## **Established 1865** the monet

www.dailypioneer.com

: DELHI I LUCKNOW I BHOPAL I BHUBANESWAR I RANCHI I RAIPUR I CHANDIGARH I DEHRADUN I HYDERABAD I VIJAYWADA

# Modi's guarantee for Delhi: PM Kumbh readies for Amrit Snan today

**STAFF REPORTER** NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday Modi on Sunday launched a sharp attack on the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) highlighting how the party is falling apart ahead of the upcoming Assembly polls in Delhi. "We are seeing that even before the voting, 'jhaadu ke tinke bikhar rahe hain' (the straws of the broom are falling apart). Leaders of 'AAP-da' are leaving it, they (people) hate this party," Modi said, referring to several AAP leaders quitting the party. Taking on the AAP's claims, the prime minister told people that no jhuggi will be demolished in Delhi and no welfare scheme shut in case of the BJP coming to power. Asserting that the Union Budget has filled every

Narendra Modi said on Sunday that this is the most middle class India's history and only the BJP respects the middle class of the country. He further claimed the Union Budget presented on Saturday (February 1, 2025) was to

Minister

family with happiness,

guarantees" were fulfilled. Addressing a "Sankalp" rally at RK Puram ahead of the upcoming Assembly polls in Delhi, the prime minister spoke about various beneficial provisions of the Budget for the middle class to claim that since

Independence those earning up to Rs 12 Lakh have received such a relief. The middle class is saying that this is the most friendly Budget for them in India's history, he added. Before beginning his speech,



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses a public meeting ahead of the Delhi Assembly elections, at RK Puram in New Delhi Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

asked the Special Protection Group personnel, deployed for his security to bring the portrait to him. He also asked the artist to write their address on the portrait and said he would write a letter to the

The PM also took a swipe at the Congress, invoking prime ministers Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi to claim that their governments imposed heavy taxes on people's earnings, Rs 10 Lakh would go into

Modi spotted a portrait of while his government has himself among the crowd. He eased the tax burden and provided greater relief to the middle class. PM Modi said, "Let me present a picture before you. It will help you understand better and make it easier to explain to others. If we look at this Budget-back in Nehru Ji's time, if you earned Rs 12 Lakh, the government would take away one-fourth of your salary as tax. If this were Indira Ji's era, you would be shocked to hear that out of Rs 12 Lakh, nearly

taxes. That was the scenario back then, which is why I am explaining this today." He added that while a Rs 12 Lakh income meant paying Rs 2.6 Lakh in tax under Congress rule, the latest budget presented by his government ensures zero tax on the same

"Even 10-12 years ago, under a Congress government, if you earned Rs 12 Lakh, you had to pay Rs 2,60,000 in taxes. Now, after yesterday's BJP government budget, a person earning Rs 12 Lakh in a year will not have to pay even a single rupee in tax," PM Modi said. The PM said many residents of RK Puram have government jobs. "You have got not just tax relief but 8th Pay Commission is also being introduced, pension schemes were consolidated, and budget benefits extended to senior citizens and the retired government officials too," he said, adding that young couples, too, will save a lot on taxes. PM Modi then underlined

the Budget offerings to Bihar to reach out to the Purvanchali community in Delhi, which plays a key role in the election. Purvanchal spans eastern Uttar Pradesh and western Bihar and many migrants from the region have settled in the national Capital. "The Purvanchali community made me an MP and the PM. The Purvanchali community made me who I am and they have been taken care of in the Budget. They were neglected in Congress' time. People from Bihar were not respected. But we have respected them," the PM said, pointing to the Budget

announcements for Bihar.

BHUBANESWAR, MONDAY FEBRUARY 3, 2025; PAGES 12 ₹4

Mahakumbh is preparing for another massive Amrit Snan on Basant Panchami day on Monday, following the tragic stampede that marred the Amrit Snan on Mauni Amavasya. Authorities estimate that over four crore pilgrims will take the holy dip, with roads leading to Sangam already swelling with crowds by Saturday evening.

With an extended weekend and a public holiday, officials anticipate a fresh surge of visitors starting Sunday. In response, security has been intensified, crowd management measures reinforced, and medical services strengthened to prevent any untoward incidents and ensure a smooth pilgrimage experience. The Maha Kumbh, which commenced on January 13, will continue until February 26. The remaining significant snan dates include Basant Panchami on February 3, Maghi Purnima on February 12, and Maha Shivaratri on February 26. The city has been witnessing a continuous influx of pilgrims since January 26, with the Mauni Amavasya Snan setting new records as nearly eight crore devotees took a dip in the Ganga. While the footfall slightly declined in the following days, officials now expect another massive turnout for the upcoming snan.

Many pilgrims began their bathing rituals on Sunday itself, as the Panchami tithi starts that day. Local vendors near the ghats have observed a sharp rise in footfall. Shyam Sundar Mishra, a vendor, remarked that the last few days were relatively quiet, but now the crowd is swelling again and they are prepared for a busy weekend. In light of the tragic incidents during the Mauni Amavasya Snan, the government has significantly ramped up security and crowd management efforts. Senior officials, including Prayagraj Divisional Commissioner Ashish Goyal and former PDA Vice-Chairman and DM Bhanu Chandra Goswami, have been deployed alongside five special secretaries. On Saturday, five



festival, in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh

#### Maha Kumbh stampede: Police launches probe

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE** ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The Uttar Pradesh Police has launched The Uttar Pradesh Folice has a lampede an investigation into the stampede that claimed 30 lives during Mauni Amavasya at the Maha Kumbh, following suspicions of a possible conspiracy behind the incident. In addition to central intelligence agencies, the state's Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) and Special Task Force (STF) are actively searching for a group of youths believed to have triggered the chaos. The state government has also constituted a threemember judicial commission to probe the matter.

Several eyewitnesses and survivors reported that a group of young men was deliberately pushing the crowd, causing panic among pilgrims. As people tried to escape, they began pushing those ahead of them, leading to many falling and getting trampled underfoot. The stampede resulted in 30 fatalities and left 37 others injured. A similar stampede was also reported in the Jhunsi area, raising concerns about deliberate attempts to create unrest.

additional PCS-level officers were assigned to enhance supervision and coordination. Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Manoj Kumar Singh assured that past crowd movements been analysed and improvements made to ensure better flow and safety so that no devotee

faces difficulties. To prevent overcrowding, authorities have identified 28 high-risk zones at Sangam, where police, RAF, and paramilitary personnel will be stationed. A senior official overseeing crowd management explained that these 28 locations were the most congested during Mauni Amavasya and Makar Sankranti, and teams will be stationed here to prevent

stampedes and maintain order. Special measures have also been introduced at the ghats. Devotees will be guided to leave the bathing areas immediately after their dip to prevent congestion. Security forces will ensure pilgrims follow designated entry and exit routes. Amit Tiwari, a devotee from Kanpur, shared his experience from Mauni Amavasya, saying that last time it was difficult to move because of the crowd, and he is glad to hear that authorities are making arrangements for better management.

## Congress fly EAGLE over ECI Retired judge files PIL Badrinath temple to open on May 4

**DEEPAK KUMAR JHA** NEW DELHI

fter leveling charges of alleged A manipulations in elections, Congress has formed a committee to monitor the conduct of free and fair elections by the Election Commission of India. The committee named as Empowered Action Group of Leaders and Experts (EAGLE) will first take up list in Maharashtra followed by Haryana and submit a detailed report to the party high command. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge constituted EAGLE with immediate effect to monitor the conduct of free and fair elections by the poll watchdog. The panel includes Congress treasurer Ajay Maken and senior leaders Digvijaya Singh, Abhishek Singhvi, Praveen Chakravarty and Pawan Khera. Besides, Gurdeep Singh Sappal, Nitin Raut and Challa Vamshi Chand Reddy are also part of the panel.

Besides Maharashtra, 'EAGLE' will also analyse past elections in other States, and proactively monitor upcoming elections and all other issues related to the conduct of free and fair elections in the country. Congress led INDIA bloc members had anticipated a massive win in both the States but only to be routed completely.

Members of Opposition parties under the INDIA bloc has claim that about 63 election petitions have been filed across various benches of the Bombay High Court



Congress General Secretary and Lok Sabha MP Priyanka Gandhi at a Delhi assembly campaign in national Capital on Sunday. Delhi goes to polls on Wednesday

discrepancies in the recently held Assembly election. About 25 Congress leaders have filed petitions, before the Nagpur and Aurangabad benches of the High Court. Five Congress leaders from Marathwada have also filed poll petitions.

Some other petitions have been filed by NCP (SP) and Shiv Sena candidates through advocate Aseem Sarode at the Principal Bench. The petitioners have alleged misconduct in the polls, including duplicate voting, concealed criminal cases, asset concealment, EVM malfunctions, bribery, and lack of election transparency.

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi had last month alleged that there is a "serious problem" with the country's election system and that the Nirvachan Sadan must ensure transparency in polls which the first faith of the people of India. Rahul rued the fact as why the Election Commission has

refused to provide Congress and other opposition voter lists of Maharashtra and Haryana elections despite of several reminders and memorandum. In his address to party

workers at the inauguration of the new party headquarters last month, Rahul had alleged there has been an increase of nearly one crore voters between Maharashtra Lok Sabha and assembly elections but the Election Commission is neither answering the queries raised by the opposition nor giving the lists of

# against poll freebies

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

etired Justice SN Dhingra has moved the Retired Justice SIN Dillingia has an American Justice SIN Dillingia has a line of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and Indian National Congress (INC) over their political promises to distribute cash to the voters in the upcoming Assembly polls, alleging that it falls within the meaning of "corrupt practices." Samman Yojana", BJP's "Mahila Samridhi Yojna" and Congress' Pyari Didi Yojna" wherein the parties have promised cash benefits to the voters if they are elected to power. A direction is also sought on BJP, AAP and Congress to desist from collecting personal and electoral data of voters and not to share or use the same to any third

The petitioner argues that such schemes violate provisions of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, particularly Section 123(1), which pertains to corrupt practices, and Section 127A, which pertains to corrupt practices, and Section 127A, which deals with

unauthorized election materials. Additionally, these actions allegedly breach Sections 170 and 171 of the Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, which relate to bribery and undue influence in elections. Furthermore, these actions disregard advisory guidelines

issued by the Election Commission of India (ECI)," the petitioner argues. The petition has been filed by Justice Dhingra who is also the President of organisation Samay Yaan (Sashakt Samaj).

The petitioner is seeking directions to cease and desist from collecting personal and electoral data of voters under false pretences and direct not to share & use the data collected during election to any third party.

#### PNS NEW TEHRI Tehri Manvendra Shah, his

The sacred portals of the Badrinath temple in Uttarakhand's Čhamoli district will open for devotees at 6 am on May 4. On the occasion of Basant Panchami,

the auspicious time for opening the temple was decided after special prayers were offered at the former Tehri royal court in Narendra

royal priest Acharya Krishna Prasad Uniyal decided the date for opening the doors of the Badrinath temple.

On this occasion, besides former Maharaja of

Committee's chief executive officer Vijay Thapliyal and several religious officials were present. Every year after Diwali, the doors of the Char

Dhams — Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri The portals reopen in April-May the following year. During the six-month-long pilgrimage, Lakhs of devotees from across the country and abroad visit the Char Dhams.

### Day temperature rises in S

Dense fog warning issued for 2 days

PNS BHUBANESWAR

Leven as the day temperatures rose in several parts of the State, the weather office on Sunday said many places are likely to be enveloped by dense fog over the next two days.

The Regional Office of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) here said there would be no major change in the minimum temperature (night temperature) during the next four to five days in the

The mercury rose at several

places in the State as four stations recorded maximum temperature above 35 degree Celsius in last 24 hours.

Paralakhemundi Gajapati district recorded the highest maximum temperature of 35.6 degree. The maximum temperature was 35.2 degree at Jharsuguda, 35.1 degree at Sonepur and 35 degree at Balangir.

The weather office predicted dense fog in several parts of the State in the next two days. Yellow warning for dense fog has also been issued for some districts.

Dense fog is likely to occur at one or two places of Baleswar, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapada,

Jagatsinghpur, Khordha Nayagarh, Angul, and Dhenkanal districts during the period.

wife, daughter Shreejaand,

Tehri Lok Sabha member

Mala Rajya Laxmi Shah,

Badrinath's chief priest Rawal

Badrinath Kedarnath Temple

Namboodri,

Yellow Warning for dense fog was also issued for some places over the districts of Kendrapada, Bhadrak, Jagatsinghpur, Cuttack, Angul, Dhenkanal, Navagarh, Khordha, and Ganjam between Monday and Tuesday morning.

Likewise, shallow to moderate fog is very likely to occur during early morning hours at one or two places over the districts of Bhadrak, Jajpur, Angul, Dhenkanal, Kendrapada, Kalahandi, Kandhamal, and Ganjam on Tuesday and Wednesday.

# CM releases new 'Barnabodha' edition

Says it has no substitute in Odia

language PNS BHUBANESWAR

 $m W_{
m hen~Odisha}$  and Odia language were struggling for their identity, Bhakta Kabi

Madhsudan Rao published the 'Chhabila Madhu Barnabodha' and brought back the State's glory, said Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi unveiling a new edition and a digital edition of the 'Barnabodha' on Sunday.

The State Government has a target to print 10,000 copies of this book. The publication



Madhusudan Rao is the greatest tribute to him, said Majhi.

The Chief Minister said the mother, motherland and mother tongue are the biggest

identity of a man. The language of 'Barnabodha' was simple which attracted the minds of children through illustrations of animals, birds, etc. The book had in a very few days in 1895 become the part which would help them in lean-

of every Odia family. There is

no substitute for 'Barnabodha' to teach in Odia language. He has also read the book in his childhood Majhi hoped that the small

ing the Odia language easily.

children would like the book

In Sambalpur

## Doctor loses Rs 1.8 cr to cyber investment fraud

NIMAI CHARAN SAHU SAMBALPUR

 $T_{
m he}$  cybercrime police of the district on Sunday informed about the seizure of over Rs 50 lakh from the linked accounts of a 52-year-old doctor, who had over Rs 1.8 crore in December 2024 for an online investment that turned into fraud.

The complainant, identified as Dr Bimal Krushna Panda, had filed an FIR at the cyber police station on January 27 and was enticed to stock investment by a person named Sanjay Sharma, who contacted him through

WhatsApp. He mentioned in his FIR that Sharma instructed him to join M.Acadain.net and advised him to trade in shares and IPOs. Following which, Panda was added to a special group formed by a fraudster. There he came in contact with one Mr Ted, who was said to be the local guide in investment. As per Ted's guidance, Panda sent money from three of his bank accounts to the different accounts given by the scammer in December 2024. In the beginning of the in-

vestment, he could withdraw Rs 2,000 from the app. However, when he tried to with draw a larger amount, the app

posit more money as the margin money. He later came to know that he had become a victim of cyber investment fraud. He attempted to contact the admin of those WhatsApp groups but in vain. He filed a case at the national cybercrime reporting portal and then reached out to the Cyber Crime police station of Sambalpur on January 27 to file a complaint. The case was registered under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) sections dealing with fraud and criminal conspiracy and the Infor-

mation Technology Act. Notably, in cyber fraud cases, the fraudsters are smart enough to not keep money in the bank accounts; victims transfer money. The first layer bank account most of the time has no balance; the money in the second and third layers is recovered. Cyber Crime Deputy Super-

intendent of Police Ambit Mohanty said, "As it was a big cyber fraud in the district, we toiled to recover amounts. The requisition to freeze the accounts where the money has been sent by the complainant was sent to banks. Currently, we have seized more than 50 lakhs from the second and third layers of banks. The process to recover that amount has already started."

# NAAC bribery case: CBI nabs Sambalpur professor

he Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has arrested a professor of the Sambalpur University in Odisha and nine others from different States in connection with an alleged bribery case for providing a favourable NAAC rating to a private university in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh.

Sources said the CBI also sealed the residence of the accused professor, Bulu Maharana at Jyoti Vihar in Sambalpur on Saturday as part of the operation. Maharana happened to be a professor in the department of Library and Information Science.

The other arrested persons

A tourist died of cardiac

arrest at Konark Eco-Retreat

near Ramchandi in Puri dis-

According to sources, the

tourist Md Alam Hussain of

Patia in Bhubaneswar had

booked a cottage at the eco-

retreat. He and his wife had

gone to the eco-retreat on Sat-

urday and stayed in the cot-

On Sunday afternoon,

trict on Sunday.

include the chairman and six members of a National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) inspection committee, including a professor from the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), according to national media reports.

The CBI registered a case and conducted searches across multiple locations, uncovering evidence of "alleged undue advantages" provided to the NAAC inspection team. These bribes reportedly included cash, gold, mobile phones and laptops, a CBI spokesperson stated.

The arrests were made after a series of operations in which the CBI apprehended several individuals. Among the ar-

Hussain fell ill and was

rushed in an ambulance to

the Community Health Cen-

tre (CHC) at Gop. But the

doctor declared him brought

As per reports, the

Chandrabhaga Marine police

seized the body and registered

a case of unnatural death. The

body has been sent to

Charichhaka hospital for

postmortem, Chnadrabhaga

Marine police station IIC

Pratima Sahu said.

rested are the chairman of the inspection committee Samarendra Nath Saha, who is also the Vice-Chancellor of Ramchandra Chandravansi

University, and committee members Rajeev Sijariya, professor at JNU, D Gopal, dean at Bharath Institute of Law, Rajesh Singh Pawar, dean at

Jagran Lakecity University, Manas Kumar Mishra, director at GL Bajaj Institute of Technology & Management, Gayathri Devaraja, professor

at Davangere University, and Bulu Maharana, professor at Sambalpur University.

The CBI's investigation led to the discovery of alleged bribe payments made to the NAAC team, including cash, gold, mobile phones and laptops, which were recovered during searches. The CBI conducted searches at 20 locations across India, including Chennai. Bengaluru, Vijayawada, Palamu, Sambalpur, Bhopal, Bilaspur, Gautam Budh Nagar and New

The Central probe agency has seized approximately Rs 37 lakh in cash, six Lenovo laptops, one iPhone 16 Pro and other items. Further investigation is in progress.

and radioisotope generation.

Increasing funding for educa-

tion, science, and technology

will lead to more significant

### Radio Mirchi, SBI hold Green Marathon





5K people across ages participate PNS BHUBANESWAR

he Radio Mirchi in association with State Bank of India (SBI) Bhubaneswar Circle organised SBI Green Marathon 2025 to promote plasticfree practice in society.

The event took place at Kalinga Stadium Bhubaneswar on Sunday and was vibrant with nearly 5,000 participants. People across all ages and almost all strata of society such as doctors, professionals, entrepreneurs etc. participated in a marathon for different categories viz 21km, 10 km and 5 km.

Mayor BMC Sulochana

lice, YB Khurania, Regional Director, RBI, Bhubaneswar Dr Sarada P Mohanty, popular cine artist and Director of Sidharth Channel Tamanna Vyas graced the event and cheered on all participants. CGM, SBI, Bhubaneswar Circle Dinesh Purthi, along with other senior officers of SBI such as Ponambalam M (GM-1), Kousal Kumar Singh (GM -2), was present in the

Das, Director General of Po-

CGM Pruthi felicitated the winners in different categories and congratulated all participants for their contribution. Pruthi requested all participants to strive for physical and mental fitness goals in life.

## 'MPs must demand spl package for State'

Odisha neglected in Union Budget: Rabi Behera

PNS BHUBANESWAR

Odisha MPs, regardless of party affiliations, should come together and demand a special package from the Union Finance Minister and the Prime Minister. Odisha has been neglected in the Union Budget 2025-26.

This was stated by Odisha Ashmita Parishad convenor Rabi Behera on Sunday. "While it was expected that Odisha would get more grants from the double-engine government, no money has been allocated for Odisha in this budget," said Behera.

Sitharaman and Prime Minister Narendra Modi and demand a special financial package for Odisha.

"It is worth mentioning here that earlier, the Central Government ignored Odisha in the railway sector and separated the Waltair Railway Division from the East Coast Railway under the pretext of Andhra Pradesh and transferred it to the

Behera said. "Besides, the Central Government has been adopting a staggered policy in funding the Kalinga-UNESCO Prize which has been awarded since 1952 by Odisha leader and former Chief Minister

South Coast Railway,"

face this challenge in the interest of Odisha," he stated.

#### 'Increase funding for science, tech for economic dev accelerators for radiotherapy

#### **Physicist** Mohanty delivers talk at UU

PNS BHUBANESWAR

Internationally-acclaimed physicist Dr Bedangdas Mohanty, presently senior Professor at the School of Physical Sciences, NISER, delivered a talk at Utkal University on Sunday on topic "Science, relevance to the Society and his Journey" under Meet the Alumni Lecture series organised jointly by the Alumni Association- Utkal University and Alumni Con-



Satyajit Mohanty, Dr Bedangdas Mohanty, in the course of his talk, stressed that science and technology are necessary for socioeconomic development. Further, our quest to know more about

nature leads to building things

that are at the forefront of cutting-edge technology and the technology has widespread applications in society, he emphasised.

He stated that fundamental science pursuits like in experimental high energy physics have led to societal benefits like world wide web (www), high resolution detectors for medical imaging and particle

economic progress with noticeable growth on the ground, Dr Mohanty opined. At the outset, Alumni Association president Dr Mohanty

delivered the welcome address. Association vice president Raghunath Prusty introduced the guests and conducted the proceedings of the Coordinator, meeting. Alumni Connect Dr Ashish Chandra Pathy gave the vote of thanks

### Al should not be used to kill jobs: Khuntia

Tourist dies at Konark Eco-Retreat



BHUBANESWAR

Artificial Intelligence (AI) should not and cannot be used as a tool to kill jobs and income; rather, it could be used as the via media to enhance the skill of the workers for the interest of a company and to make workers more employ-

This was stated by INTUC national vice-president and Odisha State president Rama Chandra Khuntia at the World Labour Market conference in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

In view of the technology development, skill up-gradation is very much required. The

receiving country and the sending country can change the policy frame work and direct the educational institutions to change curriculum of education and training, said Khuntia

"But the engaged workers should not lose the wage and should not be asked to pay for the training fees," added he.

The labour conference was attended by 49 ministers of different countries, professors, journalists, industrialists and 6,000 delegates.

During his tour to Saudi Arabia, Khuntia also met the Indian Ambassador and held discussions with him.

### In Ganjam Snakes used in crimes; no action under Wildlife Act

Police, Forest Dept need to act in tandem to curb trend: Experts RAJEEV RATHAN BRAHMAPUR

Organised crime in Ganjam district has taken a chilling turn, with criminals increasingly using poisonous snakes as weapons.

Over the past 13 years, snakes have been used in murders, kidnappings, and robberies, yet no legal action has been taken under the Wildlife Protection Act, raising serious concerns about law enforcement gaps.

Ganjam has recorded the highest number of organised crimes in Odisha involving snakes. The first such case occurred in Brahmapur in 2012

Baidyanathpur police station area was murdered using snake venom. The post-mortem revealed that venom had been injected into her body. Police arrested a snake charmer and her son, but due to lack of evidence, they were later acquit-

In 2017, a robbery at Gate Bazar exposed another shocking use of snakes in crime. A fraudster lured a victim with a scheme to double gold jewelleries and kept a venomous snake hidden in a plastic container. When the victim resisted, the accused used the snake as a weapon. The case was investigated, and the accused, Ganesh, was arrested, but no charges were filed under the Wildlife Act.

In September 2023, a horri-

fying case in Adhaibara village under Kabisuryanagar police station saw a woman and her two-year-old daughter killed after being bitten by a cobra. The accused used a snake to commit the murders, sending shockwaves through the district. More recently, in a kidnapping case, criminals used snakes to intimidate victims, threatening them with fatal bites unless a ransom was paid. A suspect was arrested, and a snake was recovered from the

crime scene. In another shocking incident in Chikiti, criminals used a cobra to extort money from a businessman. The accused demanded Rs 2 crore from the victim, threatening that if the amount was not paid, the venomous snake would be released to bite him.

Despite these incidents, neither the police nor the Forest Department invoked the Wildlife Protection Act against the accused. Legal experts stress the need for immediate enforcement of wildlife laws.

"Poisonous snakes are being increasingly used for crimes in Ganjam, yet due to lack of coordination between the Forest department and the police, the Wildlife Act is not being enforced. As a result, criminals often walk free," Snake Helpline secretary Shubhendu Mallik said. "Both departments need to act in tandem to take strict action against the offenders," he added. Meanwhile, experts have urged authorities to apply existing laws to curb the disturbing trend and ensure criminals using snakes as weapons face strict punishment.

#### Biju Patnaik," he pointed out. He urged all BJP, BJD and "It is time for all Odisha Congress MPs of Odisha to MPs to come together and come together and meet Finance Minister Nirmala



Reverse speed artist Ayush Mohapatra makes a painting of Lord Jagannath on the occasion of Padma Mukha Besha of the deity in Puri. It took eight minutes for him. Photo: Ranjan Ganguly

#### Wider roads, more flyovers won't ease BBSR traffic woes **T**he year 2024 witnessed a ever benefits might actually come

change in the State admin istration, but the problems of capital city continue with water logging, congestion, garbage, livelihood, environment, etc. However, like the previous government present one too believes in expanding road accessibility, flyovers, ring

But what many in decision makers room are not ready to accept is Bhubaneswar originally was with grid pattern city and was more comfortable for cycling, pedestrian and public transport than accommodating highways, flyovers and ring roads. There is a fundamental law of congestion in cities, i.e, no matter how much road is built, the roads will end up congested again. In last decades cities across the globe have undergone massive experiment in either expanding most major roads, leading to an additional congestion or investing in slow streets. In the first scenario, congestion will return to previous levels about 5 years after a widening and in the latter case congestion slowly eased away. In simple



**PIYUSH RANJAN ROUT** 

it is implying that adding more wider roads actually accelerates the growth of driving. At times, wdening a street can make traffic

even worse than before. Why this occurs is relatively straightforward. Traffic demand is based on the immediate cost of driving: gas plus travel time. Reduce the time it takes to drive somewhere, and that trip becomes cheaper. People drive more because it now costs less. But as more people choose to drive more miles, the cost of driving settles back to

where it was originally. Congestion is where the road system hits equilibrium, its happy place. Congestion always wins.

Where does new traffic comes from in Bhubaneswar in last many years? New driving by individuals already living around the road contributed between 9% and 39% of induced demand, heavy vehicles contributed between 19% and 29%, increased migration accounted for between 5% and 21%, and people switching from side roads to main roads accounted for 0% to 10%.

In some ways, this seems like it should be a good thing. More trips and more driving means more social and economic activity that may not have happened before. However, the social and economic benefits of new traffic are generally not argued or even modeled to see if the project's monetary costs (construction and maintenance) and social costs (added pollution and traffic deaths) are worth it.

Highway expansions are instead sold as congestion busting schemes. Because of this, planners and engineers are silent to whatfrom road widenings, choosing instead to believe in the fiction that congestion is beatable. Fixing one bottleneck might cause another three to pop up. The aggregate amount of congestion the system experiences will always either be constant or increase, and, as driving increases, more people and trips are exposed to the problems of congestion.

Despite having five decades of evidence of its inefficacy, governments still widen roads in capital city. The fact is it's not just for tackling congestion; thrre lies something else. It is important to learn the politics of road widening or expansion in Bhubaneswar. Many believe widening will reduce congestion; while others believe the short term benefits of congestion relief are worth the cost, or that a package of bicycle path and transit improvements alongside widening will have meaningful impacts.

The phenomenon of politics behind road expansion is understood in different ways and still debated in Bhubaneswar urban planning.

However, the focus of debate is shifting from the question of 'if' toward the question of how much. A battle over forecasting methods and applying the empirical research to specific projects has ensued. Because Bhubaneswar has not got relief so far from its flyovers, widened roads, expanded highways over years.

It is time, Bhubaneswar -Puri -Cuttack should now have urban planning intervention of focusing on metro rail, connecting the entire region with cycling, pedestrian paths and a possible canal way.

Perhaps our decision makers needs to understand widening or building more flyovers won't solve city's problems rather it will create  $more\ water logging\ situations, more$ congestion and health issues. It's like buying larger pants for wider body than addressing the obesity challenge that our city inherited from automobile culture. Let's wish 2025 will be a year of sustainability and sustainable urbanisation.

(Dr Rout is an urban planner, who can be reached in X @piyushrout)

Although every possible care and caution has been taken to avoid errors or omissions, this publication is being sold on the condition and understanding that information given in this publication is merely for reference and must not be taken as having authority of or binding in any way on the writers, editors, publishers, and printers and sellers who do not owe any responsibility for any damage or loss to any person, a purchaser of this publication or not for the result of any action taken on the basis of this work. All disputes are subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of competent court and forums in Delhi/New Delhi only. Readers are advised and requested to verify and seek appropriate advice to satisfy themselves about the veracity of any kind of advertisement before responding to any contents published in this newspaper. The printer, publisher, editor and any employee of the Pioneer Group's will not be held responsible for any kind of loss, consequences and further product-related damages on such advertisements

# DM, DWO allege corruption against each other

PNS RAYAGADA

he Rayagada district administration is currently facing a turbulent time as the Collector and District Welfare Officer (DWO) locked horns by bringing corruption allegations against each other, sources said on Sunday.

According to the sources, accusations have been made by DWO Asima Rao who claims she was relieved of duties because of her refusal to engage in corrupt practices, insisted on by the Collector.

In Kalahandi

PNS BHAWANIPATNA

**A**n elderly couple was

trampled to death by a wild

elephant in the Lanjigarh sec-

tion of Biswanathpur range,

South forest division in

The incident took place in

Mugana Majhi (65) and his

wife Gada (62) were identified

as the victims. The couple was

Phulbani MLA Uma

Charan Malik made a surprise

visit to the Kandhamal Dis-

trict Headquarters Hospital

He found that there was no

doctor in the emergency ser-

vice and an attendant was only

present. It was known that the

doctor who was supposed to

be on duty was in a clinic. It

was alleged that the doctor

was not regular in his duty

leaving the patients at the

mercy of the nurses. Similarly,

In Kalahandi

Over 20 students of a pri-

vate school were injured after

being attacked by a swarm of

bees during Saraswati Puja

Bhawanipatna town in

Kalahandi district on Sunday.

occurred at Duarasuni village

on the outskirts of

Saraswati Puja was being cel-

While the celebrations were

when

As per reports, the incident

celebrations

Bhawanipatna

ebrated in the school.

(DHH) recently.

Kadomali village under Lakhbahali panchayat on Sat-

Kalahandi district.

urday night.

by elephant

DWO Rao asserted that the district Collector inflated the bills of supplies for hostels to double the standard rates. She sought redressal from the Orissa High Court, seeking to challenge her removal from office as unlawful.

"As per guidelines of the State Government and on behalf of the Department, we used to procure different items (such as beds, cots, and utensils) for hostel inmates confirming to EPM (Export Promotion and Marketing) rate contract and specifications,"

asleep when the elephant sud-

denly appeared and destroyed

their house. Fearing attack,

family members ran away

from the spot. While the eld-

erly couple was unable to es-

cape, they became the target of

Later, Forest Department officials arrived at the spot fol-

lowing reports of the incident.

The deceased's family mem-

the doctor was misbehaving

with the patients and their at-

tendants. He was also in-

volved in various irregulari-

MLA Mallick was accompa-

Chandra Mohanty, BJP city

president and MP and mu-

nicipal council representative

Jagannath Sahu and some BJP

workers. They visited all the

departments. They saw that

there was widespread disor-

der in the hospital. They ex-

pressed grave displeasure over

in progress in the school, the

swarm of bees suddenly ap-

peared and attacked students.

The bees had built two hives

and a nest in the school pre-

More than 20 students and

school staffs were injured in

the bee attack. They were im-

mediately rushed to the Dis-

trict Headquarters Hospital

After receiving treatment at

the hospital, all the injured

students and staffs were al-

mises, locals said.

for treatment.

lowed to go home.

the state of affairs.

20 schools students hurt in bee attack

ties in the hospital.

the elephant's attack.

DWO Rao said.

"However, the Collector had been insisting that I purchase at much higher rates to the extent of almost double. The file was processed before I came here, and on the first day of my joining, she pressured me to sign the file and return it to her," the DWO al-

Even the district Collector had wanted the duly signed file by 10 pm at night.

"As I had refused to act according to her instructions and when I said that I would

sign only after going through the details in the file, she got annoyed and scolded me and shouted at me inside her chamber. Then, I told her of feeling

harassed," the DWO stated.

"I have already given my complaint in writing to the Department's Minister, met the Principal Secretary and brought it to the higher-up's knowledge. They have assured me to conduct a detailed probe into the matter," the DWO

On the contrary, the district "We need an active DWO Collector's office has accused

the DWO of irregularities, islosing a lot. She is working suing five show-cause notices When contacted, Rayagada

Collector Parul Patawari expressed, "We have issued five show-cause notices to DWO Rao in the last two months. She does not come to her office regularly. She never attends any meetings, submits any reports, and takes part in any of the grievance hearing meetings. Hence, we have relieved her from duties.'

to her within two months.

here; otherwise, the district is

only on teacher transfer files. It is purely an administrative decision to relieve an officer who is not working. This is not a new thing and has been done earlier also," the Collector

"Being a DWO, one has to be proactive, since this is a tribal-dominated district. Otherwise, it is too difficult on the part of a district head to work. She is blowing things out of proportion. We have proof of all her irregularities," the Collector asserted.

#### Pallishri Mela from Feb 15 Scintillating highlight the talents of local cultural programmes on cards

Gopalpur Beach Fest,

**RAJEEV RATHAN** ■ BRAHMAPUR

The much-anticipated Gopalpur Beach Festival will be held from February 15 to 17, spanning three days. In tandem, the Pallishri Mela will run for an extended period, from February 15 to 19, as it does annually.

It was informed by the Ganjam district administration on Monday that a statutory declaration has been made to ensure smooth preparations for the events. This year, ORMAS will set up 300 steel structures, creating space for the display and sale of products crafted by Mission Shakti mothers from across Odisha. Various government schemes from multiple departments will also be showcased during the festival. Cultural programes will

artists, folk performers, and artists from other districts and States. A variety of mega events will further enrich the festival experience. In addition, a food fair, sand art displays, and other attractions will add to the festivities.

In keeping with tradition, a souvenir titled "Smaranika Shamuka" will be published. Authors are invited to submit their essays to the District Information and Public Relations Officer by February 5.

A cultural dance selection competition, organized by the district Culture Department, will take place from 3 pm to 6 pm at Biju Patnaik Sanskruti Bhavan in Brahmapur, from February 3 to 5. Institutions interested in participating are asked to submit their applications in writing to the District Culture Officer by February 1. The selected teams will be given an opportunity to perform at the Gopalpur Beach

# BeMC row not to halt dev works: Mayor Elderly couple killed



**RAJEEV RATHAN** ■ BRAHMAPUR

bers demanded adequate compensation for the loss of lives and properties. Development works under the Berhampur Municipal MLA visits K'mal DHH, miffed over services Corporation (BeMC) have been stalled due to ongoing disputes between elected representatives and the administration. Mayor Sanghamitra Dalai and Commissioner Bhabani Prasad Mishra have expressed strong displeasure over repeated threats to ob-

struct civic projects.

"The corporation is being threatened, both directly and indirectly, that development work will not proceed. This is hampering public welfare," Mayor Dalai stated, affirming that citizens' needs remain the top priority despite disruptions. Commissioner Mishra also echoed concerns over administrative hurdles slowing down crucial projects.

Meanwhile, the BeMC has issued a show-cause notice to the sanitation agency over non-performance, sparking controversy. Deputy Commissioner Ashribad Parida is reportedly facing questions over the notice. Additionally, while some women self-help groups are effectively managing the projects, irregularities have surfaced in others, with allegations of political shielding and

misuse of government funds. Tensions between BeMC's elected representatives and the administration continue to escalate, with recent corporation meetings turning contentious. Observers fear that prolonged conflicts could impact essential services. As the situation unfolds, all eyes are on BeMC's ability to navigate the crisis and ensure uninterrupted public welfare initiatives.

## 5th eye donation drive by Helping Club

**A**nasuya Rao (83), a resident of Ganesh Market, Bada Bazar, Brahmapur, passed away on Friday due to old age ailments. She is survived by three daughters Rajyalakshmi, Anuradha and Bandana and one son Jagadish, who is a key member of Friends Helping Club.

Jagdish initiated the eye donation of his mother and accordingly Dr Manish Oram, Dr Ruchira Nayak and Dr P Sweta of Eye Bank, MKCG MCH collected both eye balls of the deceased. Two daughters Anuradha, Bandana and sons in law Mohan Patro and Maheshwara Rao were present



motivation programme of the club in January. Club members KPK Subudhi, P Badrinarayana, Dr Epari Narayana and Jammula Suresh among others were

# MLA assures KC High School's takeover

#### nied by lawyer Ramesh South Odisha's 2nd oldest school now in bad shape RAJEEV RATHAN ■ BRAHMAPUR

**B**rahmapur MLA K Anil Kumar has pledged immediate action for the government takeover of the historic KC High School and its affiliated institutions on Saturday.

Established in 1856, it is Odisha's second-oldest high school and the first in south Odisha. Concerns over mismanagement, unauthorised activities, and financial irregularities have prompted calls for intervention in the institution's matter.

A delegation led by Odia Bhasha Andolan president Trinath Maharana met the MLA, highlighting the unauthorised establishment of a private English medium school on its campus and alleged plans to commercialise the school's land. They demanded the dissolution of the



school management committee and an inquiry against its chairman over alleged mismanagement of funds.

"We are concerned about unauthorised activities and financial irregularities. The historic institution, built through public contributions, must be safeguarded," said Maharana. In response, the MLA assured action, vowing to raise the issue in the upcoming Assembly session to upgrade KC High School, KC Girls High School,

Lambodar and Arjun Devguru.

Students from the local Sishu

Mandir presented the opening

and KC Town High School to government institutions. His assurance has been welcomed by former students, including Mahoncharan Swain, Pankaj Nayak, Kumar Rabinarayan Sabat, who attended the meeting.

### Bleaching powder scam in U'kote civic body vate firm Rs 18,45,000 for pro-

Lakhs bungled PNS ■ NABARANGPUR

Misappropriation of lakhs of rupees in purchase of bleaching powder in Umarkote Municipality in 2022 has come to the fore through an RTI query. The query was filed by one Parsuram Patro, an activist.

According to reports, the actual cost of one bag of bleaching powder is around Rs 500 to Rs 600; however, the authorities paid Rs 1,300 for each bag.

Patro alleged that without the council body's resolution, the authorities had paid a pricuring breaching powder. He further claimed that the acquired items were stored in the office's stock yard which in course of time expired for not being used. When the bleaching powder

was purchased, norms were twisted because neither the municipality council nor the sanitization committee of the municipality had approved of the acquisition of bleaching powder of such a large quantity, said Patro.

He also demanded a Vigilance inquiry into the scam and stringent action against the officials involved in it.

# In Kendrapada Youth gets 20-yr RI for kidnapping, raping minor

KENDRAPADA

Additional District Judge cum-Special Judge (POCSO Court), Kendrapada, Prangya Parmita Raul, on Friday, awarded 20 years rigorous imprisonment (RI) to a 24- yearold youth and slapped a fine amount of Rs 61,000 on him for kidnapping and raping a minor girl several times under Pattamundai police station limits in 2021.

Special Public Prosecutor Manoj Kumar Sahoo said the convicted person was identified as Kiran Das of Thakurapatana village under

While the minor victim, on April 10, 2021 at about 3 am, had been outside the house to attend the call of nature, two persons forcibly kidnapped her in a Pulsar motorcycle. On seeing this when the mother of the victim sounded alarm, the miscreants fled from the spot by kidnapping the girl.

The victim's family members later came to know that their daughter was kidnapped

Kiran Das Thakurapatana. The father of the victim was abused with filthy languages by the accused Kiran Das's family

about the whereabouts of his daughter from them.

The father of the victim later lodged an FIR at Pattamundai police station. The police arrested the accused and submitted a charge sheet before the court under various Sections of IPC and Section 6 of POCSO Act

The court also recommended to the government to provide a compensation of Rs 7 lakh to the victim for her proper rehabilitation. The Secretary of DLSA ,Kendrapada was directed to take steps for sanctioning the compensation amount to the victim.

### 'Is Bali ritual justified?' Talk held by

Nuapada forums

he Mukta Bichar Manch, an intellect forum of Khariar, in collaboration with Jagruti Mandali of Gandabaheli, organised a seminar titled "Is the tradition of Bali during Shakti Upasana and deity worship justified?" on Thursday at Gantabahali High School under Sinapali Block of Nuapada district.

The seminar was presided over by former Income Tax Commissioner Shreekant Chatterjee, with commentators Fanindam Singh Deo, Aditya Nath Panda, Tara Prasad Acharya, and Dhruv Charan Pradhan sharing diverse perspectives on the subject. The



song, adding a cultural touch to Sarangi performances by

Meher, accompanied by the

A highlight of the occasion was the release of the play "Bharat Amar Jagat Guru" by playwright Bhishmaraj

Mahurat ceremony for its telefilm adaptation.

Several notable attendees graced the event, including Kantabanji College Principal Dr Padma Lochan Varma, educationists Lohitaksha

Joshi and Meena Saha, musician Nandalal Barik, Gaurang Kumar Sahu, Baishnab Meher (president of Gangadhar Sahitya Samiti). The seminar concluded with a vote of thanks by Chaturbhuj Sethi.

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

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 selfreliant. The SIM 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. the country. The MSME It was a "real challenge" for the manufacturing mission, enhanced



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

"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 government to spur manufacturing credit guarantee for the MSME,

extension of the PLI beyond an earlier list and several other measures proposed in the Budget to improve manufacturing will insulate country from dominance", he said.

'The Swadeshi Jagaran Manch was demanding 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 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

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

"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

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

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 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, clinical toxicology, Dr Shailendra Kumar, additional professor, anesthesia and critical care, Jamahed Nayer, professor, additional 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 antipoison drug, the sources said. Besides the AIIMS Delhi team, a team of experts from PGI Chandigarh is also investigating the cause of

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 individuals were shifted from the village to three isolated centres in Rajouri --Nursing Government

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.

# Philippines, handed over to Delhi Police

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NFW DFI HI

Wanted by police and fac-ing 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 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

"On the strength of the Red Gyong was deported from the Philippines via Bangkok to Delhi," he said.



in the murder of a victim ransom," the spokesperson 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 his brother, the CBI said.

"The subject was also cases in various states of India, including Delhi and Punjab, for the offences of fear of death or of grievous

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,

Gyong was convicted to life imprisonment in Haryana for illegal firearms possession. robbery, murder, attempt to While on parole, he murder, putting person in committed the murder in Panipat in December 2017 "The subject is a gangster hurt in order to commit and later fled abroad, police wanted by the Haryana Police extortion and kidnapping for said.

### Gangster Joginder Gyong deported from | SC to hear on February 3 plea seeking safety measures for devotees at Maha Kumbh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NFW DFI HI

The Supreme Court is sched-I uled 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 collectively in ensuring a safe and secure environment for devotees at the Maha Kumbh. It said all states should establish facilitation centres at



information and assist their respective residents 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 their manner facilitation centres at the Maha Kumbh. These centres shall provide and display the basic information regarding coming from their states. In emergency these centres shall be ready for any assistance," it

The plea said SMSes and WhatsApp messages be used

protocols to attendees. There is a need 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.

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 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 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

#### 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. blaming Congress general secretary incommunications Jairam Ramesh cited a media report which said the state administration has not given an update on the number of

the incident. "The BJP government, which 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

deaths even after four days of

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE **NEW DELHI** 

 $D_{\left( \text{DFI} \right)}^{\text{rone}}$  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 sur-

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 (MĆA), aimed to rebrand the "Drone organization as Federation 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,



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 accountability. 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.

## harness AI and ML: Sanjay Murthy PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

India's apex auditor is build-Ling 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 30trillion 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



CAG building infra and processes to

are now available have transformed the scale and potential which organisations can achieve higher performance

"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 larger companies and 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

revolutionised the field.

"The evolution of technology

transformation in intellectual 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 near started building necessary infrastructure and processes to harness these technologies to use them in auditing processes and to audit AI applications themselves," he

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 Information Management System (AIMS) and a webenabled 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 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

### SC conference deliberates issues faced by State judiciary

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ **NEW DELHI** 

**▼** dentification 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 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. technical sessions chaired by the judges of the apex court, including Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna. It said the first session witnessed

discussions on ways to narrow the gulf between

institution and disposal of

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

cases, identification of case

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

### **Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb shines as Muslims** extend hospitality to pilgrims in Prayagraj

The spirit of communal harmony was on full display during the Maha Kumbh's grand Mouni Amavasya bathing festival, as Muslim families in the old city opened their homes to stranded Hindu

With roads leading to the rail-way station blocked due to the overwhelming rush, local resi-dents stepped in to offer food, shelter, and warmth to the

Among them was Rameshwar Prasad, a pilgrim from Madhya Pradesh, who found shelter at a house near Chowk. "I had nowhere to go when the roads were closed, and I was shivering in the cold," he recalled. "A kind man named Rashid invited me in, gave me food, and even offered me a blanket. I will never forget his kindness.

The historic Jama Masjid in Chowk also turned into a refuge for dozens of pilgrims. Community kitchens in Muslim-majority areas ran throughout the night, serving



hot meals to those in need. With the success of these efforts, locals have now begun preparations to assist devotees on Vasant Panchami, another major bathing festival. During Mouni Amavasya, thousands of devotees spent three days at Yadgare Husaini Inter College

itated," Lakshmi told journal

ists after her surrender today.

She thanked Chief Minister

Siddaramaiah for the gener-

ous surrender package and appealed to the district

administration to relieve her

of all charges laid against

her in the police stations in

Kundapur taluk. DC Vidya Kumari said

Lakshmi comes under the 'A' category candidate for

surrender, and as a surrender package norm the Naxalites

coming under this category

The 'A' category has been denominated for the Naxals

originating from Karnataka

The surrender packages will

be given in phases extending

to three years, and in addi-

tion, depending on the core

capacity of the Naxals who surrendered, facilities like

education, rehabilitation, and

employment will be offered,"

Sripal of the State Surrender

Committee, told the jour-

nalists present that the com-

mittee had recommended to

the government to expedi-

tiously dispose of the cases

filed against the surrendered

Naxalites, helping them to

lead a normal life in society.

"Due to the efforts of the

Committee, 22 Naxal activists

have surrendered in 2025 so

far and Lakshimi happens to

be the last one in the state to

added the DC

state, Kumari added.

Shankaranarayana

Amasebail

in Chowk, where members of the Muslim community volunteered to provide food and accommodation. Gauhar Kazmi, the college manager, confirmed that arrangements are now being made for Vasant Panchami as well.

Radha Devi, a devotee from

Varanasi, shared her experience: "I was tired from the journey and had no place to rest when a young man named Areeb guided me to the school, where they provided us with meals and warm bedding. Their generosity reminded me that humanity comes before reliLocal businessman Rashid Sagir, who had opened Shaharara Bagh Mosque for pil-grims and distributed blankets during Mouni Amavasya, is preparing similar arrangements for Vasant Panchami. "It is our duty to help those in need, regardless of religion," he said. Understanding the need for construct arrangement for separate arrangements for women, Rashid had also opened his restaurant for female devotees. Sunita Mishra, a pilgrim from Kanpur, expressed her gratitude: "I was hesitant at first, but they treated me like family. The women in Rashid bhai's house took care of me as if I was their own sister. In addition, Haseeb Ahmed organised a langar in Chowk,

serving food to hundreds of devotees. He has now started preparations to host more pilgrims on Vasant Panchami. Recognising the struggles of those walking long distances, young leader Adil Hamza arranged for vehicles to transport devotees. "Religion teaches us compassion, not division,

Maha Kumbh: BHU scientists conduct DNA and COVID immunity study

BISWAJEET BANERJEE

Scientists from Banaras Hindu University (BHU) are conducting a groundbreaking study at the ongoing Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj to analyse the genetic diversity of attendees and assess immunity languages of the court nity levels against COVID-19. The study aims to determine what percentage of India's genetic makeup is represent-ed at the religious gathering and whether COVID antibodies are still prevalent in the population.

A five-member team of researchers has begun collecting samples from approximately 1,000 participants. Professor Gyaneshwar Chaubey, who is leading the Gyaneshwar study, stated that the research focuses on two primary objec

The first is to conduct antibody tests to gauge the level of immunity developed against COVID-19 among devotees.

The second is to analyse the diversity of DNA present in the crowd, given that pilgrims from across India converge at the Maha Kumbh.

ue till February 7. The team is using saliva samples for genetic analysis and conducting antibody tests to evaluate Covid immunity. Initial findings indicate that

at the Maha Kumbh. The scale of the investigation will be vast, with the



"By using random sampling methods, we aim to map the genetic diversity of attendees and assess how well their DNA represents the broader Indian population," Professor Chaubey explained.
The data collected will pro-

vide insights into migration patterns and genetic ancestry, contributing to a deeper understanding of India's demographic composition. The sample collection began on January 24 and will contin-

most participants have been vaccinated and retain a degree of immunity, reducing the likelihood of major outbreaks

researchers analysing data from 25,000 individuals.

#### Last naxalite of Karnataka, Lakshmi surrenders in Udupi



PNS BENGALURU

Lakshmi, said to be the last Naxalite in Karnataka, unconditionally surrendered on Sunday in front of Udupi Deputy Commissioner Vidya Kumari and Superintendent of Police Arun K.

According to police, Lakshmi, who had been hid-ing in Andhra Pradesh, has had three cases at Amasebail and Shankaranarayana police stations in Kundapur Taluk in the Udupi district. These cases date back to 2007-2008, and they pertain to the exchange of fire with police, literature in villages and small

Police said Lakshmi originally belonged to Thombattu of Machchattu village in Kundapura taluk.

She was accompanied by the State Naxal Surrender Committee member Sripal and her husband Salim, a former Naxalite who had surrendered in 2020 in Andhra Pradesh.

After severing her connection with her family 15 years ago, Lakshmi had gone underground and was active in pushing the Naxalite agenda in Chikkamagaluru and Udupi districts.

"I tried to get in touch with the district officials and wanted to surrender after the Karnataka government had announced the surrender protocol and package, but it had not happened for some reason. Now that the surrender committee was formed,

### Pilgrim bus plunges into gorge in Gujarat, five killed 35 injured

Five persons were killed and 35 others injured when a private bus carrying pilgrims hailing from Madhya Pradesh fell into a deep gorge in Gujarat's Dang district early Sunday morning, police said. Among the injured persons, 17 were grievously hurt, they said,

adding the victims were on a trip to religious places across various states in the country. The accident took place at 4.15 am when the bus driver lost control over the wheels near the

Saputara hill station, in-charge Superintendent of Police SG Patil said. The bus, carrying 48 pilgrims, broke the crash barrier and fell at a depth of about 35 feet into the

gorge, he said. The passengers started at night for Dwarka in Gujarat from Trimbakeshwar, a religious place in Maharashtra's Nashik district. They made a brief stop at Saputara for tea break before



said. "Five persons died on the spot and 17 others suffered serious injuries and have been rushed to a civil hospital at Ahwa. Some others have sustained minor injuries. The rescue operation is nearly over," the official said.

The bus driver was among the deceased, comprising three men and two women, according to police. A total of 35 passengers

were taken to the nearby community health centres (CHCs) for treatment, and 17 of them were referred to the civil hospital at Ahwa in the district, Patil said. The pilgrims, hailing from Madhya Pradesh, had set out on four different buses on December 23, 2024 on a trip to religious places across various states, he said. Dang Collector Mahesh Patel said the unfortunate incident occurred after one of the four buses carrying the pilgrims

#### Sonia Gandhi faces legal action over 'poor thing' remark on President Murmu

PNS MUZAFFARPUR

A complaint was filed against Congress leader Sonia Gandhi before a court in Bihar's Muzaffarpur district for her 'poor thing' remark on President

Droupadi Murmu. Sudhir Ojha, a Muzaffarpurbased lawyer, filed a complaint on Saturday against Gandhi seeking registration of an FIR against her for allegedly disrespecting the country's highest constitutional authority.

Ojha also named Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha-Rahul Gandhi and Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra as co-accused and sought legal action against them as well. 'Sonia Gandhi has insulted

President Murmu by making the 'poor thing' remark. It's disrespect to the highest constitutional authority in the country. Rahul and Priyanka are co-accused in it. A case should be registered

against them under sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)," Ojha told reporters after filing the complaint before the CJM court in Muzaffarpur.

The court will hear the matter on February 10. After the President's joint address to Parliament ahead of the Budget session, Sonia Gandhi was asked by reporters outside the House about Murmu's nearly hour-long

"The President was getting very tired by the end. She could hardly speak, poor thing," Sonia Gandhi, the former Congress chief, was heard saying in clips in what appeared to be a reference to how long the address was.

Rahul described the speech as "boring" in one of the clips. Priyanka was also present there. The Rashtrapati Bhavan had, later, released a statement, calling the remark "unacceptable" and saying that Murmu was not tired.

#### Eight naxalites killed in Chhattisgarh encounter

PNS RAIPUR

The eight naxalites killed in an encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district on Saturday were senior cadres carrying cumulative rewards of ₹16 Lakh, police said. The members of the outlawed Maoist organisation were gunned down during an anti-Naxal operation in a forest near Todka village under the Gangaloor police station area. Two personnel of the District Reserve Guard, a unit of state police, were also injured in the

exchange of fire. Of the neutralised Naxalites, Kamlesh Neelkanth (24), a member of the Gangaloor area committee under the west Bastar division of Maoists, carried a reward of Rs 5 lakh on his head, a senior police official said on

Two others, identified as Tati Kamlu and Mangal Tati of the Gangaloor LOS (local organization squad), carried a reward of Rs three lakh each on their heads, he said.

Sunday.

Potam (40), Shankar Tati (26), Raju Tati, Vijju Padam (22) and Sannu Tati (40), were active in various wings of Maoists and carried a reward of Rs 1 lakh each, he said.

One Insas rifle, one Barrel Grenade Launcher (BGL) and its 10 shells, two 12-bore rifles, four muzzle-loading rifles and a huge cache of explosives items were recovered from the

encounter site, he said. So far this year, 49 Naxalites have been killed in separate encoun-

ters in the state. Of them, 33 were killed in the Bastar division comprising seven districts, including Bijapur.

Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security personnel in the state's Gariaband district, which is a part of the Raipur division.

separate encounters in the state, as per police.

### Wetlands crucial for ecology, must be protected from encroachers: CM Yogi

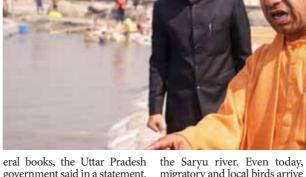
PNS LUCKNOW

Tttar Pradesh Chief Minister Uttar Prauesii Cinc. .... Yogi Adityanath on Sunday emphasised on the ecological importance of natural wetlands and said that many of them are suffering due to encroachment. Addressing an event at Gonda on the occasion of World Wetlands Day, themed "Wetland Future, Our Future", the Chief Minister said natural wetlands are vital for our ecosystem.

They play a key role in groundwater conservation, irrigation, drinking water availability, flood and drought control and carbon storage, he said.

Wetlands also play an important role in conservation of aquatic ecosystem-dependent vegetation, wild animals, migratory and local birds and provide food, medicine, livelihood, as well as income resources, he said. Adityanath launched a pro-

gramme on "Conservation of Wetlands for the Future of All of Us" at Parvati Arga Bird Sanctuary and also released sevsurrender. Karnataka is now a 'Naxal-free' state," he said.



government said in a statement. The Chief Minister visited an exhibition, and felicitated winners of various competitions, the statement said.

He said wetlands not only sustain aquatic life but also preserve nature in its original form. "Parvati and Arga natural lakes are a symbol of India's heritage,

formed hundreds of years ago by

migratory and local birds arrive here from thousands of kilometers away," Adityanath said. Highlighting the economic

potential of tourism, he said eco, heritage, and spiritual tourism generate employment. "In 2016, Ayodhya saw only 2.35 lakh tourists. After improving connectivity and facilities, 16.11 crore people visited in 2024, significantly boosting employment and businesses like hotels, taxis, restaurants, and local handicrafts," he said.

He added that efforts are underway to integrate nearby villages into the Parvati Arga Wetlands conservation initiative and encourage women self-help groups to market their products online in collaboration with Amazon.

in the direction of self-reliance and to achieve the target of one trillion dollar economy, every family will have to be made selfreliant. The Chief Minister also said that

Adityanath said that women vol-

Tikri forest would be developed as an open safari, turning the Awadh region into a major ecotourism hub. The state government will ensure

connectivity and link the Parvati and Arga wetlands with the Saryu Canal National Project, he "In a survey conducted 8 years

ago, Gonda was the dirtiest district in the country, but today its ranking is good. Today a medical college has been built here. The Vantangiyas who did not get rights for 100 years, have are also living a respectable life with rights," he added.

Speaking about carbon emissions, Adityanath said that Prime Minister Modi has asked to take steps towards achieving the target of net zero in 2070.

On January 20-21, police said, 16

Last year, 219 Naxalites were neutralised by security forces in

### Row over Saraswati Puja continues in Kolkata college

PNS KOLKATA

West Bengal Education Minister Bratya Basu on Sunday faced protests by a group of students of a Kolkata college, who alleged that outsiders led by a Trinamool Congress Chhatra Parishad (TMCP) leader threatened them for organising Saraswati Puja on the institute campus. Following a row between two groups of students in Jogeshchandra Law College premises over organising the Puja, the Calcutta High Court on Friday asked the Kolkata Police to ensure that the ceremony can be held by law college students with adequate

Matters came to a head on January 29 when students of the law college, majority of them women, alleged they were being prevented from organising the puja on college premises by members of TMCP-led by ex-student Sabir and met them. Ali and even faced rape threats

One of the girl students then moved the Calcutta High Court seeking its intervention and the judge ordered that the students must be allowed to celebrate the festival and asked a top-ranked official of Kolkata Police to monitor their security posting enough personnel at the college gate. A general college and a law college are run in the same building at different times of the day.

Students of the two colleges have been separately organising the puja on the same campus for years.

The situation, however, is dif-

ferent this year. Basu, who was accompanied by local Trinamool Congress MP Mala Roy, was greeted by 'We Want Justice' slogans from the female students as he went

"I am here to talk to you. None will coerce you, terrorise you or threaten you. If anyone has issued any threat, we will take strong action against him," the education minister said. Several of the female students broke down before him and alleged that while entering the college, they were threatened with assault and rape by some "outsiders"

"I have met the students, I had a darshan of the idol and offered prayers. I have assured the students we will look into their grievances and appropriate action will be taken after inquiry, Basu said

He said he would meet them and the college authorities on February 5-6 to discuss the

Rejecting the allegations, Ali said, "We are organising the Saraswati puja of the day section in the adjacent lane of the inside the law college campus college. No threats have been

issued against anyone. They cannot show any such video (of issuing threats). He also added that being an alumnus of the day college, he

has every right to be part of

the Saraswati Puja. Mala Roy said, "Saraswati Puja is not the occasion to shout slogans demanding justice. The MP said she and the education minister visited both

puja pandals erected by the students of the two colleges. "There has been no provocation or aggression shown by the Saraswati puja organises of the day section. Everything is being conducted as ordered by the honourable high court in the presence of the police.

"There are reasons to suspec that those demanding justice are backed by political elements who want to disrupt the academic functioning of the law college and foment trouble during the Saraswati puja,'

#### Manipur CM hails Himanta for taking tough measures against illegal poppy cultivation PTI IMPHAL where every youth of the NE

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Sunday hailed his Assam counterpart Himanta Biswa Sarma for taking tough measures against illegal poppy cultivation and drugs in the He said both the states remain

resolute in building a future where youth are protected from the shadow of drugs. Replying to media queries on Sarma's post on X, Singh said at the sideline of a pro-

gramme in Imphal West district, "I appreciate the chief minister of Assam. He is taking up counter drugs activities very actively. We have to be united and save the future generations from drugs." Later in a post on X, Singh appreciated his Assam coun-



terpart in taking measures against illicit poppy cultiva-

'My deep appreciation for the decisive measures taken in Assam, under the leadership of Hon'ble Chief Minister

Shri @himantabiswa ji, in addressing the challenges posed by the cultivation of poppy," he said.

"We stand together and remain resolute in our shared

goal of building a future

is protected, nurtured, and given the opportunity to thrive free from the shadow of drugs," the Manipur CM posted on X. The Assam CM on Sunday said around 170 bighas (over

56 acres) of poppy farming worth more than ₹27 Crore were destroyed in Goalpara district of the state in January this year. "Dear Local Pablo Escobars,

Sorry to spoil your planned Udta Assam party! Because @Goalpara\_Police destroyed 170 Bighas of poppy cultivation in the Char areas worth ₹27.20 Crore in January, Sarma said in a post on X. He also uploaded a video, showing a tractor smashing the purported poppy plantation amid the presence of a huge posse of policemen.

www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/

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

inance 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 registeration 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.



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

# 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

special bench of the Supreme Court led CJI Sanjiv Khanna, 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 dis-

#### Judicial Review and the Rule of

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 of law in a republic while the laws cannot override the fundamental rights guaranteed by the caprice of an absolute Constitution and remain subject monarch.

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



THE PARLIAMENT'S

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

been excluded; (b) if that differentia 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 Ayodhya 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 reclama-

tion of religious sites other

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 classi-

fication that provides advan-

tages and disadvantages on a

differential ground will be

declared as unconstitutional:

(a) if there is no intelligible

differentia between the clas-

sification made, which distin-

guishes those that are

grouped from those that have

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 inval-

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

idating it entirely.

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### 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.

Minister, → Nirmala Sitharaman has presented a forwardthinking 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: Grameen 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

Revamped Central KYC **Registry** – A much-needed step toward simplifying compliance requirements for financial institutions, reducing 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

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 land-

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 CEOCompany: i-exceed technology solutions; views are personal)

#### **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 70hour 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**



ndoubtedly, 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

timely and well argued. The suggestions regarding 70 to 90 working hours per week by some leading industrialists and capitalists of India are highly reactionary and

exploitative. The suggestion shows their greed for more profits in the name of increased productivity and efficiency. Both the authors have given pertinent arguments against this proposal. All work and no play makes young people dull, unhealthy and unproductive. Extended working hours will make the young population of the country hypertensive, heart patients and mentally deranged. It will cast the young population of India into fire. Despite labour laws, many companies in India are taking 60 hours of work per week from their employees without paying them extra money. Due to fear of unemployment, young people are compelled to work for long hours. All righteous persons, employers and labour union leaders should oppose this proposal tooth and nail. A 5day, 35 to 36.5 hour workweek is consid-

ered ideal internationally. Vinay Kr Malhotra | Ambala Cantt

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 gov-

ernment 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 coun-

Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneér@gmail.com www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/

### **FIRST COLUMN**

#### THE SCIENCE **OF MUDRAS**

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



RAVI VALLURI

ord 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

(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 immu-

(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

(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

(f) Shunya 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

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 humanness 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

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, mak-

ing 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 over-whelming 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 FOREST OFFICIALS given, illegal occupation continues in the rejected cases which are 36.5 per cent in leftwing affected states and 60 per cent in oth-

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 RESPONSIBILITIES regularisation. In Gujarat, 434 cases have been disposed of, and Maharashtra accept- AND CHALLENGES ed 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 Sitanadi 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

**ACCOUNTABLE** FOR TIGER HAS STIRRED CONVERSATIONS **ABOUT THE** FACED BY

FORESTERS IN BALANCING CONSERVATION **EFFORTS WITH** THE RIGHTS AND SAFETY OF

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

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 ocals, mostly accidental and out of hunger rather than retaliatory or revengeful. People, however, in contrast to their erstwhile prevalent spir-DEATHS WHICH mostly respond now through retalit of tolerance and co-existence, iation or out of vengeance resulting in the escalation of human-wildlife

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. al behaviour by regularly avoiding Inside and near forests, light pollu-

tion, such as artificial lighting from streetlights, homes and recreational areas disrupts wildlife in numer-

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 rit-uals 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 humanwildlife conflict too.

Mitigating adverse impacts on wildlife necessitates more than merely avoiding times when human activities overlap with wildlife activities. Even if human disturbances occur outside of wildlife activity periods, the large-scale nature of such disturbances can still have a profound effect on wildlife. These disturbances often displace ani-mals 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 unusuconsuming 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

### 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

**¬**he 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 ecologresponsibility 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



dependence on fossil fuels. However, the chal lenge 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- Afforestation

tainability boost. The PM Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana and Mission for Aatmanirbharta in Pulses are moving in the right direction, ensuring climateresilient farming and reducing excessive reliance on 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 Compensatory Fund

Management Authority (CAMPA) 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 zerowaste economy will require robust monitoring and pub-

lic 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 longterm 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 environ-mental 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 execution, enforcement, and longterm 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)

 $P^{\text{resident Donald Trump on }}_{\text{Saturday signed an order to}}$ 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

Canadian Prime Minister

Justin Trudeau on Saturday said that Canadian duties on \$30 billion in trade in American alcohol and fruit 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

"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

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

"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." tries.

Meanwhile, the Premier of The Trump administration put

Canadian province of British Columbia, David Eby, called on residents to stop buying liquor from U.S. "red" states and said will take effect Tuesday, when 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 indus-

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

the tariffs in place to force the

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

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 comural 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

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's raising 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.

### **US** businesses brace for rising costs

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

 $F^{\text{rom an ice cream parlour in}}_{\text{California to a medical sup-}}$ ply 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 ization agreements between economy, which grew 2.8 per cent last year, would fall by 1.5 in his first term, is believed to per cent this year and 2.1 per 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 pep-percorn" 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

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 — includ-ing 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 lowerquality products or pass higher costs along via higher health 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 tar-

"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

"Once that inventory starts to get low, we're going to start feeling the effects," Carillo 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 buying mo and it's going to be at a higher

months.

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 cut flowers. You don't stockpile bananas?

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

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Sunday he will discuss "victory over Hamas," countering expanding diplomat ic 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 farright governing partners to

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,"

resume the war after the first referring to Iran's alliance of Under the first phase of the phase ends in early March, has militant groups across the said Israel is still committed to region, including Hamas.

victory over Hamas and the He said that by working togethreturn of all the hostages cap-tured in the militants' Oct. 7, er, they could "strengthen secu-rity, broaden the circle of peace and achieve a remarkable beace through strength." The war began when thou-

sands 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 weeklong 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 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 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, Oatar 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 normal-Israel and four Arab countries e seeking a wider and noten-

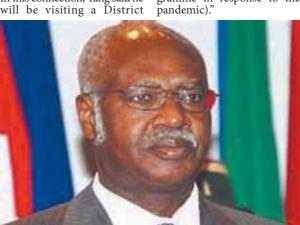
tially historic agreement in

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, farright 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

#### Yang, as UNGA President, tion and how it can advance form was instrumental in delivtions to the multilateral system including in other multilaterering two billion doses to India al forums, particularly on SDGs, Yang said he is particustand out, Yang listed India's during the COVID-19 panlarly keen to see how India is contribution to peacekeeping, urgent issues like mobilising financing for sustainable develdemic (I have heard it being using digital technology to efforts as a first responder in last year. opment and advocating for Given his focus on the Pact and referred to as the "digital backimprove the lives of its people, numerous humanitarian emerespecially in the health sector. bone" of the vaccination progencies and being a strong voice of the Global South. its roadmap, Yang said that as General Assembly President, additional climate finance for In this connection, Yang said he will be visiting a District gramme in response to the developing countries, have Yang said that India's most stood out for their timeliness pandemic). ignificant contribution to the and sincerity," Yang said.



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-

Delhi and Bengaluru.

Yang also plans to visit the Infosys Campus and the Indian Bengaluru and other sites in

Institute of Science in When asked to highlight three

UN has been to its peacekeeping operations, both in terms of financial and human resources. With more than 290,000 Indians having served in 49 of the 71 UN peacekeeping missions established around the world since 1948, India's contribution to multilateral efforts towards peace and security is remarkable. He further said that India has

acted as a first responder in numerous humanitarian emergencies within its region and has contributed humanitarian aid, whether in the form of food grains or medical supplies, to countries and regions devastated by war and natural disasters.

Finally, India's consistent efforts to defend and advance the voice of the Global South,

"It is my hope that India will continue to advance the interests of the Global South," he

tives like the India-UN Development Partnership Fund which supports sustainable development projects in Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs)

vey my deep appreciation for the longstanding and steadfast commitment that India has displayed towards multilateralism, and I am confident that this will continue in the future,

presided over the adoption of the Pact of Future in September

his role is to support the imple mentation efforts of the Pact. "I intend to do this by facilitating inclusive dialogue, creating opportunities for Member States to engage substantively in the implementation of the Pact, and galvanising collective efforts to advance its objectives." When asked what role he envisages for India in this, Yang said India is a strong voice of the Global South, a country that has made great strides at the national level, including on artificial intelligence which is one of the topical areas of the "It is for this reason that I think

that India, like other countries from the Global South, must not just take an active role in these discussions, but should also lead on national implementation of the Pact's commitments," he said.

#### 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"

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

Yang will visit Ĭndia from

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

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 in that there is always more work to do, collectively, to make our world a better

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 193member General Assembly in September last year at the commencement of the 79th UNGA

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-

areas where India's contribu-

India has rapidly emerged as a critical enabler of South-South Cooperation through initia-

and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). "For all of these reasons, I con-

Yang said.

## **Zelenskyy says excluding Ukraine from US-Russia talks on war 'dangerous'**

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Saturday that excluding his country from talks between the US and Russia about the war in Ukraine would be "very dangerous" and asked for more discussions between Kyiv and Washington to develop a plan for a ceasefire.

Speaking in an exclusive interview with The Associated Press, Zelenskyy said Russia does not want to engage in ceasefire talks or to discuss any kind of concessions, which the Kremlin interprets as losing at a time when its troops have the upper hand on the battlefield. He said US President Donald Trump could bring Russian President Vladimir Putin to the table with the threat of sanctions targeting Russia's energy and banking system, as well as continued support of the Ukrainian military.

"I think these are the closest and most important steps," he said in the interview in the Ukrainian capital that lasted for more than an hour.

Zelenskyy's remarks followed comments Friday by Trump, who said American and Russian officials were "already talking" about ending the war. Trump said his administration has had "very serious" discussions with Russia, but he did not elaborate.

"They may have their own relations, but talking about Ukraine without us — it is dangerous for everyone," Zelenskyy

He said his team has been in contact with the Trump administration, but those discussions are at a "general level," and he believes in-person meetings will take place soon to develop more detailed agreements.

'We need to work more on this," he said, adding that understandably appeared to be focused on domestic issues in the first weeks after his inauguration. The nearly three-year war in Ukraine is at a crossroads. Trump promised to end the fighting within six months of taking office, but the two sides are far apart, and it is unclear how a ceasefire deal would take shape. Meanwhile, Russia continues to make slow but steady gains along the front, and Ukrainian forces are enduring severe manpower shortages. Most Ukrainians want a pause in fighting to rebuild their lives. The country faces neardaily Russian attacks on homes, and strikes on power systems have plunged entire cities into

Millions of Ukrainians have been displaced, unable to United States of America,

return to their homes after vast tracts of the country's east have been reduced to rubble. Nearly a fifth of Ukraine is now occupied by Russia. In those areas, Moscow-appointed authorities are swiftly erasing

any hint of Ukrainian identity. With Trump back in the White House, Ukraine's relationship with the U.S., its largest and most important ally, is also at a tipping point. In an initial phone call with

Trump during the presidential campaign, Zelenskyy said, the two agreed that if Trump won, they would meet to discuss the steps needed to end the war. But a planned visit by Trump's Ukraine envoy, Keith Kellogg, was postponed "for legal reasons" Zelenskyy said. That was followed by a sudden foreign aid freeze that effectively caused Ukrainian organizations to halt projects.

"I believe that, first and foremost, we (must) hold a meeting with him, and that is important. And that is, by the way, something that everyone in Europe wants," Zelenskyy said, referring to "a common vision of a quick end to the war." After the conversation with Trump, "we should move on to some kind of format of conversation with Russians. And I would like to see the

Ukraine and the Russians at the negotiating table. ... And, to be honest, a European Union voice should also be there. I think it would be fair, effective. But how will it turn out? I don't know." Zelenskyy cautioned against allowing Putin to take "control" over the war, an apparent reference to Russia's repeated threats of escalation during President Joe Biden's administration.

from Ukraine's allies, Zelenskyy said, any deal struck with Russia would only serve as a precursor to future aggression. Membership in the NATO alliance, a longstanding wish for Kyiv that Moscow has categorically rejected, is still Zelenskyy's top choice. NATO membership is the

Without security guarantees

"cheapest" option for Ukraine's allies, and it would also strengthen Trump geopolitically, Zelenskyy argued.

really believe that these are the cheapest security guarantees that Ukraine can get, the cheapest for everyone," he said "It will be a signal that it is not for Russia to decide who should be in NATO and who should not, but for the United States of America to decide. I think this is a great victory for Trump," he said, evidently appealing to the president's penchant for winners and business deals.



In this photo released by the Iranian Presidency Office, President Masoud Pezeshkian, third right, visits an exhibition of the defense ministry's latest defense and space

## Syria's interim president heads to Saudi Arabia on first trip abroad, likely signal to Iran

Syria's interim president made his first trip abroad Sunday, travelling to Saudi Arabia in a move likely trying to signal Damascus' shift away from Iran as its main regional ally.

regional ally.
Ahmad al-Sharaa, who was once aligned with al-Qaida, travelled to Riyadh alongside his government's foreign minister, Asaad al-Shaibani.
A photo published by the state-run SANA news agency showed the two men on a jet, likely provided by the king-dom, with a Saudi flag visible on the table behind them.

Saudi state television trumpeted the fact that the first trip by al-Sharaa, first known internationally by the nom de guerre Abu Mohammed al-Golani, would make Riyadh his first destination.

Saudi Arabia had been among the Arab nations that poured money into insurgent groups

President Bashar Assad after Syria's 2011 Arab Spring protests turned into a bloody crackdown. However, its groups found themselves beaten back as Assad, supported by Iran and Russia, fought the war into a stalemate in Syria.

That changed with the December lightning offensive led by al-Sharaa's Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. The group was once affiliated with al-Qaida but has since denounced its former ties. Al-Sharaa and HTS have carefully managed their public image in the time since, with the interim president favoring an olive-colored military look similar to Ukrainian President Zelenskyy, Volodymyr appointing women to roles and trying to maintain ties to Syria's Christian and Shiite

That also includes keeping both Iran and Russia largely at arms' length as well. Iran has yet to reopen its embassy in Damascus, which had been a key node in running operations through its self-described "Axis of Resistance," including Assad's Syria, Lebanon's Hezbollah militia and other partners. Russia meanwhile would like to maintain access to air and sea bases it has in Syria, but took in Assad when he fled Syria during the advance.

Those moves appear aimed at reassuring the West and trying to get crippling sanctions lifted on Syria. Rebuilding the country after over a decade of war will likely cost hundreds of billions of dollars, not to mention covering the needs of Syria's people, millions of whom remain impoverished.

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan vis-

ited Damascus in January and said Rivadh has been "actively engaging in dialogue" to lift sanctions on Syria. Saudi Arabia, unlike Al-Sharaa's key allies in Turkey and Qatar, restored ties with Assad in 2023 alongside most of the Arab world. Getting sanctions lifted could go a long way in cementing their relationship.

Meanwhile, Syria's interim government still faces challenges from the Islamic State group and other militants in the country. On Saturday, a car bomb exploded in Manbij, a city in Syria's Aleppo governorate, killing four civilians and wounding nine, SANA reported, citing civil defense officials.

Turkish-backed Syrian rebels had seized Manbij in December, part of a push by Ankara to secure Syrian territory close to its border for

#### Five killed as militants attack Pakistan has been battling Pakistan Army Chief General Asim Munir has two-pronged militancy led by the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan

Pakistan's economic growth stalls

despite interest rate cuts: Report

Pak Army Chief pledges to defeat 'frenemies'

vowed to hunt down the "frenemies" acting as terrorist proxies targeting the country. Munir's comments came as he visited Quetta on Saturday following the killing of 18 soldiers during clashes terrorists Balochistan's Kalat district. Twenty-three terrorists were also killed in clashes.

During the visit, Munir was given a comprehensive brief on the prevailing security situation in Balochistan, the Army said in a statement. Munir said, "Those who are acting as terrorist proxies of their foreign masters who have mastered the art of manifesting double standards of hunting with the hound and running with the hare are well known to us.

"No matter what these socalled 'frenemies' may do, you will surely be defeated by the resilience of our proud nation and its Armed Forces For the d our motherland and its people, we will definitely retaliate and 'hunt you down', whenever required and wherever you

and Baloch nationalists. The two groups have been fighting for different objectives, with the TTP for the so-called Islamic system like in Afghanistan and the Baloch extremists against the alleged

exploitation of Balochistan's natural wealth by the federal government. Pakistan officials often blame

the "foreign hand" for the trouble, which it said uses the local elements – 'frenemies' to create an insurgency-like situation. The Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) also appreciated the efforts of the valiant officers and soldiers of the Army, Frontier Corps and Law Enforcement Agencies for their courage and determination towards fighting terrorism. He reassured the Army's resolve to ensure the security and wellbeing of the people of Balochistan, while also reaffirming its commitment to ernment in its efforts to promote peace, stability, and the security forces as in addidevelopment in the region. Saturday was a lethal day for another four security person-

money supply and growth.

The Dawn newspaper report-

ed that despite a steep fall in the

interest rate, the monetary

expansion remained negative

during the first seven months

of the current fiscal year, not-

ing that the frequent declines in

interest rates resulted in a mas-

sive outflow of liquidity from

banks to the private sector

and non-bank financial institu-

Still, it has failed to stimulate

Bank advances to the private sector and NBFIs increased sharply in the second quarter

economic growth, it said.

tions (NBFIs).

### paramilitary personnel's vehicle in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

**PTI** ■ PESHAWAR

Four paramilitary personnel were among five people killed when their vehicle was ambushed by the militants in Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on Sunday, police said.

The incident happened in Dera Ismail Khan district bordering South Waziristan. According to police, the Karizat Levies personnel were heading to recover a stolen truck in Daraban Tehsil of the district, accompanied by a private driver, when they were ambushed. The attack resulted in the

deaths of four Levies personnel and one civilian The security forces have been

While financial experts believe that the impact of high liquid-

ity supply to the private sector

will take time to impact the

economy, the government fears

that inflation may catch the

economy again, imports would

be higher, and resultantly the

current account would face a

deficit which was currently surplus with USD 1.2 billion in

According to the newspaper,

the latest data showed that the

M2 growth (money supply) was negative Rs973 billion in

July 1-Jan 17, FY25, compared to a net growth of Rs 416 bil-

lion in the same period last fis-

the first half of FY25.

terror operations across the country to curb the menace of terrorism in both Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan.

On Saturday law enforcement agencies killed 23 terrorists during separate operations in Balochistan.

These operations are part of a sustained effort as the country witnessed a surge in violent attacks since the Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan in 2021, particularly in the bordering provinces of KP and Balochistan

Terror attacks have increased since the banned militant Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan group broke a fragile ceasefire agreement with the govern-

nel and a civilian were killed in tion to losses in Balochistan, Dera Ismail Khan district of

Expanding the money supply is

meant to result in lower inter-

est rates and borrowing costs to

boost consumption and invest-

The M2 data shows that the

broad money expanded by Rs 4.94 trillion in FY24 and Rs

4.17 trillion in FY23. This

huge supply, mostly to the

government, created only infla-

tion, which reached a record

high of 38 per cent in May

It badly hampered economic growth as the State Bank

increased the interest rate to

tame surging inflation.

ment.

2023

### Elon Musk's DOGE commission gains access to sensitive Treasury payment systems

Alawite populations.

**PTI** WASHINGTON

The Department of Government Efficiency, I run by President Donald Trump's billion-aire adviser and Tesla CEO Elon Musk, has gained access to sensitive Treasury data including Social Security and Medicare customer pay ment systems, according to two people familiar with the situation. The move by DOGE, a Trump administration task force assigned to find ways to fire federal workers, cut programs and slash federal regulations, means it could have wide leeway to access important taxpayer data, among other things.

The New York Times first reported the news of the group's access of the massive federal payment system. The two people who spoke to The Associated Press spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly.

The highest-ranking Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee, Ron Wyden of Oregon, on Friday sent a letter to Trump's Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent expressing concern that "officials associated with Musk may have intended to access these payment systems to illegally withhold payments to any number of programmes."

To put it bluntly, these payment systems simply cannot fail, and any politically motivated meddling in them risks severe damage to our country and the economy," Wyden said.

The news also comes after Treasury's acting Deputy Secretary David Lebryk resigned from his position at Treasury after more than 30 years of service. The Washington Post on Friday reported that Lebryk resigned his position after Musk and his DOGE organization requested access to sensitive Treasury data.

The Fiscal Service performs some of the most vital functions in government," Lebryk said in a letter to Treasury employees sent out Friday "Our work may be unknown to most of the public, but that doesn't mean it isn't exceptionally important. I am grateful for having been able to work alongside some of the nation's best and most talented operations staff."

The letter did not mention a DOGE request to access Treasury payments.

Musk on Saturday responded to a post on his social media platform X about the departure of Lebryk: "The @DOGE team discovered, among other things, that payment approval officers at Treasury were instructed always to approve payments, even to known fraudulent or terrorist groups. They literally never denied a payment in their entire career. Not even once. He did not provide proof of this claim.

DOGE was originally headed by Musk and former Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy, who jointly vowed to cut billions from the federal budget and usher in "mass headcount reductions across the federal bureau-

mentioned wrongly written as VIJAY KUMAR in my Adhar Card No 679725922992, The actual name of mine is VIJAY ARORA, which may b amended accordingly. It is certified that I have complied with other legal requirement in this connection



**CHANGE OF NAME** 

I, Arushi Ahluwalia alias Arushi Puri W/o Deepak Puri, R/o 1013, Indirapuram, Shakti Khand, Ghaziabad-201014, have changed my name to ARUSHI KAUR AHLUWALIA.

PD(1377)A I, Naresh Kumar Miglani S/o Om Parkash Miglani R/o flat no 103 tower I, Mahindra Aura apartment sector 110A Gurgaon that in some documents name mentioned is naresh kumar & in some name mentioned is naresh miglani. That Naresh kumar, Naresh Miglani & Naresh Kumar Miglani are name of one & same person. That i may be known as Naresh Kumar Miglani for all future purposes.

PD(1378)C I, Sangeeta Prasad Gupta, Mother of- No.10136957W Rfn Amit Prasad Gupta, R/o- H.No.-C-21, CTI Complex, Raja Garden, PO- Rajouri Garden, West Delhi, Delhi-110027, have changed my name from Sangeeta Prasad Gupta to Sangita Gupta, vide affidavit dated 01/02/2025 before

Notary Public Delhi.

I, Baliram Prasad Gupta, Father of- No.10136957W Rfn Amit Prasad Gupta, R/o- H.No.- C-21, CTI Complex, Raja Garden,

# UNGA President calls on member states to commit to Security Council reforms

**PTI** UNITED NATIONS

PTI ISLAMABAD

report.

 $P^{\text{akistan failed to kick-start}}_{\text{economic growth in the}}$ 

first seven months of the

current fiscal year despite a

massive 10 per cent reduction

in the interest rate by the

central bank during this peri-

od, according to a media

The State Bank of Pakistan in

the latest cut on January 27 fur-

ther reduced the interest rate by

1 per cent to set it at 12 per

cent, a whopping 10 per cent

down from 22 per cent in June

last year. It was expected the

decision would help to increase

s the United Nations turns 80 this year, As the Office Practice to be fit for purpose, UN General Assembly President Philemon Yang has said, calling on all member states to "engage actively" and commit to reform, including of the Security Council. Yang, who is set to travel to India from February 4 to 8 on his first official visit to the country as President of the 79th session of the UN General Assembly, said the global body must acknowledge the need to adapt to the change of times.

"I believe it is imperative for the United Nations to be fit for purpose, to better address the many pressing issues of global concern. As the UN marks its 80th anniversary we must acknowledge the need to adapt to the change of times, to a manifestly different geopolitical context to that of 1945," Yang told PTI in an exclusive interview here. In response to a question on UN reforms, particularly of the powerful 15-nation body

on which the needle has not moved much over the past few decades, he said there is no doubt that the calls for reform have been loudest about the UN Security Council.

"Again here, the Pact for the Future provides us with a boost of political momentum for the success of the intergovernmental negotiations during this session. I am fully supportive of the membership to follow through with ambition and determination, particularly at a moment where we see a deadlocked UN Security Council on matters of key importance for the maintenance of international peace and security," Yang said in the written interview ahead of the visit.

Yang added that the Pact emphasises the importance of making the Council more representative. "This includes addressing the historical injustice against Africa as a priority and improving the representation of underrepresented and unrepresented regions and groups. I am hopeful that we will be able to see a consolidated model being agreed to at the end of this session and I call on all member states to engage actively and commit to reform an institution that is vital for our collective security.

At the landmark Summit of the Future during the high-level General Assembly session in September last year, world leaders had adopted by consensus the ambitious Pact of the Future along with the annexes - the Global Digital Compact and the Declaration on Future Generations.

On UN reform, Yang further said that in this regard, the General Assembly has played and continues to play a key role

"In fact, since the end of the Cold War, the General Assembly has been constantly reviewing its effectiveness and efficiency through the process of revitalization of the work of the Assembly.

Yang emphasised that as the most representative body in the United Nations system, the General Assembly has the potential to lead the way into the future. As it was exemplified in September 2024, at the Summit of the Future, the Assembly was able to adopt by consensus the Pact and its annexes, charting the way forward for humanity.

India has been at the forefront of years-long efforts to reform the Security Council, saying the UN body does not reflect current geopolitics realities and underscored that it rightly deserves a permanent seat at the horse-shoe table. India last sat at the UN high table as a non-permanent member in 2021-22. In response to a question on how nations and leaders should ensure implementation of the roadmap laid out in the Pact as the world confronts challenges and conflicts, Yang said the 80th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations is a key moment for the international community to not only reflect on the collective achievements of the organisation since its foundation but to highlight those areas where urgent action is needed.

The Pact provides a perfect lens through which the international community can undertake this exercise, he said adding that the Pact marked a major step towards the

realisation of a renewed international system that is responsive to the realities of today's world and the challenges of tomorrow.

It is also a powerful tool to accelerate the process of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda, he said. "Its implementation requires collective efforts by all relevant stakeholdersmember states, international and regional organizations, civil society, and the private sector. Nations and their leaders must work hand in hand to address complex challenges and leverage innovation," he said. Yang underscored that it has been made clear

time and time again that "we can only make progress through collaboration and partnership. World leaders must ensure that the commitments in the Pact are implemented in a comprehensive and sustainable manner. The success of the Pact lies in translating those commitments into tangible, transfor mative outcomes, especially at the national level. My message to the leaders of the world is clear: we have no time to lose."

PO- Rajouri Garden, West Delhi, Delhi- 110027, have changed my name from Baliram Prasad Gupta to Baliram Gupta, vide affidavit dated 01/02/2025 before Notary Public Delhi

PD(1380)C

## 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 about complaining 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

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

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



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 wavs in which the rates can be a lot more reasonably taxpayer friendly. And therefore that work was also

the strengthens India's clean

energy ecosystem, he stated.

Investments in offshore wind capacity, green hydrogen

production, and hybrid renewable projects will drive

innovation, job creation, and

economic growth, he opined. Sunil Mathur, Managing Director and Chief Executive

Officer, Siemens Ltd said that

announcements are a shot in

the arm for consumption,

which will in turn drive

manufacturing in the private

The National Manufacturing

Mission, the focus on clean

technology and measures to

support Start Ups and MSMEs

With a 10 per cent increase in

infrastructure over the revised

estimates, the Government

stays on course in its commitment of building a

world class infrastructure in

the country, he added. Bikesh Ogra, MD and CEO,

Jakson Green said, "Crucially,

the budget emphasises power

sector reforms, incentivising

distribution and transmission

infrastructure that is essential

for seamlessly integrating

Resources into the grid and

ensuring a stable power supply. The proposed PPP

supply. The proposed PPP model for infrastructure development, coupled with

substantial interest-free loans,

will catalyse investments in

spending

are welcome steps, he said.

demand

and

Budget

going on," she said. "Equally, after the July budget, there was this voice of the middle class, which felt that they were paying tax... But also felt they don't seem to have much in the way of redressing their problems.

There was also this feeling that the government was very inclusive in taking care of the very poor and the vulnerable sections

"So the voice, which came wherever I travelled, was we are

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 is it 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 So, the more work that was needed, was needed convincing the Board efficiency in collection and honest taxpayers' voice" needs to be

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

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

"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

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

"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



Industry experts hailed steps for boosting clean energy nuclear mission, incentives for critical minerals and renewable equipment in the Budget presented on Saturday by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharman. Sitharaman announced a ₹20.000-crore nuclear mission and duty exemptions for

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

crucial minerals and capital

goods for electric vehicles to

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

sustainable future."

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 D emerging technologies signals transformative shift building a sustainable critical minerals ecosystem, Verma

Executive Devansh Jain, Director, INOXGFL Group, "The emphasis on wind 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, electrolysers, wind turbines, high-voltage transmission

## Frequent extreme weather in India: Economic Survey

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 horticulturemajor producing states, leading to inflationary pressure on horticultural commodities, it said.

"Over the past two years, India's food inflation rate remained diverging from global trends of stable or declining food inflation. This can be attributed to factors such as supply chain disruptions exacerbated by extreme 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. government also



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

The Economic Survey acknowledged that recent shocks like geopolitical conflicts and 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 reducing crop damage, and minimising post-harvest

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

### Customs duty cuts in certain areas events driving food inflation 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 Budget country's introduced significant tariff on multiple reductions 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 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 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 below engine capacity 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.

ethernet switches (carriergrade) under the others category from 20 per cent to 10 per cent would help American exporters.

Million worth of these products to India in the last fiscal, "making this a significant trade benefit", Founder Srivastava said.

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

supplied \$ 92 Million worth of these products in FY23, Srivastava said.

year, these imports dropped significantly to \$ 0.07 Million, suggesting a sharp decline in trade activity in this category. Similarly, it said, tariff cut on

The US exported \$ 653.4  $202\bar{3}$ -24.

However, in the last financial

Additionally, the Budget has proposed elimination of tariffs on specific waste and scrap items, reducing duties from 5 per cent to zero. America exported a total of \$

2.5 Billion worth of waste and scrap of all types to India in

While Trump has long India's criticised latest structure, these reductions indicate a shift in policy that could boost US exports across

During April-November 2024-25, the US was the second largest trading partner of India with \$ 82.52 Billion bilateral trade in goods (\$ 52.89 Billion worth of exports \$ 29.63 Billion of imports and \$ 23.26 Billion trade surplus). During 2021-24, America was the largest trading partner of

### 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, 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, sustainability, crucial for the stainless steel industry's growth," apex industry body Stainless Association Development

(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 sustains this momentum with a 10.08 per



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".

aimed at equipping youth with Industry 4.0 technologies has the potential to revolutionise both manufacturing and

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

entrepreneurship innovation across sectors.

cent hike in capex to ₹ 11.21

The digital skilling initiative

In the stainless steel industry,

The newly introduced credit cards for micro-enterprises and the growth of Funds of Funds for startups will encourage



RE projects."

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. India's

and 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

be interesting to

watch out for? However, a non-event but practically

would



and FII selling dampen sentiment. data

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," Krishnan, Sr Krishnan, Analyst, Technical and Derivatives of - Angel One, said.

Krishnan further said, "Now,

the major Union Budget is

behind us, and it appeared as

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 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 limit investment 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 muchneeded 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.

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

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 cent to settle at

### Exporters demand extension of interest equalisation scheme

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 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 postshipment 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

reinstate the scheme for all exporters to make them globally competitive." similar Sharing Federation of Indian Export (FIEO) Organisations President Ashwani Kumar said the commerce ministry has allocated funds of ₹2,250 Crore under export promotion

scheme of covering IES and

(Market

Finance Minister to kindly



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 production 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.



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



ver 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 timehonoured Korean beauty rituals and cuttingedge 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 Reshbha 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 beauty, right here in Delhi.

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 ambiance, 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







By ANURAAG BHARDWAI

s we spend increasingly more time indoors, it's essential to consider how our built environments impact our physical health. A welldesigned 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 space

Well-designed 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

purify the air

schedules for HVAC systems THERMAL COMFORT: Thermal comfort significantly impacts our mood,

Incorporate plants, which naturally

Implement regular maintenance

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 global movement—one that includes not



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 wellbeing. 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 wellbeing 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. 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

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

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 onesize-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

## **Two-tier Test format likely before India's tour of England: Report**

PTI ■ LONDON

hen Australia face South Africa in the World Test Championship final, it will mark the end of the current format, which is set to be relaunched as a two-tier system ahead of India's tour of England later this summer. In a bid to create a "fairer competition", England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) Richard chairman

Thompson, who is the head of the ICC's strategic growth committee, recently held talks with the apex body's chairman Jay Shah and the two will lead the plan.

With just five months left for the next cycle to start with England hosting India at Headingly from June 20, Thompson acknowledged the urgency of the matter.
"It is fully understood that

the current structure does not work in the way it should and we need to find a fairer, better competition, but at this stage no recommendations have been put forward," Thompson told Telegraph Sport.

"We have five months to work on this, step back and look at what the structure should be going forward." should be going forward. The World Test Championship should be fairer and more competitive. It is going to change to ensure it always encourages the best teams to the final and encourages other nations that want to play Test cricket, to play Test cricket. "We will protect, grow and

ensure the integrity of Test cricket because the format is crucial to the DNA of the

The current model has drawn criticism for its inconsistencies.

Teams do not play every other nation within the twoyear cycle, and an excess of two-Test series has skewed standings.

Political constraints mean India and Pakistan do not



face each other, impacting integrity competition.

competition.

Similarly, South Africa reached the final without playing Australia, though they will meet in the title clash at Lord's in June.

Discussions will also explore the possibility of four-day Tests, as this could help boards schedule three-Test series around franchise

series around franchise leagues, the report has said. Notably, no three-Test series involving teams outside the "big three" of England, India, and Australia has taken place since 2019.

However, the four-day Tests won't be there for marquee series such as the Ashes or matches between tier-one

The push for a two-tier system gained traction Australia's following blockbuster series against India, which set attendance

The proposed model would see the top-tier nations play

each other more frequently, potentially sidelining other teams and series which has evoked negative responses from the legends of the game. West Indies great Clive Lloyd has been a strong critic of the system, saying it would be "disastrous for smaller

"All these countries have worked very hard to get there. We have been in ICC for nearly 100 years. We've a great history and now you're going to tell us, because of a monetary situation, this is how it's going to be," Llyod

had said. Sri Lanka's World Cup winning skipper Arjuna Ranatunga has also criticised the move, saying it would only benefit the three boards. "Sport isn't just about Pounds, Dollars and Rupees. Administrators must nurture and protect the game.

Bangladesh batter Mominul Haque and England's former pacer Steven Finn have also criticised the move.

### Hard to go past India, Australia in CT: Ponting

PTI DUBAI

The legendary Ricky Ponting feels the quality of players and recent history make India and Australia the favourites to compete in the summit clash of the upcoming ICC Champions

The 50-over tournament will take place from February 19 to March 9 across three venues in Pakistan and one in Dubai.

"It's hard to go past India and Australia again," Ponting told the ICC

"Just think about the quality of players in both countries right now, and you look back in recent history when these big finals and big ICC events have come around, and inevitably Australia and India are there somewhere," said the former Australia

India and Australia are the only teams to have won the Champions Trophy twice.



India secured the crown in 2013 and shared the trophy with Sri Lanka in 2002 after the final was washed out, while Australia clinched back-to-back titles in 2006

Pakistan, the defending champions after winning the 2017 edition, will also pose a strong challenge, according to Ponting.

'The other team that is playing some really good cricket at the moment is Pakistan," said Ponting, who a 3-0 won two ODI World Cups Africa.

BCB independent committee to

and as many Champions

Trophy titles as captain.

"Their one-day cricket over the last little bit has been absolutely outstanding. We know they're not always the most predictable team in those big tournaments, but they seem like they've sorted things out a little bit." Pakistan won all the three

ODI series they played last year, including a 2-1 comeback win in Australia and Zimbabwe, followed by a 3-0 whitewash of South

NSriram Balaji and Rithvik Choudary Bollipalli were

clinical in their effort before

Karan Singh dished out an

impressive show on debut as

India thrashed Togo 4-0 in the

play-off tie to keep their place

in the Davis Cup World

Starting the day with a 2-0

Group I, here Sunday.

### Pure cricketing miscalculation, says Ashwin on concussion substitution row

Former India spinner R
Ashwin has questioned the use of concussion substitution during the fourth T20I against England, in which medium-pacer Harshit Rana replaced batting all-rounder Shivam Dube, calling it a case of "pure miscalculation." cricketing

Dube, who had scored a halfcentury, was struck on the head by Jamie Overton off the penultimate delivery of India's innings. Head coach Gautam Gambhir then effectively used the concussion protocol to field Rana in place of Dube, who bowls at speeds in the early 120 km/h range.
Rana, on debut, took 3 for 33, and India ways the match by

and India won the match by 15 runs, clinching the T20 series with a match to spare. "The game is done. India capture yet another series at home. T20I has been a real juggernaut of a win. But my first question is, did we forgot it was an international game and played an IPL match?,"



YouTube channel 'Ash ki baat'. Because today all the discussion was on how Harshit Rana became Shivam Dube's concussion sub? I can understand it has happened in the past too. In Canberra, Yuzvendra Chahal replaced Ravindra Jadeja.

"You can call poetic justice, or in fact poetic injustice. I don't understand it. At least earlier, Chahal replaced Jadeja. Here, Rana replaced Shivam Dube."

concussion protocol

allows replacement, and Rana, a tearaway quick, replaced medium pacer Dube, who is used as an 'impact player' for Chennai Super Kings in the

England's captain Jos Buttler, unhappy with the decision, stated that his team was not consulted and would seek clarity from match referee Javagal Srinath on what exactly constituted a like-forreplacement concussion cases.

Ramandeep Singh would have been a more appropriate like-for-like replacement for

"There is no role of the Indian or England team. If there is no one in the squad, then you can say that Harshit Rana can bat a bit and Shivam Dube can bowl a bit, that's why we brought him in. Like-for-like replacement Ramandeep Singh was sitting outside. I don't understand," said Ramandeep Ashwin.

"This is a case of pure cricketing miscalculation, either on the part of the umpires or the part of the match referee or whoever be it. Ramandeep Singh was there, a batter who can ball a bit, like-for-like for Shivam Dube. But not him.

"Harshit Rana was chosen as the concussion substitute. I think people in charge should look into this. Today it happened against England and hurt, some day India might be hurt too."

India will face England in the final ODI on Sunday

#### Karnatak, Haryana play out a draw

**PTI** ■ BENGALURU

Ravichandran Smaran gave another reminder of his immense talent with an hundred as unbeaten Karnataka ended the Ranji Trophy season with a draw against Haryana in their Elite Group C match here on Sunday. However, Haryana have

already qualified for the knockouts from the group, starting from February 8, along with Kerala. Haryana are also the group-

toppers with 29 points from seven games and Kerala finished second with 28 points.

Karnataka were fourth (20) behind Bengal (21) on the

Starting from overnight 108 for 3 and 38 runs behind, Karnataka had some work to do to ensure that they would not end up with a defeat in their final league match.

However, they lost Devdutt Padikkal (43), KL Shrijith (2) and Yashovardhan Parantap (12) in the space of 12 overs

to slip to 164 for six. The home side was just 16 runs ahead at that time, but Smaran (133 not out, 217 balls, 14x4, 2x5) and Hardik an alliance of 98 runs for the seventh wicket to shore their

side up. More importantly, consumed nearly 25 overs and a couple of hours during the stand that carried Karnataka to 262 before Hardik fell to Javant Yadav. But by that time, Karnataka

had a lead of 114 runs. Smaran extended that lead to 148 as Karnataka reached 294 for 8 in their second innings. and at that point Haryana agreed for a draw, knowing that there was not enough time to mount a chase

Date: 03.02.2025

### Balaji-Bollipalli pair wins, Karan impresses o

probe BPL corruption allegations PTI DHAKA

The Bangladesh Cricket Board has established an independent inquiry body to assist its Anti-Corruption Unit in probing a slew of corruption allegations over the last couple of weeks in the Bangladesh Premier League. This marks the first official

corruption investigation in the BPL since 2013 as the league faces challenge with delayed player payments and ticketing controversies.

"As part of its ongoing efforts, the BCB is in the process of establishing an Independent Inquiry Body to further support the ACU in its investigations," a BCB press release said.

"The BCB remains dedicated to ensuring a fair and

transparent to take all necessary actions to safeguard the integrity of the by the BCB's ACU.

'The BCB has also come across media coverage regarding potential anti-corruption concerns about the BPL. The Board reiterates its firm commitment to upholding the integrity and spirit of the game," added the release.

The BCB strictly adheres to Code for Participants and

sport in Bangladesh." Recent media reports have alleged instances of corruption, naming specific players and

the ICC Anti-Corruption policy towards corruption in any form.

cricketing environment, and will continue matches, although these claims have not yet been substantiated

maintains a zero-tolerance

lead in pocket, India needed to win just one of the three matches of the day. The pair of Balaji and debutant Bollipalli did the job in the very first contest against M'lapa Tingou Akomolo and Hod'abalo Isak

The Indians needed only 57 minutes to dispatch the Togo team 6-2 6-1 at DLTA Complex.

Praaggnandhaa and Gukesh in joint lead at Tata Steel Masters

Togo replaced their best player Thomas Setodji with M'lapa Tingou Akomolo due to an arm injury. It hurt them serve even once in the contest. The tie already sealed, India expectedly handed debut to youngster Karan Singh in the first reverse singles. Watched by his coach Aditya Sachdeva, the 21-year-old raced to a 6-2 6-3 victory.

Both teams decided not to play the dead fifth rubber. Surprisingly, it was Sasikumar Mukund who sat in the captain's chair instead of Rohit Rajpal when Karan played.

Karan served extremely well, was aggressive in his returns and also wisely used the drop shots. Padio, who plays in the US Collegiate circuit, hit the hall well but Karan had better control and that made a huge difference in the outcome of the match.

Karan, who also trained at the now-shut National Tennis



(NTC) at DLTA. showed a lot of composure and did not let the occasion

get to him. The only blemish for Karan was dropping his serve in the fifth game of the second set. Balaji was sensational with his serving. Playing percentage tennis, he lost just one point on his serve during the match.

Bollipalli, who had won a Challenger together last year. Bollipalli was a bit under pressure when he could not pick up a half-volley, making it 30-all in his first ever service game on debut but managed to hold. After that it one-way traffic throughout.

The Indians got their first break when Akomolo served in the third game. At 15-15, Bollipalli hit an uppish forehand return that sailed over the two players but landed inside the lines. Balaji then hit a service return

It was a pretty straightforward winner to earn two break Ā riveting volley rally ensued on first break points with all four players showing some great reflexes, but eventually

> one Akomolo return flew over the baseline. It gave India a 3-1 lead and Balaji made it 4-1 with another strong service game. His nerves settled, Bollipalli

came out serving even better and soon Akomolo was serving to stay in the set. However, he did not help Togo's cause by serving consecutive two double faults from 15-15, giving Indians two set points.



#### **State Health Assurance Society**

A1 Block, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Toshali Bhawan, Satya Nagar Unit-9, Bhubaneswar - 751007, Odisha Phone/Fax:0674-2620500

TENDER CALL NOTICE FOR PRINTING & SUPPLY OF ENVELOP, ABPMJAY-GJAY CARD HOLDER (POUCH), FAQ (LEAFLET) & HCM LETTER

Tender Advt. No. 01/2025

Sealed tenders are invited from registered agencies (with GST registration having GSTIN) having adequate experience in taking up the works of composing / prof reading / designing and printing. Details regarding the design of these items, specifications, printing and supply terms & conditions may be downloaded from the websites: www.nhmodisha.gov.in (under link "Tender"). A pre-bid meeting shall be held on 06.02.2025, 03.30 PM at NHM Conference Hall, Unit-8, Bhubaneswar. The tender should reach the office of the undersigned by 10.02.2025 (till 03.00 PM). The Tender will be opened at 04.00 PM on 10.02.2025 at NHM Conference Hall, Unit-8, Bhubaneswar. Any changes in the tender document including extension if any shall only be

The undersigned reserves the right to reject any or all the tenders / cancel the tender without

**Chief Executive Officer** State Health Assurance Society, Odisha

Sd/

notified in the website mentioned above.

assigning any reason thereof.

OIPR-10170/11/0008/2425

PTI WIJK AAN ZEE World Champion D Gukesh played out a

Grandmaster Praggnanandhaa beat Alexey Sarana of Serbia as the two Indians shared the lead after a thrilling day at the Tata Steel Masters here.

draw with Jorden van Foreest

Holland,

Praggnanandhaa notched up his third consecutive win to take his tally to a commendable 8.5 points, same as his compatriot Gukesh after the 12th and penultimate round.

The two Indians are now poised for an exciting finish the prestigious tournament, with remarkable prospect of one of them potentially clinching the title—a first in Tata Steel

Masters history. Eying the top spot after the round, Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan was outdone by Arjun Erigaisi and is all but out of title contention on 7.5 points. Praggnanandhaa



with white pieces. It was quite a contrast from

his previous round game against Caruana as Sarana went for an early advance of king side pawns and then castled on the queen side. It was time to launch an attack against the black king and Praggnanandhaa did not disappoint.

In tactical complications, Praggnanandhaa was at his best as he sacrificed a piece to rip-apart the black's king position and what followed thereafter was a pleasure to

"At that point I realized it a knight but on the 39th

could be a long game, but then I saw sacrifice," said Pragg after the game. The game ended through a

queen sacrifice resulting in force checkmate.

Gukesh played a game of fluctuating fortunes against Foreest, who has the ability to play the spoiler on any given day.

Foreest declared his peaceful intentions early in the Queen pawn game as white when he appeared readv for repetition. However, Gukesh declined the offer and the game was still equal with

many pieces on board. Foreest sacrificed a Rook for

for Gukesh but precise calculation was needed and it was right here that the Indian faltered allowing hi opponent a huge comeback. Foreest had suddenly turned the tables down but did not quite realise it and decided to go for perpetual checks in the heavy piece endgame.

move Gukesh returned the

favour with his clock ticking

away. It was a won position

his mettle against Nodirbek spot came to an end. The game featured a Nimzo-Indian Defense, wherein the his choice of Capablanca for Abdusattorov to disturb

Abdusattorov went for unwarranted complications and ended up blundering on the king side. Arjun won a pawn first and later won two bishops for a rook. With precise calculations wrapped up the issue.

Arjun Erigaisi finally proved

Abdusattorov, ambitions of claiming the top Indian had white pieces and variation gave little chances the balance. In the early middle game,