this change, all the way to the grassroots level." "The visit will also serve to highlight the importance of information sharing and capacity building in advancing sustainable development in the Global South. India has in many respects led the way through its South-South cooperation," Yang said in the written interview. Yang said his message "to the people of India, and particularly to the young people of India, is one of confidence and ambition. Confidence in the extraordinary work achieved and ambition that there is always more work to do, collectively, to make our world a better

place. "For that reason, I would like to encourage them to continue spearheading efforts in harnessing innovation while also celebrating their rich culture and heritage. "As the world's largest population, the people of India have a huge stake in the work of the United Nations, in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and in ensuring that -indeed- no one is left behind. I therefore look forward to seeing India's continued engagement and leadership within the United Nations," Yang said. Yang began his year-long tenure as President of the 193-member General Assembly in September last year at the commencement of the 79th UNGA session. As PGA, his priorities include peace and security in Africa, combatting illicit use of small arms and light weapons, eliminating child labour, and turbocharging the SDGs, through digitalisation. Given his focus on digitalisa-

tion and how it can advance SDGs, Yang said he is particularly keen to see how India is using digital technology to improve the lives of its people, especially in the health sector. In this connection, Yang said he will be visiting a District

form was instrumental in delivering two billion doses to India during the COVID-19 pandemic (I have heard it being referred to as the "digital backbone" of the vaccination programme in response to the pandemic).



Vaccine Store in Gautam Buddha Nagar in Uttar Pradesh and meet with health workers to understand the role of some of these digital public infrastructure (DPI) tools. "I am told the Co-WIN plat-

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Budget is by the people, for the people, says Finance Minister

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Paraphrasing Abraham Lincoln, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday described the Union Budget as "by the people, for the people, of the people", and said Prime Minister Narendra Modi was fully behind the idea to cut taxes for the middle class but it took time to convince the bureaucrats.

"We have heard the voice of the middle class" who had been complaining about their aspirations not being met despite being honest taxpayers, she told PTI in an interview.

With the honest and proud taxpayers wanting the government to do more to limit the impact of factors like inflation, the prime minister was quick to task Sitharaman to look at ways to give relief.

While Modi was quick to agree to tax relief, it took a bit of convincing to get on board the officials in the finance ministry and the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) - who are tasked to ensure revenue collection to meet welfare and other schemes, she said.

Presenting her eighth straight budget, Sitharaman on Saturday announced an increase in the personal income tax threshold below which taxpayers owe no tax to ₹12 Lakh, up from ₹7 Lakh, as well as a rejig in tax brackets that would help those earning higher than that save up to ₹1.1 Lakh. The ₹5 lakh hike in exemption limit is the biggest ever and equals all the reliefs that were given between 2005 and 2023.

"I think the prime minister put it succinctly, he said it's the people's Budget, it is the Budget which the people wanted."

Asked to describe the ethos of the budget in her own words, she said, "As they say in democracy in Abraham Lincoln's words, it is Budget by the people, of the people for the people."

Sitharaman said the new rates would "substantially reduce the taxes of the middle class and leave more money in their hands, boosting household consumption, savings and investment".

Explaining the thought that went behind the big announcement, Sitharaman said the tax cuts were in the works for some time. One of the ideas was to make the



direct tax simpler and easier to comply with. Work on this started in the July 2024 Budget and now a new law is on the anvil, which will simplify the language, reduce the compliance burden and be a bit more user-friendly.

"It wasn't talking about rate restructuring, although for several years now, we have been looking at ways in which the rates can be a lot more reasonably taxpayer friendly. And therefore that work was also

proud taxpayers. We are honest taxpayers. We want to continue to serve the country by being good taxpayers. But what do you think about what kind of things you can do for us?" she said. "And so I had this discussion also with the prime minister who put me on the specific assignment to see what it is that you can come up with."

Numbers were worked, and presented to the prime minister who gave guidance for what was presented in the FY26 Budget on Saturday, she said.

Asked how much persuasion did it take to get the prime minister on board, Sitharaman said, "No, I think your question should be, how much did it take for me to convince the ministry (and) the board (CBDT)."

"So, it is not so much the PM, the PM was very clear that he wants to do something. It is for the ministry to have had the comfort level and then go with the proposal," she said. "So, the more work that was needed, was needed for convincing the Board that efficiency in collection and honest taxpayers' voice" needs to be heard.

The ministry and CBDT needed

convincing because they have to be sure of revenue generation. "So, they were not wrong in reminding me periodically, saying what would it mean? But ultimately, everybody came around," she added.

The finance minister said the prime minister meets and listens to the voices of people from different sectors and industry leaders and responds to their needs.

"I'm very happy to be a part of this government, which literally hears the voice and responds," she said. Stating that an attempt has always been to widen the tax net, Sitharaman said efforts are to get more Indians, who are in a position to pay and come on board.

That attempt of widening the tax net is a continuous, ongoing exercise," she said.

India currently has about 8.65 crore income tax return filers. The number swells to over 10 crore after people with TDS liability but not filing returns are included.

"I think many people who are just outside of the fringe should be nudged to come in who have never been taxpayers or who have now

reached that level of income, or even those who have avoided tax, will all have to be brought on," she said. "So, that is certainly a task before us. We have to make sure that people are understanding the role of paying tax and bring them on board."

Sitharaman defended the modest increase in capital spending at ₹11.21 Lakh Crore in the next financial year starting April compared to a lowered ₹10.18 lakh crore in the current fiscal, saying the quality of spending has also to be seen.

"If we are looking at the numbers, because we have got used to 16 per cent, 17 per cent increase (in capital spending) every year from 2020, and saying you have not increased it by that number (in the Budget for 2025-26), I would equally want to ask you to please look at the way in which the quality of spending has happened, particularly capital expenditure," she said.

She was also appreciative of the states which received the 50-year interest-free share of the money which went from the central government's side as capital expenditure for them.

Industry experts hail steps for boosting clean energy



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Industry experts hailed steps for boosting clean energy like nuclear mission, incentives for critical minerals and renewable equipment in the Budget presented on Saturday by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

Sitharaman announced a ₹20,000-crore nuclear mission and duty exemptions for crucial minerals and capital goods for electric vehicles to step up energy transition.

Rajat Verma, Founder and CEO, LOHUM said, "The 2025 budget marks a watershed moment in India's journey toward clean energy sovereignty and circular economy leadership. The government's strategic vision for domestic manufacturing and critical minerals recycling demonstrates remarkable foresight in securing our sustainable future."

The elimination of import duties on lithium-ion battery scrap, cobalt powder, and an array of critical mineral wastes

unlocks unprecedented opportunities. Coupled with the duty exemption expansion to 63 additional capital goods for EV and mobile battery production, this creates a robust foundation for India's manufacturing renaissance, he opined.

The landmark ₹20,000 Crore investment in private-sector R and D for emerging technologies signals a transformative shift in building a sustainable critical minerals ecosystem, Verma said.

Devansh Jain, Executive Director, INOXGFL Group, "The emphasis on wind energy, the National Green Hydrogen Mission, and EV infrastructure, along with dedicated support for Clean Tech manufacturing, marks a transformative step toward sustainability."

By fostering domestic value addition in solar PV cells, EV batteries, motors, controllers, electrolyzers, wind turbines, high-voltage transmission

Frequent extreme weather events driving food inflation in India: Economic Survey

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The food inflation rate in India has remained firm over the past two years defying the global trend, and frequent extreme weather events are one of the reasons, the government said in its latest Economic Survey.

Tabled in Parliament on Friday, the report said that the decline in onion and tomato production over the past two years can be partly attributed to frequent extreme weather events in major producing states compared to other regions. Extreme weather events in 2023-24 damaged crops in major horticulture-producing states, leading to inflationary pressure on horticultural commodities, it said.

"Over the past two years, India's food inflation rate has remained firm, diverging from global trends of stable or declining food inflation. This can be attributed to factors such as supply chain disruptions exacerbated by extreme weather events and reduced harvest of some food items," the report read.

Citing data from the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), the report said that the total crop area damaged in 2024 was higher than in the previous two years due to extreme weather conditions. The government also



referred to India Meteorological Department (IMD) data, which shows a significant rise in the frequency of extreme weather events, especially heatwaves.

Between 2022 and 2024, heatwaves were recorded on 18 per cent of days, compared to 5 per cent in 2020 and 2021, the report said.

The Economic Survey acknowledged that recent shocks like geopolitical conflicts and extreme weather have caused price fluctuations, but their impact has now subsided, leading to more variation in commodity prices.

For long-term price stability, the report suggested developing climate-resilient crops, strengthening data systems to monitor prices, reducing crop damage, and minimising post-harvest losses.

On Saturday, the government announced a six-year mission to increase pulse production, aiming to achieve self-sufficiency in three widely consumed varieties - tur, urad, and masoor.

Customs duty cuts in certain areas to benefit American exports: GTRI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The customs duty reduction announced in the Budget on products such as motorcycles and synthetic flavouring essences would benefit American exports, economic think tank GTRI said on Sunday.

The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said that despite the repeated criticism of India as the biggest tariff abuser and tariff king by the Trump-administration, the country's Budget has introduced significant tariff reductions on multiple products, many of which benefit the US exports.

"With key tariff cuts on technology, automobiles, industrial inputs, and waste imports, India appears to be taking steps toward facilitating trade even as the global trade environment remains tense. Whether these reductions will alter Washington's view of India's trade practices or become a point of contention in the US election cycle remains to be seen," it added.

Among the key tariff reductions, India lowered the duty on fish hydrolysate for the manufacturing of aquatic feed from 15 per cent to 5 per cent, a move that directly impacts US exports, which amounted to \$ 35 Million in 2023-24. For the automobile sector, India has reduced tariffs on motorcycles based on engine capacity.

For motorcycles with an engine capacity below 1,600cc, the tariff has been cut from 50 per cent to 40 per



cent, while for motorcycles above 1,600cc, the tariff has been slashed from 50 per cent to 30 per cent.

"The US motorcycle exports to India stood at \$ 3 Million in FY24, and this tariff cut could help expand market access for American manufacturers," the GTRI said.

Similarly, it said, tariff cut on ethernet switches (carrier-grade) under the others category from 20 per cent to 10 per cent would help American exporters.

The US exported \$ 653.4 Million worth of these products to India in the last fiscal, "making this a significant trade benefit", GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said.

India has also lowered the duties on synthetic flavouring essences from 100 per cent to 20 per cent, a category in which Washington exports stood at \$ 21 Million in FY24. "In the space sector, tariffs on ground installation for satellites, including spares and consumables, have been reduced to zero, benefiting American exporters who

Focus on infrastructure, manufacturing, sustainability to push steel sector growth

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The stainless steel industry has hailed the Union Budget 2025-26, saying the focus on infrastructure, manufacturing, and sustainability will push the sector's growth.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the record eighth straight Union Budget in the Lok Sabha on Saturday.

"The industry lauds the Union Budget 2025-26 for its robust focus on infrastructure, manufacturing, and sustainability, crucial for the stainless steel industry's growth," apex industry body Indian Stainless Steel Development Association (ISSDA) said in a statement.

The Budget offers a balanced roadmap for long-term growth in the stainless steel industry. The focus on infrastructure, manufacturing, and sustainability will elevate the sector's economic contribution and reinforce India's position as a global leader in stainless steel production and innovation, the association said.

Jindal Stainless Managing Director Abhyuday Jindal said, "Infrastructure remains central to India's growth, and the Budget sustains this momentum with a 10.08 per



cent hike in capex to ₹ 11.21 Lakh Crore and ₹1.5 Lakh Crore earmarked for state capital expenditure. The ₹10 Lakh Crore Asset Monetisation Plan (2025-30) will unlock funds for new projects, while increased public-private partnerships will drive private investment in transport, urban development, and energy."

The digital skilling initiative aimed at equipping youth with Industry 4.0 technologies has the potential to revolutionise both manufacturing and services.

In the stainless steel industry, where automation and advanced manufacturing are on the rise, these efforts will ensure a workforce capable of navigating rapid change and expansion, Jindal said.

The newly introduced credit cards for micro-enterprises and the growth of Funds of Funds for startups will encourage entrepreneurship and innovation across sectors.

Global trends key drivers for markets: Analysts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

RBI's interest rate decision, quarterly earnings and global cues would be the major driving factors for equity markets this week, analysts said adding that the impact of the Union Budget could linger on this week.

Trading activity of foreign investors will also be a key driver for the markets, experts noted.

"US and India's manufacturing PMI for January to be released on Monday, will be the key macro data to watch out for. Investors will closely study the fine prints of the Budget policies and market focus will shift back to the corporate earnings/outlook and RBI's interest rate decision to be announced on Friday," Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said.

From the earnings calendar, Asian Paints, PC Jeweller, Tata Power, Titan, Apollo Tyres, Bharti Airtel, ITC, F, SBI, LIC, MandM and NHPC would announce their earnings this week.

Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said, "Will the RBI soften its stance and announce any rate cut in this week's credit policy that would be interesting to watch out for? However,



investors need to watch out for global developments, as any uptick in US bond yields and FII selling could dampen sentiment."

PMI data for the manufacturing and services would also be tracked by investors.

"As we look to this week, there are several important events on the horizon, including the MPC outcome, the Delhi state election, and developments regarding US tariffs. These events present an opportunity for market participants to remain engaged and informed, as they are likely to introduce some volatility," Osho Krishnan, Sr Analyst, Technical and Derivatives of - Angel One, said.

Krishnan further said, "Now, the major Union Budget is behind us, and it appeared as a non-event but practically

speaking, FIIs participation was very minimal. Hence, the actual reaction is likely to be witnessed on Monday and hence, we need to wait for a day or two to understand whether the market has really discounted the Budget factor or not."

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday announced significant income tax cuts for the middle class and unveiled a blueprint for next-generation reforms for Viksit Bharat as she treaded a fine line between fiscal prudence and providing a thrust to growth.

The Budget for April 2025 to March 2026 fiscal (FY26) proposed to raise foreign investment limit in insurance sector to 100 per cent from current 74 per cent and continued spending spree on infrastructure while

raising allocations for social sectors as well as providing for measures for poor, youth, farmers and women.

"The Union Budget largely played to our expectations, particularly with the much-needed income tax relief for the middle class, which will drive consumption and economic growth. No changes were made to Securities Transaction Tax or capital gains tax, as anticipated," Pranav Haridasan, MD and CEO, Axis Securities, said.

Equity markets were open on Saturday due to the presentation of the Union Budget.

Last week, the BSE benchmark jumped 1,315.5 points or 1.72 per cent, and the NSE Nifty went up by 389.95 points or 1.68 per cent.

Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said, "The impact of the Union Budget could linger in the next session, particularly in the consumption sectors."

Additionally, with the earnings season set to take center stage again, traders should focus on stock selection, Mishra added.

On Saturday, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex eked out a marginal gain of 5.39 points or 0.01 per cent to settle at 77,505.96. The Nifty dipped 26.25 points or 0.11 per cent to settle at 23,482.15.

Exporters demand extension of interest equalisation scheme

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian exporting community on Sunday urged Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to extend the interest equalisation scheme (IES) for getting affordable rates of credit, as their demand was not mentioned in the Budget.

The scheme ended on December 31 last year. The scheme, according to exporters, has helped them avail of rupee export credit at competitive rates at a time when the global economy is facing headwinds. Exporters used to get subsidies under the scheme for pre and post-shipment rupee export credit.

Sanjay Budhia, Chairman of CII National Committee on EXIM, said though the Budget announcements would help boost outbound shipments, "We sincerely request the Finance Minister to kindly reinstate the scheme for all exporters to make them globally competitive."

Sharing similar views, Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) and President Ashwani Kumar said the commerce ministry has allocated funds of ₹2,250 Crore under export promotion scheme of covering IES and MAI (Market Access



Initiative). The IES may be extended immediately with effect from January 1 with a cap of ₹10 Crore and international events for 2025-26 may be approved immediately.

Budhia also said that measures announced in the Budget such as cutting customs duties on certain inputs, and rolling out of national manufacturing mission would help boost exports and job creation.

He added that the proposed export mission to improve export credit, and support to MSMEs to tackle non-tariff measures in overseas markets would surely help in getting greater market access for domestic goods.

"The reduction of basic customs duty on several inputs for production and rationalisation of customs tariff structure for industrial goods will boost the export potential of the country significantly," Budhia, who is also MD of Patton Group, said.



UNLOCKING THE K-BEAUTY MAGIC

Get your skin analysis at the KorinMi's clinic that brings authentic Korean skincare to Delhi, writes **ABHI SINGHAL**



Ever wanted to have glass skin looking at all those viral Instagram reels and products? Ever wanted to get a 3D analysis of your skin like it happens in Korea? Then the quest for the radiant, flawless "glass skin" just got easier. KorinMi, India's Korean skin clinic has expanded its footprint with a new location in Defence Colony in Delhi.

Korean glass skin is a skincare trend that emphasises achieving skin that looks incredibly smooth, radiant, and intensely hydrated, almost like a pane of glass. The term originated from Korean beauty (K-beauty) and has gained global popularity for its focus on achieving a naturally luminous complexion.

To get your skin have qualities for the glass skin, there is KorinMi, at the the prestigious Centre for Skin & Hair Pvt Ltd, under the guidance of dermatologist Dr. Deepali Bhardwaj. The new space promises a transformative skincare experience. Known for its unique fusion of time-honoured Korean beauty rituals and cutting-edge dermatological techniques, KorinMi offers bespoke treatments tailored to a diverse range of skin concerns.

The Defence Colony clinic offers a range of exclusive treatments, including a comprehensive 3D Skin Analysis & Consultation to personalise treatment plans. Clients can also indulge in various K Glow Treatments targeting specific



concerns like brightening and anti-aging, sensitive skin, and acne and pore control. For those seeking a quick and effective radiance boost, the KorinMi Glass Skin Resurfacing Treatment promises visible results in just three days. And for special occasions, the KorinMi Diamond Glass Skin Treatment delivers an instant glow and brightness.

"The overwhelming response and remarkable results we've seen at our Gurgaon clinic inspired



us to bring KorinMi to Defence Colony," says Reshba Munjal, Co-founder of KorinMi. "This new location makes authentic Korean skincare more accessible to Delhi, providing a luxurious and personalised experience designed to address every skin need. We're thrilled to continue our mission of helping clients achieve radiant, glass skin through the elegance and expertise of Korean beauty traditions." This exciting collaboration with Dr. Deepali

Bhardwaj adds another layer of expertise to KorinMi's offerings. As an internationally trained Skin Allergy Specialist, Dr. Bhardwaj brings a wealth of knowledge to the table, particularly relevant in today's environment of increasing pollution and skin allergies. "I've incorporated an Indian scientific perspective into these Korean treatments," Dr. Bhardwaj explains, "which has significantly enhanced the results, helping Indians achieve their desired clear and glass-like skin. It's a fantastic treatment approach, especially with its holistic focus."

KorinMi's philosophy centres on enhancing natural beauty through safe and effective skincare solutions that embody the elegance and precision of Korean beauty. Every detail, from the personalised care to the luxurious ambience, is designed to create a pampering and transformative experience. The clinic uses products, treatments, and technologies imported directly from South Korea, ensuring authenticity and quality.

This expansion isn't just about opening another clinic; it's about making the transformative power of Korean skincare accessible to a wider audience. For those seeking the coveted "glass skin" look and a truly personalised skincare journey, KorinMi's new Defence Colony location offers a unique and exciting opportunity. It's an invitation to experience the best of Korean beauty, right here in Delhi.



IMPORTANCE OF NATURAL LIGHT

By **ANURAAG BHARDWAJ**

As we spend increasingly more time indoors, it's essential to consider how our built environments impact our physical health. A well-designed residential building can significantly boost occupants' mood, sleep quality, productivity, and overall well-being.

NATURAL LIGHT AND VENTILATION:

Exposure to natural light and fresh air is crucial for our physical and mental health. Natural light regulates our circadian rhythms, influencing our sleep-wake cycles, hormone secretion, and mood. Adequate ventilation, on the other hand, removes stale air, reducing the concentration of pollutants and allergens.

To incorporate natural light and ventilation into your residential building design:

- Orient windows to maximize natural light exposure.
- Incorporate skylights, clerestory windows, or solar tubes.
- Use light-coloured interior finishes to



reflect natural light. ■ Install ventilation systems that provide a consistent supply of fresh air.

ERGONOMICS AND ACCESSIBILITY:

A Well-designed space should accommodate occupants of all ages and abilities. Ergonomic design principles prioritize comfort, reducing the risk of injury and strain.

To design ergonomic and accessible spaces:

- Incorporate adaptable fixtures and furniture
- Ensure sufficient clearance for wheelchair navigation
- Install grab bars, non-slip flooring, and tactile signage
- Design spaces with flexibility in mind, accommodating different user needs

INDOOR AIR QUALITY: The air we breathe indoors can be up to five times more polluted than outdoor air. Indoor air quality is influenced by various factors, including building materials, ventilation systems, and occupant activities.

To improve indoor air quality:

- Specify low-VOC (volatile organic compound) materials
- Install effective ventilation systems, including air filtration

- Incorporate plants, which naturally purify the air
- Implement regular maintenance schedules for HVAC systems

THERMAL COMFORT: Thermal comfort significantly impacts our mood, productivity, and overall well-being. A well-designed thermal environment should maintain a consistent, comfortable temperature range.

To achieve thermal comfort:

- Install efficient HVAC systems with precise temperature control
- Incorporate passive design strategies, such as insulation and shading
- Specify materials with high thermal mass, which absorb and release heat
- Design spaces with flexible thermal zoning, accommodating different occupant needs

By incorporating these design principles into your residential building, you can create a healthier, more comfortable indoor environment that supports the well-being of occupants.

— The author is an architect and is the founder of Anjaney Vastu & AB Architects



Holistic Wellness in the Digital Age



The world is changing rapidly, and with it, the way we think about wellness. Gone are the days when wellness was simply about hitting the gym or following the latest diet trend. Today, wellness is a multi-faceted, deeply personal journey, one that goes beyond physical fitness to encompass mental, emotional, social, and even environmental well-being. It's no longer just about feeling good; it's about being whole, in mind, body, and spirit. And in this digital age, brands are stepping up, weaving holistic wellness into their DNA to foster deeper connections with consumers.

A SHIFT IN CONSUMER EXPECTATIONS:

The wellness movement began quietly at first a small ripple in the wellness community, but over time, it turned into a tidal wave that reshaped industries. We saw yoga studios spring up, organic food brands gaining prominence, and mindfulness apps becoming household names. But as technology began to play an even larger role in our lives, the scope of wellness began to widen. Today's consumer is informed, engaged, and expects brands to be more than just a product or service. They want companies that reflect their values, understand their needs, and contribute to their holistic well-being. The conversation around wellness has evolved into something much larger than simply improving physical health. It's a fusion of mind, body, soul, and environment, all wrapped into one.

As a result, brands have a unique opportunity. The challenge, however, is in how to craft campaigns that not only resonate with consumers' needs but also inspire them to live healthier, more sustainable lives. It's not enough to sell a product; brands now have to sell a



lifestyle like the one that nurtures well-being on every level.

THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION:

In a world where social media dictates trends and influencers have the power to shape movements, the digital age has been both a blessing and a challenge for brands trying to tap into the wellness space. The power of digital platforms cannot be overstated.

The most successful brands are those that recognise this and align their core values with the principles of holistic wellness. Take Patagonia, for example. The outdoor apparel brand's commitment to sustainability and environmental well-being extends far beyond their product offerings. They have built a narrative that connects consumers with the idea of wellness as a

global movement—one that includes not only personal well-being but also the well-being of the planet. By promoting responsible consumption and environmental conservation, they are not just selling jackets; they are selling a lifestyle that speaks to the core values of their audience.

A PERSONALISED APPROACH TO WELLNESS:

But it's not only about big, global brands. Small, direct-to-consumer companies are equally making their mark. Take the wellness app, Headspace, for example. Its digital-first approach has made mindfulness and meditation more accessible than ever before. What sets it apart is not just the meditation guides or breathing exercises but it's the way Headspace taps into the emotional wellness of its users.

In the wellness space, there is no one-size-fits-all solution, and brands that can offer personalised, tailored experiences will always be one step ahead. Whether it's a beauty brand offering skincare solutions based on specific skin concerns or a fitness brand offering virtual personal training sessions tailored to your fitness level, the more personalised the experience, the deeper the connection.

WELLNESS THAT LASTS:

Ultimately, the goal of holistic wellness is not just to make consumers feel good in the moment but to empower them to make choices that lead to long-term health, happiness, and sustainability. Brands are now tasked with being more than just vendors. They must be allies in their customers' wellness journeys.

In a crowded market, it's the brands that prioritise education, emotional connection, and authenticity that will truly resonate. Take for example, Lulu lemon - what began as a yoga apparel company has grown into a lifestyle brand that is rooted in the idea of holistic wellness. Lulu lemon has built a community of consumers who don't just wear their clothes; they live by the principles of mindfulness, self-care, and personal growth that the brand promotes. By creating a community around wellness, they are inspiring healthier lifestyles, not just through the products they offer, but through the values they embody.

— Excerpts from Ishani Ghosh, Business Head, Brand Street Integrated



Govt. of Uttarakhand

Uttarakhand

देवीगौरी महादेव उत्तराखण्ड

युवा कार्यक्रम एवं खेल मंत्रालय
MINISTRY OF YOUTH AFFAIRS AND SPORTS

UTTARAKHAND

INDIA

38th NATIONAL GAMES
Uttarakhand 25
SILVER JUBILEE YEAR
January 28 - February 14 2025

Pushkar Singh Dhami
Chief Minister, Uttarakhand

Narendra Modi
Prime Minister

Under the leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, Uttarakhand is moving forward steadily. Just as the state successfully hosted the G20 Summit, the National Games will also be a memorable event.

SANKALP SE SHIKHAR TAK

There are two main pillars for the creation of a developed India in the 21st century - pride in our heritage and making every possible effort for development. Today, Uttarakhand is strengthening both these pillars. This decade will be the decade of Uttarakhand.

38th National Games Organized

under the guidance of
Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji

From Devbhoomi to Khelbhoomi

- National Games are being hosted in Dehradun, Rishikesh, Tehri, Udham Singh Nagar, Haldwani, Haridwar, New Tehri, Nainital, Almora, Pithoragarh and Champawat.

- Around 10,000 players are participating in the National Games.

- Competitions in 35 sports disciplines.

- A historic opportunity for Uttarakhand to host the games.

- Promotion of sports culture to inspire youth.

- A milestone for Uttarakhand's sports landscape.

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