



the pioneer

Established 1865

Inside

WORLD 8
LEADERS OF INDONESIA,
TURKIYE HOLD TALKS ON
DEFENCE, ECONOMIC TIES

BHUBANESWAR, THURSDAY FEBRUARY 13, 2025; PAGES 12 ₹4

www.dailypioneer.com

PUBLISHED FROM: DELHI | LUCKNOW | BHOPAL | BHUBANESWAR | RANCHI | RAIPUR | CHANDIGARH | DEHRADUN | HYDERABAD | VIJAYWADA

SUPREME COURT SLAMS PARASITES

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

On political parties promising freebies ahead of polls, the Supreme Court (SC) on Wednesday said instead of bringing people into the mainstream for national development, are we not creating a class of parasites? A bench of Justices BR Gavai and Augustine George Masih said it would be better to make people a part of the society's mainstream and contribute towards national development. "Rather than promoting them to be a part of the mainstream of the society by contributing to the development of the nation, are we not creating a class of parasites?" it asked. Justice Gavai went on to add, "Unfortunately, because of these freebies, which just on the anvil of elections, are declared, like 'Ladki Bahin' and other schemes, people

are not willing to work." The top court was hearing a matter concerning the right to shelter of homeless persons in urban areas and said people got free rations and money without working. "We quite appreciate your concern for them but would it not be better to make them a part of the mainstream of society and permit them to contribute to the development of the nation?" the bench asked. Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for one of the petitioners, said there was hardly anybody in the country who did not want to work, if they had work. The judge said, "You must be having only one sided knowledge. I come from an agricultural family. Because of the freebies in Maharashtra, which they just announced prior to elections, agriculturists are not getting labourers." The court, however, said it did not want to debate.

Judges said everybody, including attorney general R Venkataramani, was on the same page that providing shelter to the homeless merited due attention. "But at the same time, should it not be balanced?" the bench asked. Venkataramani said the Centre was in the process of finalising the urban poverty alleviation mission, which would address various issues, including the provision of shelter for the urban homeless. The bench asked him to verify from the Centre the time frame within which the scheme would be applicable and also place on record the aspects covered by it. "In the meantime, the attorney general is also requested to take instructions as to whether till the implementation of the said scheme, the Union of India would continue with the National Urban Livelihoods Mission," it said.

The bench further asked the Centre to collate information from all states for the consideration of the issue on a pan-India basis. One of the petitioners during the hearing said it was unfortunate that the cause of the homeless was not being addressed as it was last on the priority. The bench was irked when he claimed the authorities showed compassion only for the rich, not the poor. "Don't make a speech of Ramlila Maidan in this court," said Justice Gavai, "And don't make unnecessary allegations. Don't make a political speech here. We won't permit our courtrooms to be converted into a (place of) political battle." The judge went on to add, "How do you say the compassion is shown only for the rich? Even for the government, how can you say this?"

Painting a picture that the government did not do anything or show concern for the poor was not in a good taste, the court added. Bhushan said as per a note placed before the bench, as on December 4, 2024, a total of 2,557 shelters was sanctioned by the States or Union Territories and 1,995 shelter homes were functional with a capacity of 1.16 lakh beds. He said a survey showed there were about 3 lakh urban homeless in Delhi alone. Bhushan said as per the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board, the total capacity of the shelters was 17,000 persons of which only 5,900 such facilities had beds. The DUSIB counsel said the board had 197 shelter homes running in Delhi as on date with a total capacity of 17,000 persons. In the last four years, he said, the average maximum occupancy was 5,500 in all shelter homes.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron at the Mazargues Cemetery to pay their respects to the fallen heroes, in Marseille PTI

Modi, Macron walk together

PTI ■ PARIS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron on Wednesday called for enhancing trade and investment ties between the two countries and committed to further deepening their engagement in the Indo-Pacific and various global forums and initiatives. After their wide-ranging talks, the two leaders also reiterated their commitment to concrete actions to ensure that the global AI sector can drive beneficial social, economic, and environmental outcomes in the public interest. A joint statement issued after the meeting here said the talks covered a full spectrum of bilateral relations, as well as key global and regional issues. The two leaders stressed an urgent need for reform in the United Nations Security Council and agreed to coordinate closely on various global issues, including the UNSC matters. French President Macron reiterated France's firm support for India's permanent membership of the UNSC. The two leaders reaffirmed their strong commitment to India-France Strategic Partnership while noting that it has steadily evolved into a multifaceted relationship over the past 25 years. Prime Minister Modi flew together from Paris to Marseille in the French Presidential Aircraft last evening and held discussions here on the full spectrum of bilateral relations and key global and regional issues. This was followed by delegation-level talks after arrival in Marseille. The two leaders reviewed cooperation in the strategic areas of defence, civil nuclear energy and space. They also discussed ways to strengthen collaboration in the fields of technology and innovation.

UPSC updates registration system online

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) has introduced certain changes in its online application system for the civil services preliminary exam after aspirants complained of technical glitches while applying through it, according to an official notice. The Commission has recently extended the last date to apply for the civil services preliminary exam 2025 till February 18.

The UPSC said in the notice that some entries have been made "editable" in the one-time registration for filling up of the online application. "In view of the queries/difficulties raised by the candidates in filling up the online application form for the civil services examination, 2025, the Commission has decided the following changes in the one-time registration (OTR) for filling up of the online application," it said. The candidates are "not allowed to make any change(s) in the columns relating to 'Name (as per Class X)', 'Date of Birth', 'Father's Name', 'Mother's Name', 'Mobile Number' and 'Email ID' in the OTR profile, the Commission said in the notice.



MAGHI PURNIMA: 2 CRORE DIPS

More than two crore devotees took a dip in the Sangam till 6 pm on Wednesday on the occasion of Maghi Purnima. With the 'snan' on Maghi Purnima, another auspicious day for holy bath, the month-long 'Kalpavas' will be ending and around 10 Lakh 'Kalpavasis' will start leaving the Maha Kumbh. The administration has requested them to follow traffic rules and use only authorised parking spaces. Overall since the start of the Maha Kumbh, over 47 crore people have taken a dip in the Sangam. The Maha Kumbh will conclude on February 26 with the final 'Amrit Snan' on the occasion of Mahashivratri. Meanwhile, Adityanath greeted everyone on the holy bathing festival while the UP government has also launched a safety drive for the pilgrims.

Detailed story on page 5

Kerala ragging turns serious

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOTTAYAM (KERALA)

Five third-year students have been arrested for allegedly ragging first-year students at the Government Nursing College here, police said on Wednesday. A case was registered after three first-year students lodged a complaint, alleging that the ragging had been ongoing for nearly three months at the nursing institute, which functions under the Government Medical College. According to the complaint, the ragging began in November last year. The students reported that the incidents involved extreme brutality. They alleged that they were forced to stand naked and subjected to severe physical abuse using dumbbells, including tying them to their private parts. Further allegations include injuries inflicted using compasses and similar objects, followed by the application of lotion on the wounds. Additionally, they were forced to have cream applied to their faces, heads, and mouths. The accused students have been suspended, college authorities said. The action was taken following an inquiry conducted under the anti-ragging law, they added. The arrested students have been identified as Samuel Johnson

(20), Rahul Raj (22), Jeev (18), Rijil Jith (20), and Vivek (21). The complaint also states that senior students regularly extorted money from juniors on Sundays to buy alcohol and frequently assaulted them. On November 16, the accused allegedly forced a first-year student to transfer Rs 300 via Google Pay and hand over Rs 500 in cash under threats. Police revealed that the money was used for alcohol consumption. On December 13, a first-year student endured extreme physical torture. That night, the accused allegedly entered his room, tied his hands and legs, and restrained him. They then poured lotion all over his body and inflicted injuries using a divider. They also forced another first-year student in the room to record the incident on a mobile phone. Unable to endure the harassment any longer, three students finally lodged a complaint with the Kottayam Gandhinagar police. College authorities stated that the affected students had not informed hostel officials, teachers, or parents about the abuse. Upon receiving the complaint, the college promptly took action. Once the investigation confirmed the allegations, the case was handed over to the police, they added.

Sajjan Kumar convicted for Sikh riots murders

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi's Rouse Avenue court on Wednesday convicted former Congress MP Sajjan Kumar in a case related to the killings of two men in Saraswati Vihar on November 1, 1984, during the anti-Sikh riots. The arguments on the quantum of sentence in the case will take place on February 18. The Congress leader, who is currently serving a life sentence in another anti-Sikh riots case in Delhi Cantonment, was produced from Tihar jail before special judge Kavari Baweja, who pronounced the conviction order. "I am of the opinion that Prosecution has been able to prove its case against the Accused beyond reasonable doubt. Thus, Accused Sajjan Kumar S/o Ch.Raghunath Singh is hereby convicted for offences punishable under Sections 147/148/149 IPC and for offences punishable under Sections 302/308/323/395/397/427/ 436/440 read with Section 149 IPC," Special Judge Kavari Baweja said in her 139 pages order on Wednesday. The order said, "I am of the considered opinion that the Prosecution has been able to bring home the guilt of the Accused. It has been established that the Accused was instigating the mob, which was armed with deadly weapons i.e. lathis and saris etc. and that the mob being an 'unlawful assembly' within the meaning of Section 141 IPC used force and violence in prosecution of the common object of looting, committed the offence of rioting armed with deadly weapons. Further, the fact that the members of the 'unlawful



Former Congress MP Sajjan Kumar at the Rouse Avenue Court, in New Delhi PTI

assembly' were armed with iron rods, lathis, bricks etc. also proves that alleged offences were committed after having made preparations for committing such offences." The case attracts a maximum punishment of death penalty and life-term imprisonment as the minimum sentence. Kumar was produced before the court from Tihar jail to pronounce the verdict. He was convicted for the murder of Jaswant Singh and his son Tarundeep Singh on November 1, 1984. Special judge Kavari Baweja aside from saying that a mob took part in rioting and killed the victims, held, "It has further been established that Kumar, being a member of such unlawful assembly, is guilty of having committed the murder of Jaswant Singh and Tarundeep Singh, the husband and son

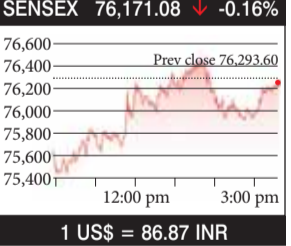
of the complainant, during the incident." The conviction judgment said, "The complainant who witnessed the brutal killing of her husband and son can certainly not be expected to forget the face of the person who was instigating the mob to carry out the said killings and looting and her deposition in court fortifies her stand that it is accused who was not only present during the alleged incident but also instigating and leading the mob which resulted in commission of the aforesaid offences." The judge rejected Kumar's argument that the statement of the complainant couldn't be trusted as she named him belatedly and held at the time of the incident, she was not aware of the identity of the accused as she was admittedly new to the area and had never seen him earlier.

CBI arrests DTC officials

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has arrested six officials of the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) on charges of corruption and bribery. This is the first major crackdown by the apex investigating agency in the national capital after the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) lost the recently concluded Assembly elections. Sources said, the arrests follow multiple complaints alleging widespread corruption in the department. The CBI launched a thorough surveillance operation to verify these claims before taking action. Upon investigation, authorities found prima facie evidence indicating corruption at various levels, leading to the arrests. The arrests are a part of a larger corruption case, which is being investigated by the CBI. The DTC has been in the eye of storm over allegations of corruption against its officials. The BJP had alleged a scam in the purchase of 1,000 low floor buses by DTC during the AAP Government in Delhi. The Chief Secretary of Delhi had then recommended the CBI to investigate the matter. The recommendation was approved by Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena.

MARKETS



WEATHER

AQI 212
MAX 26.5°C(+3.1)
MIN 11.6°C(+1.4)

NEWS BRIEFS

Ram Janmabhoomi chief priest passes away

LUCKNOW: Acharya Satyendra Das, the chief priest of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi temple, breathed his last at SGPGI, Lucknow. He had been battling health complications after suffering a stroke earlier this month. Despite receiving intensive care, doctors were unable to save him. His passing has cast a pall of sorrow over Ayodhya, where he had served as the chief priest since 1993. Over the decades, he became a symbol of devotion, witnessing the long and tumultuous journey from the Babri Masjid demolition to the consecration of Ram Lalla in the grand new temple.

State Assembly to go paperless

Budget Session starts today

NALINI SAHU ■ BHUBANESWAR

In a move towards digital innovation, the Odisha Legislative Assembly is preparing to become paperless. Beginning with the Budget Session on Thursday (February 13), lawmakers will use tablets to carry out their legislative duties, replacing the traditional use of paper documents. This initiative is designed to streamline the legislative process and



boost efficiency within the Assembly. Each of the 147 Assembly seats has been equipped with a tablet to facilitate this transition. Legislators will now engage in question-and-answer sessions and submit proposals through digital platforms. An all-party meeting was held on Wednesday ahead of the session to foster cooperation and ensure a smooth functioning of the Assembly. Speaker Surama Padhy led the meeting, stressing the need for maintaining a peaceful atmosphere during the proceedings. Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi attended the meeting along with Parliamentary Affairs Minister Dr

Mukesh Mahaling, the Opposition Chief Whip and others. The Budget for the 2025-26 financial year is scheduled to be presented on March 17 with 28 working days scheduled for detailed and comprehensive discussions. Earlier in the day, CM Majhi paid a courtesy visit to the Raj Bhavan for a meeting with Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati ahead of the Assembly's Budget Session. The Governor is slated to deliver the opening address in the Assembly highlighting the State's development and growth outlook.

In State Temp soars to 37 deg first time in season

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The maximum temperature in the State went up to 37 degrees Celsius for the first time this season on Wednesday. Jharsuguda recorded the maximum temperature at 37 degrees Celsius. According to the weather office, 12 places in the State recorded maximum temperature above 30 degrees Celsius. Of them, 10 places registered the maximum temperature at 35 degrees or above. Bhubaneswar and Cuttack recorded 34.8 degrees and 33.2 degrees Celsius, respectively.

Giving a somewhat relief, the Regional Office of the India Meteorological Department here forecasted that the night temperature across the State is very likely to gradually fall by 3 to 5 degrees Celsius during next four days. No large change thereafter over the districts, the IMD said. The IMD forecasted that in the next 24 hours, fog and mist in the morning and mainly clear sky later will prevail for Bhubaneswar and neighbourhood. The maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to be around 33 degrees Celsius and 21 degrees, respectively.

HC stays govt's apartment registration notification

Appeal against order to be filed: Minister

PNS ■ CUTTACK
The Orissa High Court on Wednesday temporarily suspended a previous notification of the Odisha Government concerning the sale and purchase of apartments constructed before the Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA) came into being. The notification, which was circulated by the Housing & Urban Development (H&UD) Department on February 1, had granted permission for the registration of apartments built before the promulgation of the Real Estate (Regulation & Development) Act, 2017.

"Odisha Apartment Ownership Act, 2023 was enacted by repealing the Odisha Apartment Ownership Act, 1982. The new Act did not have any additional compliance. While selling a flat, an occupancy certificate, a society registration certificate, and a declaration are the minimum things required," petitioner Mohit Agrawal said when contacted.

"Recent notification of the Odisha Government on registration of apartments built prior to the creation of RERA mentioned that the new Act will not apply to these apartments. However, Odisha Apartment Ownership Act, 2023, clearly states that it is applicable to all apartments whenever they are constructed (be it before or after the formation of RERA)," Agrawal said.

"In a sense, the State Government notification was wrong. We had cited how government officials tried to over-

ride a previous legislation passed by the State Legislature, through an executive instruction. On that ground, the High Court accepted our petition for hearing and issued a stay order," he stated.

With the High Court's decision, the State Government is currently unable to proceed with actions based on this notification.

"We will go through the court order and then file our appeal," Housing and Urban Development Minister Krushna Chandra Mahapatra said.

Celebrity Cricket

Boney Kapoor invites CM

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Bollywood producer Boney Kapoor and his son Arjun made a courtesy call on Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi here on Wednesday.

They invited Majhi as chief guest to the Celebrity Cricket League (CCL)-2025 to be held at the Barabati Stadium in Cuttack on February 16.

Deputy Chief Minister KV Singh Deo, several other ministers and MLAs were present during the meeting.



The 11th edition of CCL that kick-started on February 8 in Bangalore would continue till March 2. Altogether eight

teams featuring Bollywood, Tollywood, Kollywood and other film fraternities are competing in the CCL-2025. A

total of 17 matches would be played across four legs in Bangalore, Delhi, Hyderabad, Cuttack and Surat.

VIMSAR 2nd year student alleges ragging

Probe committee formed

PNS ■ SAMBALPUR

A second-year student of the Veer Surendra Sai Institute of Medical Sciences and Research (VIMSAR) at Burla has brought serious allegations of ragging.

The student alleged that he was subjected to verbal abuse and physical harassment by senior students.

The matter came to the fore after he informed his mother, who reported the matter directly to Professor Pradeep Kumar Mohanty, the Dean of VIMSAR. In response, a committee has been constituted to scrutinise the allegations. Prof Mohanty assured that necessary actions would be pursued based on the committee's findings.

"A mother of a second-year student had called us and alleged that her son was manhandled and abused using filthy language by a few students. A committee was soon formed to probe the matter. The committee is now probing to find the authenticity of the allegations. Necessary action will be taken after the findings of the committee," said Prof Mohanty.

Notably, the VIMSAR had hit the headlines in March 2021 after the premier institute faced a significant ragging incident involving 18 MBBS students. The anti-ragging committee of the institution conducted an investigation, resulting in the students being fined a total of Rs 54,000 for their involvement in ragging junior students.

IIT BBS celebrates Foundation Day



Governor Hari Babu inspires students

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bhubaneswar celebrated its 17th Foundation Day on Wednesday with Governor Dr Hari Babu Kambhampati as the chief guest.

IIT Bhubaneswar Director

Prof Shreepad Karmalkar briefly traced the birth of the institute and the history of its campus. He highlighted its new initiatives in the areas of teaching-learning, research, industry-academia collaboration, entrepreneurship development, creation of outstanding school teachers and corporate social responsibility.

Governor Kambhampati lauded the institute's significant progress and urged it to

strive for global excellence. He noted that the IIT Bhubaneswar's multidisciplinary curriculum and focus on industry-academia collaboration have set it apart.

Urging students to lead with conviction, courage and compassion, the Governor encouraged them to pursue ambitious projects and contribute to the vision of Viksit Bharat. He emphasised that

the institute must continue creating knowledge and building a culture of lifelong learning to prepare students for leadership roles in an evolving world. He concluded his speech with an inspiring message: "Let us create knowledge that will inform and transform the world and prepare students as technically grounded leaders who will change the world."

In Cuttack

Plus Two student found dead under bridge

Was missing from BBSR from Tuesday

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A body of a Plus Two student was recovered from the Katakjodi riverbank under the Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Bridge in Cuttack on Wednesday. The deceased was identified as Prateek Das of Niladri Vihar in Bhubaneswar.

The minor boy was missing from Tuesday. His family members had launched a frantic search to trace him but in vain. Locals spotted his body under the bridge and informed police, following which he was identified.

The boy's relatives stated that he had left the house in the morning. Calls made to him also went unanswered until about 10:30 pm, after

which his phone was switched off.

The boy was staying with one of his relatives in Bhubaneswar. After he did not answer calls, family members traced his phone's last location to the City Garden apartment blocks at Raghunathpur.

The relatives said Prateek took an Uber cab to Cuttack as per logs found in his phone. However, despite searching till late in the night, he was unable to be located.

"We are clueless about how and why he came to Cuttack. We do not have any information about any issues he may be having or why he took the extreme step, and only his parents may be able to shed light on the matter," stated a relative with whom the boy was staying.

Later, the Markat Nagar police reached the spot and began a probe into the matter.

DSBM holds talk on Union Budget

India's economic future analysed

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The D.A.V. School of Business Management (DSBM) here organised a panel discussion on Union Budget 2025-26 taking the eminent persons from industry, corporate houses and academicians for an empirical analysis of the budget.

Presided over by Madan Mohan Panda, President of DSBM, the session featured an impressive roster of panelists. Dr Sanjeev Mahapatra, secretary, Utkal Chambers of Commerce and Industries (UCCI), who set the tone with a detailed overview of India's cur-



rent economic scenario and lauded the government for its visionary focus on key sectors.

Satwik Swain, secretary general, Odisha Assembly of Small and Medium Enterprises (OASME), who critically analysed the budget's implications for MSMEs and the agricultural sector, emphasised both the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. Prof Kishore Kumar Das, Head & Dean, Department of Commerce,

Ravenshaw University, explained the real-time applications of the budgetary provisions and underscored the necessity of a comprehensive understanding of their economic impact.

CMA Shiba Prasad Padhi, partner at SAPSJ & Associates, who offered a comparative analysis between the previous and the current budgets, articulated how these shifts are controlled to foster a robust economic ecosystem.

The session was a testament to the vital role that academic institutions play in shaping the career of future budding managers. The discussion was moderated by Dr DN Mishra, Principal of DSBM, who remarked that such forums are instrumental in enhancing practical skill sets of students, a vital requirement in today's dynamic business environment. The event was co-ordinated by Debabrata Sahoo, Faculty in Management.

Book 'Jala Yuddha' by scribe Pati launched in Delhi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

NEW DELHI: Experienced and specialised conflict and investigative journalist Bibhuti Pati's first Odia book Jala Yuddha (Water War), was officially launched at the Foreign Correspondent Club (FCC) in Delhi.

The publisher of the book is Pakshighara. The book provides comprehensive coverage of the ongoing water conflicts surrounding the Yarlung Tsangpo, Brahmaputra, Siang, Sindh, Jhelum, Kali, and Ichhamati rivers. Pati's extensive travels along the international riverbanks and borders of India, Pakistan, China, Bangladesh, and Nepal inform the narrative, which also delves into the enigmatic river



Saraswati and examines various international treaties related to river disputes.

The work further analyzes the pollution affecting the Ganga and Yamuna rivers, presenting a stark warning about the potential threats to the Ganga's future.

The title Jala Yuddha aptly encapsulates the escalating

tensions among individuals, States, and nations over water resources. During the book's inauguration, the author highlighted the alarming reality of emerging conflicts over water, emphasizing that these struggles represent a form of warfare. The author spoke about a chilling fact, how the unseen wars on water

issues have already started around the world and how water is a weapon without artillery.

Internationally acclaimed author Monika Kowaleczko Szumowska joined as the chief guest at the event. She gave a rare valuable insight stories, as to how water scarcity and river conflict jeopardize the lives of women and children. Veteran journalist and FCC president Venkat also spoke on the occasion.

Many prominent journalists and documentary filmmakers including Anjali Bhusan, Apeksha Niranjana, PM Narayanaa, Aayanjit Sen, Adil Shah Nawaz Khan, Asis Ray, Srinjoy Chowdhury and KV Prasad attended the event.

HITTING THE BULL'S EYE

Kejriwal: Heavenly dream run to terrible nightmare

Despite a number of unique pro-people schemes and two massive consecutive victories to rule Delhi, the Arvind Kejriwal-led Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) had to bite dust in its run for a third term to rule the city-state in 2025. Evidently, in the last three years of the second stint, owing to arrogant overconfidence, bluster, indignantly aggressive talk by Kejriwal had vexed Delhites. Further, the people had begun to believe that the government had gone opaque and autocratic, which forced them to pound the AAP to dust.



BISWARAJ PATNAIK

seen living like an arrogantly haughty Moghul in a palatial mansion done up at a whopping cost of 45 crore rupees, apart from the fleet of swanky imported luxury cars he was seen using merrily. All this enraged the thinking voters. Additionally, his promise of moving across the public without any security cover too turned out to be a false promise. The 'Aam' ingredients had developed into sophisticated 'Khaas' things that monarchs and business tycoons use with gay abandon. The people who had

voted for him out of love and reverence for his simple lifestyle and compassionate approach to solving ordinary citizens' problems, found him a fake leader who did not have any remorse for leading a luxurious life in full public glare. His cronies, when cornered, put up a lame excuse: that the Central Government authorities in charge of allotting and renovating houses had literally tossed him into the swanky house and dumped him into the luxury car fleet. He was helpless and undone. So, he chewed what was shovelled into his mouth. This theory was not bought by even the street beggar.

Renowned psephologist Yogendra Yadav, one of the founding members of AAP, expelled from the party in 2015 along with Prashant Bhushan, termed the party's loss a setback for all who dreamt of truly alternative politics. They say Kejriwal is largely responsible for AAP's Delhi debacle. A party hugely expected to be transparent, accountable and democratic, failed to deliver on all these

ethical fronts. Further, Kejriwal quickly transformed the ruling outfit into a superno-dominated, non-transparent and corrupt one which didn't even pursue a 'Lokpal' for which he had staged the enormously successful 'India against Corruption' campaign. Most paradoxically, he removed his own 'Lokpal' and never cared to have one installed ever.

After leaving an Income Tax officer job in 2000, Kejriwal became an RTI activist and lived in Delhi's slums to figure out the struggles faced by its residents until 2010. In 2011, he roped in activist Anna Hazare to fuel the anti-corruption movement, and all went too well with the masses. His indefinite hunger strike as part of the 'India against Corruption' movement alongside Hazare had witnessed nights spent sleeping in his blue Wagon R during a biting winter. His sole demand was for a 'Jan Lokpal' Bill.

It is an undeniable fact that politics has become an extraordinarily expensive affair. It requires more

black money than of white to fight elections today only because the legally permissible expenditure limits are laughably low. So, candidates have to organise black money for running their campaigns and bribing voters. The modern Indian society is abysmally low in morals and ethics when it comes to the poor and disadvantaged communities both in the rural and urban settings. Gone are the days when tainted ones were looked down upon as social pariahs.

Arvind Kejriwal may not be personally corrupt, or at any rate more corrupt than Narendra Modi in any which way. Nor does he lead a lifestyle which is anywhere comparable to that of Narendra Modi, whose super lavish and ultra luxurious lifestyle would make even the emperors of yore envious of him. Yet, Kejriwal had to suffer for having failed to maintain the high moral ground he harangued so vociferously.

The system of Government of NCT of Delhi is reminiscent of the colonial Montagu-Chelmsford Re-

forms, also known as the Government of India Act of 1919, which introduced the diarchy system of governance in provinces. While the Governor of the province was all in all, a semblance of power was given to Indian Ministers who were elected and had to answer to the people but could not take any decision independent of the Governor. Kejriwal as CM of NCT of Delhi was exactly in the same helpless position. He was under complete control of PM Narendra Modi who literally paralysed the functioning of his government and tried to smash the AAP by overusing indiscriminately the LG, CBI, ED, DDA, MHA and more agencies. But then, the poor Chief Minister was answerable to the people of Delhi.

Even after so much skullduggery, the BJP won the Delhi Assembly elections with just a mere 2% bigger vote share than that of Arvind Kejriwal's.

Incidentally, out of the 156 lakh voters in Delhi, only 94.50 lakh voted in the elections, which translates to 60.54% voters. At the macro

level, AAP lost by 2% votes which equals to 1.89 lakh votes. Interestingly, there are nearly 50,000 families of Hindu priests- each on having at least 4 votes. Put together, that would be about 2 lakh votes, which is substantial. As spiritual leaders of the Hindu society, they have great influence over other Hindus. Had Kejriwal heeded to their appeal in 2022 for a survival honorarium, the two lakh votes would have made a difference. Hindu priests in Delhi reeling under acute distress chose the saffron fold and gave them easy victory. A majority of these 2 lakh votes would have gone to the AAP to offset the difference of 2% votes and tilted the electoral fortune in Kejriwal's favour.

People's perception about Kejriwal changed drastically maybe with BJP's machinations having worked wonders. They got convinced that Kejriwal was a dictatorial leader who made unacceptable policies to steal public money for personal pleasures and keep the unworthy party afloat.

In Nayagarh 2 killed as car rams into shop

PNS ■ NAYAGARH
A speeding car crashed into a shop late on Tuesday night at Itamati in Nayagarh district claiming two lives in the process. One of the deceased was the car owner while the other was a pedestrian.
Sources said the Mahindra SUV lost control and crashed into an electronics shop. The impact was so severe that one of the concrete pillars of the shop structure was completely demolished and the car was mangled.
A truck driver, who had just parked his vehicle nearby, was walking down the road in front of the shop when the car

hit him, killing him on the spot.
The car had two occupants. While one of them was the deceased car owner, the other was the vehicle's driver, who managed to escape the wreck and flee the scene.
The Itamati police reached the spot and launched an investigation into the accident. As per reports, the owner hailed from Sagarugan in Khordha district. It was suspected that the car driver was drunk.
The police were trying to contact the car owner's family as well as probing to ascertain the identity of the dead pedestrian.

In Puri dist Two die, 1 hurt in bike mishap

PNS ■ PURI
Three persons travelling by a motorcycle lost control and collided with a roadside structure on Tuesday night near Bandhei Square on the Konark-Kakatpur road in Puri district.
The impact of the collision was so powerful that two of the riders, from the Charichak area, died on the spot.
The third passenger was rushed to a hospital in

Bhubaneswar in a critical condition. The spot where the accident took place is notorious for such road mishaps due to sharp turns and poor lighting.
Locals from Charichhak lamented the frequent occurrence of such mishaps, urging for improved lightning road safety measures. Authorities are investigating the incident to determine the cause of the crash and whether speed, weather conditions or vehicle malfunction played a role.

K'pada tehsil clerk held for raping widow

PNS ■ KENDRAPADA
Police on Tuesday arrested a peon of Rajkanika Tehsil office for keeping physical relation with a 30-year-old widow, impregnating her and later, terminating her pregnancy slyly, informed police.
Rajkanika police station IIC Sanjay Kumar Mallick said the victim widow, identified as Sanjukta Behera, wife of late Rabinarayan Behera of Jarisahi under Rajkanika police station, lodged an FIR in this regard. Sanjukta alleged that she was evacuated to Jarisahi-based cyclone shelter during cyclonic storm Dana.

A fellow villager, Pupun alias Biswaranjan Das, working as a peon of Rajkanika Tehsil office, allegedly raped her at the cyclonic shelter. Later, the accused allegedly raped her several times and impregnated her. While she was two months' pregnant, Pupun allegedly took her to hospital and slyly provide her an abortion pill. As a result, her pregnancy was terminated.
Acting on the FIR, police registered a case and arrested Papun. He is going to be produced before a local court on Wednesday, added IIC Mallick.

INBRIEF

DAV CSpur students excel in JEE Main
Bhubaneswar: As many as 105 students of the DAV Public School, Chandrasekharpur, Bhubaneswar, have been enlisted in the qualifiers list of NTA-conducted JEE Main (Session 1) results published recently. Notably, 12 students of the school scored 99 and above percentile, 22 scored more than 98 percentile, 34 secured above 97 percentile, 55 with more than 95 percentile, 105 scored more than 90 percentile. Sibasis Panda with 99.95 percentile, Sriman Bishnu P Satpathy with 99.87 percentile and Gaurav Maharana with 99.86 percentile bagged the first three positions in the school.

Kakatpur Xavier School fest held
Kakatpur: The annual festival of Xavier School in Kakatpur, Puri, was celebrated recently. While school managing committee president Sharmistha Biswal presided, principal Durga Charan Parida introduced the guests. Kakatpur Block Education Officer Dilip Kumar Jena was the chief guest on the occasion.



and the guest of honor was Jyotrimaya Dalai. Himanshu Bhushan Tripathi participated as keynote speaker. Tripathi spoke about the key role of parents in building the future of students and keeping them away from the misuse of mobile phones. The students who excelled in various competitions were awarded. A cultural programme followed. All the teachers and students of the school were present

Man dies in road mishap in JSpur
Jagatsinghpur: A 41-year-old man died in a road mishap that occurred at Chandagada on Cuttack-Jagatsinghpur NH-55 on Monday. The deceased was identified as Pabitra Kumar Patra from Kendala village under Jagatsinghpur block. Patra was returning from his workplace in Jagatsinghpur around 11 pm in his bike when a paddy-laden truck moving ahead suddenly used brake at the spot. As a consequence, Patra's bike collided behind the truck; he got severe head injuries and died on the spot.

Major Ports Football Championship
Paradip: The 46th All India Major Ports Football Championship commenced with 8 Major Ports at the Gopabandhu Stadium here being inaugurated by Advisor, Traffic, Paradip Port AK Bose. Teams will participate on league-cum-knockout basis. The Paradip Port Authority (PPA) along with the Major Ports Sports Control Board is organising the event which will conclude on February 16. The inaugural match was held between PPA and Vishakhapatnam Port Authority.

United Petro-Sadhav Shipping initiative in Odisha
Bhubaneswar: United Petro Group, Singapore, and Sadhav Shipping Ltd, Mumbai, have announced a major partnership to establish shipbuilding and comprehensive offshore facilities in Odisha. An MoU was signed during the Utkarsh Odisha, Make in Odisha Conclave 2025 on January 28 in Bhubaneswar, marking an important milestone for both organisations.

At Bargarh Auditorium after late MLA's name unveiled



PNS ■ BARGARH
In honour of former Bargarh MLA, former Bargarh Municipality Chairman and prominent leader late Jadumani Pradhan, a newly constructed auditorium was inaugurated in his name at the local Krusaka Bazaar here on Sunday. District Collector Aditya Goyal, Bargarh MLA Ashwini Sarangi, Attabira MLA Nihar Ranjan Mahanand, Bargarh Municipality Chairperson Kalpana Majhi, ADM Madhuchhanda Sahu, Superintendent Engineer Arun Pandey, Bar Association president Bhismadev Saraf,

MP representative Sureshwar Satpathy and late MLA Pradhan's wife Hemant Pradhan were present at the inauguration ceremony.
It is worth noting that the 500-seat auditorium has been constructed by the Public Works Department at an estimated cost of Rs 9.7,10,000 from the Western Odisha Development Council funds. The auditorium has 88 seats in the balcony, while the gallery has 412 seats, 2 changing rooms, a VIP lounge, separate toilets for men and women, and various modern facilities like office rooms, store rooms, pantry rooms and waiting rooms.

G'mardan villagers rattled by fear of mining bid



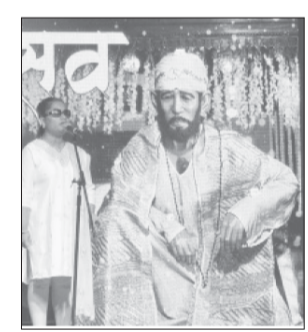
Hold meet
PNS ■ BALANGIR
The purchase of land just below the Gandhmardan hills by one of the associate companies of Adani, ostensibly for compensatory afforestation, has further fuelled speculation of backdoor entry of Adani for mining.

Apprehensive of secret move in this regard, Chakamal villagers of Salepali panchayat in Patnagarh block held a meeting here. According to the report, several villages of Patnagarh Block are going to be affected by mining of manganese.
According to reports, as many as 16 villages including

Salepali, Rahenmal, Karlamal, Guhiramunda, Chakamal, Turlamal, Kalangapali, Chakamal, Kalangapali, Phudkiupadha, Chuladarh, Bichhilipali, Balipata, Bilaisathi, Banjari and Batarla etc are going to be affected if mining takes place in the area.
"We held a meeting on Monday to discuss a hush-

move for mining in our area which is rich in bauxite. We are determined to oppose it tooth and nail. We urge the district administration to clarify on the matter," said Zilla Adivasi Kalyan Singh joint secretary Giriraj Singh Bhoi.
The Balangir district Collector was unavailable for comments on the issue.

Cuttack girl's Sai Bhajan mesmerises Delhi audience



PNS ■ CUTTACK
Visually-handicapped student of Sailabala Autonomous Women's College, Cuttack, Asha Bahadur was highly praised at Delhi for singing "Sai Bhajan".
Her performance was live telecast in Delhi Doodarshan Channel and was highlighted by many Hindi daily newspapers.
She was invited by "Sai Ka Angan Aashram", Delhi in a largely attended function.
Dr Chandravanu Satpathy, chief of Sai Ka Angan, being highly impressed by her talent, and performance, said her

to be ready to perform "Bhajan" at USA. He has also assured her that he would talk with the directors and producers of Hindi films to give her opportunity for singing.
Soumendra Priyadarsi Mishra, head of Police Intelligence Department had made all arrangements for her travel from Cuttack to Delhi and back.
Earlier she had received many State level awards from former Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik in the competition of Surabhi, Cuttack.
Apart from that she is recipient of many awards from various educational and social organizations including Lions Club and Police Employees Association.
She is the proud daughter of Kumal Bahadur and Chumki Bahadur and stays with her parents within the premises of advocate Satya Narayan Sahu at Madhusudan Nagar, Tulsipur, Cuttack.

1st death anniversary Sugnana Kumari paid rich tributes



PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR
The first death anniversary of veteran politician and distinguished leader, late V Sugnana Kumari Deo, was observed with deep reverence. Known for her high moral values, simple lifestyle, and unwavering dedication to public service, she commanded immense respect and admiration.
On this solemn occasion, tributes were paid to her at Nirmal Jhar Palace in Khallikote, where many gathered to honour her memory.
Notably, V Sugnana Kumari

Deo, a senior Biju Janata Dal (BJD) leader and 10-time MLA from Khallikote and Kabisuryanagar Assembly constituencies in Ganjam district, was a member of the erstwhile Khallikote royal family. She passed away at the age of 87 while undergoing treatment at a hospital in Chennai in 2024. Her demise was deeply mourned across political and social circles.
Ganjam district BJD president Dr Ramesh Chandra Chyauapatnaik expressed his heartfelt condolences, stating, "She was a highly respected

leader of BJD who made immense contributions to the party. Her commitment to public service was unparalleled."
Marking the solemn occasion, senior BJD leaders Pradeep Amat, Praful Samal, Sanjay Das Burma, Snehangini Chhurria, Tukuni Sahu, Chandra Sekhar Sahu, Bhruju Baxipatra, Biplab Patro, Manoj Mahapatra, Ranjita Sahu and all MLA BJD candidates from the district, Bhabani Sahu (BYJD) and Prasant Panda (BCJD) visited her residence in Khallikote to pay their respects.

In Baleswar Youth held for raping elderly woman

PNS ■ BALESWAR
In a bizarre incident, a 65-year-old woman was allegedly raped by a youth at Gahirabandh village under the Raibania police station in Baleswar district.
The accused identified as Niharsan Bihari (32) committed the offence while the victim was on her way to a relative's house. According to reports, the accused allegedly intercepted the victim on the way and dragged her behind the GP office. He assaulted her sexually and fled from the scene, leaving her in a critical condition.
Villagers after spotting the woman rushed her to the Hatigarh Community Health Centre (CHC). The Raibania police began an investigation after the son of the victim lodged an FIR.
Later, the police began an investigation based on the complaint and arrested the accused.

In Kendrapada Youth impregnates girl on marriage plea

Loots her money, jewelleryes
RAJESH BEHERA ■ KENDRAPADA
A girl lodged an FIR alleging that a youth kept physical relation with her, impregnated her and later terminated her pregnancy on the pretext of marriage and subsequently cheated her. He also took away Rs 18 lakh she had saved and her gold ornaments. Besides, she alleged that the accused made public her obscene photos and videos.
Rajkanika police station IIC Sanjay Kumar Malik said the 29-year-old victim girl of Ayatan village under Rajkanika police station lodged the FIR against Pravas Senapati (30) alias Banglu, a married person of Ganja village.
The victim alleged that after her father died during Corona period, Banglu devel-

'We'll expose BJD, BJP and present Cong as only option'

Bhakta Charan Das, a senior Congress leader with nearly four decades in politics, has been appointed as the Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC) president. A former MP and former Union Minister, he began his political journey during the Jay Prakash movement in the 1970s and has since championed Dalit, tribal, and farmer rights. Previously chairing the Congress Campaign Committee, he aims to revitalize the party through grassroots engagement and mass outreach. Das has a tete-a-tete with our representative RAJEEV RATHAN over a gamut of issues concerning his new assignment.
Bhakta Da, congratulations on your appointment as

the new president of the Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC). What will be your immediate priorities for reviving Congress in the State?
Ans: Thank you. My first priority is to strengthen the party at the grassroots level. Congress has always been the voice of the people, and I will ensure that we reconnect with every household in Odisha. We will focus on mass outreach programmes, agitations against the failures of the current government, and reviving our organisational structure from the booth level.
Congress has been struggling in Odisha in recent years. What exactly would be your strategies to regain the lost ground?
Ans: The people of Odisha

are looking for an alternative. The ruling party has failed in many aspects, be it employment generation, price control, or farmer welfare. We will expose these failures and present Congress as the true pro-people party. My strategy will be to energize the youth, involve experienced leaders, and take our campaign to every district, with a special focus on rural and tribal regions.
You have always been vocal about issues concerning Dalits, minorities and tribals. How will this reflect in your leadership?
Ans: My commitment to Dalit and tribal welfare is unwavering. I have worked extensively in undivided Kalahandi and other backward areas, fighting for the



rights of the marginalised. Under my leadership, Congress will advocate for their rights, push for policies that ensure their development, and stand by them against any form of injustice.
You have been a lawmaker at both the State and national levels. How does your experience shape your vision for Odisha Congress?

Ans: My journey in politics has given me a deep understanding of both State and national issues. I have seen governance closely—both as a Legislator and as a Minister. This experience will help me guide the party with a clear vision. We need a leadership that understands policy-making, people's aspirations, and ground realities. I am committed to using my experience to strengthen Congress in Odisha.
Southern Odisha, especially Kalahandi, has been close to your heart. Will we see a special focus on the region?
Ans: Absolutely. Western and southern Odisha have always been neglected in terms of development. I will ensure that Congress becomes the voice of the people in the

region. We will demand better infrastructure, healthcare, and education for these areas. Our campaign will focus on bringing real change to regions that have been overlooked by successive governments. Additionally, we will work on sustainable development models that prioritise agriculture, industry, and skill development for the youth.
The political landscape in Odisha had been largely dominated by BJD, while BJP managed to take the wind out of its sails by winning a spectacular majority only in 2024. What challenges do you see for Congress?
Ans: The BJD had been in power for over two decades, but it failed to address fundamental issues like unemployment, healthcare, and educa-

tion. The BJP, on the other hand, has been using divisive politics to gain traction, but it has not provided any substantial vision for Odisha's development. Congress is the only party with a clear developmental roadmap that prioritises social justice, economic growth, and democratic values. Our challenge is to break the BJP-BJD nexus that has kept Odisha's true potential from being realized. We will expose their failures and present Congress as the only viable alternative.
You have worked in Bihar and other States for Congress. How do you see Odisha Congress aligning with the national party's vision?
Ans: Congress has a clear national vision under the leadership of Mallikarjun Kharge

Ji and Rahul Gandhi Ji. We are fighting for democracy, social justice, and economic stability. In Odisha, I will ensure that our fight aligns with the national vision while also addressing local concerns. We will work in coordination with the All India Congress Committee (AICC) to revive the party here.
What message would you like to give to the people of Odisha?
Ans: My message is simple that Congress is your party. We have always stood with the people and will continue to do so. I urge every Odia to join us in this movement for a better, more inclusive Odisha. Together, we can bring real change and build a State that provides equal opportunities for all.

No child will be discrimination: SC on Rohingya access to schools

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

No child will be discriminated against in education, the Supreme Court said on Wednesday while fixing for next week a plea seeking a direction to the Centre and the Delhi governments to grant Rohingya refugees in the city access to public schools and hospitals.

The court just wants to know where these Rohingya families are living, in whose house and what are their particulars, a bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiwar Singh said while making the the no discrimination in education point. Senior advocate Colin Gonsalves, appearing for the NGO Rohingya Human Rights Initiative, said he has filed an affidavit giving the details and pointed out that the Rohingya refugees have UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) cards.

It will be easier for the NGO to give the particulars if these Rohingya families have these cards, Justice Surya Kant said. Gonsalves then sought some time to furnish more details to



Photo: File photo

the court. The top court posted the matter for further hearing after 10 days. On January 31, the top court asked the NGO to apprise the court where the Rohingya refugees have settled in the city and the facilities accessible to them. It also asked Gonsalves to file an affidavit indicating their places of settlement in Delhi. Gonsalves said the NGO



sought access to public schools and hospitals to Rohingya refugees as they were denied the access due to lack of Aadhaar cards. "They are refugees having UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) cards and therefore they can't have Aadhaar cards. But for want of Aadhaar they are not being granted access to public schools and hospitals," he submitted.

Gonsalves said Rohingya refugees resided in Shaheen Bagh, Kalindi Kunj and Khajuri Khas areas of Delhi. "In Shaheen Bagh and Kalindi Kunj they are residing in slums and in Khajuri Khas they are residing in rented accommodation," he had submitted. The top court had said it asked the questions to understand if they lived in camps, the nature of relief would be different than the one mentioned in the PIL. The PIL has sought a direction to authorities to grant admission to all Rohingya children free of cost irrespective of Aadhaar cards and allow them to participate in all examinations, including Classes 10 and 12 and graduation, without government insistence on the ID proof.

India, France to develop modern nuclear reactors

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and France on Wednesday expressed an intent to jointly develop modern nuclear reactors, emphasising that nuclear power was crucial for energy security and transition to a low-carbon economy.

The two countries signed a letter of intent on Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) and Advanced Modular Reactors (AMRs), according to a joint statement issued after Prime Minister Narendra Modi met French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris.

"Prime Minister Modi and President Macron stressed that nuclear energy is an essential part of the energy mix for strengthening energy security and transitioning towards a low-carbon economy," according to the statement. SMRs are compact nuclear fission reactors that can be manufactured in factories and then installed elsewhere. They typically have a smaller capacity than conventional nuclear reactors.

The two leaders also acknowledged the strong civil nuclear ties between India and France and efforts in cooperation on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy,



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron during the inauguration of the Indian Consulate, in Marseille, France PTI

notably in relation to the Jaitapur Nuclear Power Project.

They also renewed a memorandum of understanding between India's Department of Atomic Energy and France's Commissariat à l'Energie Atomique et aux Energies Alternatives of France, concerning cooperation with the Global Center for Nuclear Energy Partnership (GCNEP). Both the nations agreed to enhance collaboration in training and education for nuclear professionals. Later on Wednesday, Modi is scheduled to meet US President Donald Trump, with nuclear power expected to be among the topics of discussion. India aims to generate 100 gigawatts of nuclear energy by 2047 as part of its transition to

clean energy. Earlier this month, the government announced plans to launch a Nuclear Energy Mission with a budget of Rs 20,000 crore to support research and development of SMRs. As part of the initiative, India plans to operationalise at least five indigenously developed SMRs by 2033. To enable private sector participation, the government is considering amendments to the Atomic Energy Act and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act.

At present, nuclear power plants contribute 1.8 per cent of India's total installed power capacity of 462 gigawatts and around 3 per cent of total electricity generation. This helps save around 41 million tonnes of carbon dioxide annually.

India to host first Global Coalition for Social Justice

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister of Labour and Employment Mansukh Mandaviya will inaugurate first-ever Regional Dialogue on Global Coalition for Social Justice here on February 24-25, an official statement said here on Wednesday.

Giving details, it said Ministry of Labour and Employment in collaboration with Confederation of Indian Industry (CII)-Employers' Federation of India (EFI) will host the Dialogue at Bharat Mandapam. This landmark event is a significant contribution to the Global Coalition for Social Justice. Launched by ILO in 2023 the Coalition is a platform for governments, employers' and workers' organizations, international and regional organizations, financial institutions and development banks, enterprises, international non-governmental organizations and academia committed to advancing social justice and engaging in collaborative efforts to achieve shared objectives.

The Coalition leverages collaboration among partners to amplify the unique strengths of each participant, comprehensively and coherently addressing social justice challenges. As a member of the Asia Pacific Coordinating Group,

India is spearheading the first 'Regional Dialogue' under the Global Coalition for Social Justice and championing the key intervention "Responsible Businesses for Inclusive and Sustainable Societies" under the Coalition's thematic area of "Expanding access to and capabilities for Productive and freely chosen Employment and Sustainable Enterprises." The Regional Dialogue will bring together nearly 80 Coalition partners from the Asia Pacific region and beyond to explore innovative approaches, exchange best practices, and strengthen collaboration to advancing social justice in the region.

The event will also mark the 74th Foundation Day of the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC), celebrating its unwavering commitment to ensuring dignified healthcare and economic security for India's workforce. The ESIC Foundation Day is an occasion to recognize the vital contribution of the organization in fostering social justice through the extension of comprehensive social security benefits for workers and their families in the formal sector. Discussions will focus on critical dimensions of social justice, including responsible business conduct and social protection, aligning with the Coalition's thematic priorities.

Ayush Ministry, social justice department sign MoU for senior citizens

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Ministry of Ayush and Department of Social Justice and Empowerment signed a MoU on Wednesday to improve the well-being of senior citizens and address the growing concern of substance abuse. This strategic partnership seeks to implement Ayush-based interventions to promote geriatric healthcare and combat substance abuse, Union Ayush Minister Prataprao Jadhav said. He said the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is a pioneering step to develop cooperative initiatives for health promotion among senior citizens and those affected by substance abuse.



Photo: File photo

"Geriatric healthcare and substance abuse are critical areas that require special focus, especially as we face an ageing population and growing concerns around addiction," Jadhav said.

This collaboration between the Ministry of Ayush and the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment (DoSJE) represents a significant step towards addressing these chal-

lenges. "By leveraging the holistic approach of Ayush systems alongside social welfare initiatives, we aim to empower our senior citizens and those affected by substance abuse," the Minister stated. While addressing the gathering, Union Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment B L Verma, said, "Under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, our government has taken several steps to ensure the welfare of our senior citizens. The signing of the MoU with the Ministry of Ayush will benefit our senior citizens in a big way. "The development of elderly-specific training modules, treat-

ment protocols, yoga training programs, sharing of preventive and curative practices, etc, under the MoU will go a long way in enabling our senior citizens to lead a healthy life. By joining hands with the Ministry of Ayush, I am sure that together we can provide comprehensive services to the community," Verma said. By leveraging the strengths of Ayush systems, both ministries committed to working together on various initiatives, including awareness programmes, capacity-building for service providers and the establishment of geriatric health and de-addiction units under Ayush autonomous bodies. Key objectives of the MoU include developing coopera-

tion, convergence and synergy between the Ministry of Ayush and DoSJE to foster innovative initiatives for promoting the health of senior citizens, reducing the demand for drugs, addressing substance abuse and aiding mental rehabilitation. This will be achieved through the generation of awareness and capacity-building of service providers using Ayush systems. It also includes encouraging research in the areas of geriatric health, substance abuse and mental health, with a focus on exploring the therapeutic benefits of traditional healthcare practices and supporting additional activities for health promotion tailored to both the geriatric population and individuals affected by substance abuse.

PM Modi embarks on two-day US visit

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will pay a two-day working visit to the US starting Wednesday and hold a bilateral meeting with President Donald Trump, with New Delhi saying it will give further direction and momentum to this "important partnership". Modi, who is currently visiting France at the invitation of President Emmanuel Macron, would be among the first few world leaders to visit the United States following the January 20 inauguration after Trump's vic-

tory in the US elections last November. The visit will provide a "valuable opportunity" to engage the new administration in all areas of mutual interest, senior officials said. The prime minister's visit to the US at the invitation of President Trump shows the "importance of India-US partnership and is also reflective of the bipartisan support that this partnership enjoys in the US", Foreign Secretary said Vikram Misri said here in a briefing on February seven. Modi will also interact with business leaders and members of the Indian community in the US.

Modi will hold a bilateral meeting with President Trump in both restricted and delegation-level formats, he said. A range of bilateral issues are expected to be on the table besides, besides discussions on regional and international situation. "There is an obvious convergence of interests between the two countries in a number of areas - trade, investment, technology, defence cooperation, counterterrorism, Indo-Pacific security, and of course, people-to-people relations," the Foreign Secretary said in the briefing. The visit is also expected to boost people-to-people ties between

India and the US. "The 5.4 million-strong Indian community in the US and the more than 3,50,000 students from India who are pursuing studies in universities strengthen this bond immeasurably," Misri said. "The prime minister's visit to the United States will give further direction and momentum to this important partnership. We expect a joint statement to be adopted at the end of the visit and will share that in due course," the foreign secretary said. This will be Modi's first visit since the inauguration of the second presidential term of Trump on January 20.

Judicial officers' pension: Unified pension scheme notified, Centre tells SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Wednesday informed the Supreme Court that it recently notified the Unified Pension Scheme which might address the concerns of judicial officers.

A bench of Justices B R Gawai and Augustine George Masih heard the submission made by the Centre's counsel.

ence how the Unified Pension Scheme worked and then take a call on the issues at hand. The matter would be heard after 12 weeks. The case raises concerns over the disbursement of pension to officers of the district judiciary and retired high court judges. The top court is dealing with salaries, arrears and allowances of the officers of district judiciary. The finance ministry notified the UPS on January 25 and it promises an assured pension of 50 per cent of the average basic pay drawn over the last 12 months prior to superannuation. UPS would be applicable to Central government employees who were covered under the National Pension System and chose the option under the system, according to a gazette notification issued by the finance ministry.

UPS or assured payout would not be available in case of removal or dismissal from service or resignation of the employee, as per the notification published on January 25. The matter relates to the applicability of the New Pension Scheme to the officers of the district judiciary. "It is the submission of the attorney general as well as the solicitor general that the Unified Pension Scheme may address concerns of all the employees, including the judicial officers," observed the bench. The court therefore found it appropriate to defer the matter for some time to experi-

Supreme Court denies Indrani Mukerjea plea to travel abroad

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday dismissed the plea of Indrani Mukerjea, accused of killing her daughter Sheena Bora, against a ruling denying her permission to travel abroad. A bench of Justices M M Sundresh and Rajesh Binal directed the trial court to conduct the proceedings in the case within a year and upheld the Bombay High Court order refusing her plea. "There is no guarantee that



Photo: File photo

you will come back. Trial is at an advanced stage. Taking into con-

sideration the fact that the trial is ongoing, we are not inclined to

consider the request at this stage. We direct the trial court to expedite the hearing and conclude within a year," it said. Indrani is also an Accused turned Approver in the INX Media bribery case. Former Finance Minister P Chidambaram and son Karti are accused in this case filed by CBI and ED. Indrani confessed before the court that she gave bribes to Karti linked firms to get saved from Income Tax and FDI violations. Opposing the permission, the CBI counsel said it was a sensitive matter and

the trial had reached halfway with the examination of 96 witnesses. The counsel for Mukerjea, a former media executive, submitted she was given bail by the top court and 92 witnesses still remained to be examined in the case. She said the trial court was vacant for the last four months and the proceedings could take a long time to conclude. The travel restriction matter came up in the Supreme Court after a special court on July 19 allowed Mukerjea's plea to visit Spain and the United Kingdom

for 10 days over the next three months. The Bombay High Court however set aside the order on September 27 after the CBI filed an appeal. Mukerjea moved the apex court against the high court order. In her plea, filed through advocate Sana Raees Khan, Mukerjea said she was a British citizen as she sought permission to visit Spain and her home country for "making necessary changes and amendments and taking care of pending work which cannot be transacted without her personal presence".

Deepika Padukone shares stress management tips with students on PM's PPC 2025

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Identify the cause of your stress and express it to someone you can trust, Bollywood actor Deepika Padukone has told school students during an interaction on PM's Pariksha Pe Charcha aired on Wednesday. The actor shared insights on mental health, stress management and how to stay calm during exams at a special session of 'Pariksha Pe Charcha', an annual event in which the Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacts with students appearing for board examinations. In a shift from the traditional

town hall format, Modi preferred a more informal setting this time and took the students to Delhi iconic Sunder Nursery for his annual interaction with them ahead of board exams. "I think competition and comparison is a part of life. Competition is not a bad thing, but recognising our strengths and weaknesses, focusing more on our strengths, and working on our weaknesses is probably the only way to do it," Padukone said during the session. During the session, the actor shared her struggle with depression and also advised the students to learn to derive happiness from their own strengths.

"To manage stress, talk to your parents the night before exams. Identify the cause of your stress and express it to someone you can trust," she said during the interaction broadcast on Wednesday. Eminent personalities like Boxer MC Mary Kom and spiritual leader Sadhguru have also shared their experiences and knowledge with students on key aspects of life and learning in different episodes of Pariksha Pe Charcha this year. Padukone, who revealed her depression diagnosis in 2015, said there was a time when discussion around mental health was not encouraged in India.



Photo: File photo

"Mental health used to be a stigma in our country. As soon

as I started talking about this illness, I started feeling so free,

light. From there, my journey towards mental health awareness began. Depression, anxiety, stress could happen to anyone, anytime. "Like Shri Narendra Modi ji has mentioned in his book 'Exam Warriors' - 'express, never suppress'. When you're preparing for exams, you start feeling better. And you're able to live a happier, healthier life," she told students during the episode of the PPC session which was telecast on Wednesday. Calling depression an "invisible" illness, the "Pathaan" star said there was a time she was working continuously and one day in 2014 she just passed out. It was

her mother, who was then visiting her in Mumbai from Bengaluru, who realised that something wasn't ok. "They asked me if something happened, someone said anything to me, something happened at work. And, I said, 'No. I don't know what it is. I'm just feeling completely helpless and hopeless. I just don't want to live anymore. I was lucky in that moment that my mother realised and she decided to call a psychologist," she recalled. When a student asked for tips to care for one's mental health, Padukone shared three pointers. "Sleep is very important. It is a

freely available superpower. You must go out for adequate sunlight and fresh air. Always reach out for help." The 39-year-old also said patience is an important virtue and one can only do what's in their control. "So take a short break. Relax the mind. And then address it again. Sometimes, you just (need to) have a fresh take on whatever you are studying. Feeling stressed is quite natural. How we handle it is important. It's important to be patient - related to your exams, results or preparations... Sleep well, hydrate, exercise, and meditate," she added.

Millions take holy dip in Prayagraj on Maghi Purnima

BISWAJEET BANERJEE
MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The ghats of Prayagraj came alive with devotion as millions of pilgrims took a sacred dip at the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati on the auspicious occasion of Maghi Purnima. A sea of saffron-clad sadhus, devotees in colorful traditional attire, and spiritual seekers from across the country thronged the banks, creating a surreal atmosphere of faith and celebration.

Government claims that by the end of Wednesday over 2 crore people have taken a dip at Sangam.

From the break of dawn, chants of "Har Har Gange" echoed across the riverbanks, blending with the sound of temple bells and conch shells. As the golden hues of the rising sun kissed the holy waters, devotees stepped into

the river, some folding their hands in prayer, others bowing completely in reverence. Some wept tears of joy, while others stood silently, letting the sacred moment wash over them.

"The feeling is indescribable," said Anuradha Mishra, a 62-year-old pilgrim from Varanasi. "The moment you step into the Sangam, it's as if all your worries dissolve. This is not just a ritual, it is liberation."

Adding to the divine ambiance, authorities orchestrated a grand floral shower on the devotees. Thousands of marigold and rose petals rained down from atop buildings and helicopters, turning the ghats into a vibrant, fragrant spectacle.

The sight left many in awe. "It felt like the heavens themselves were blessing us," said 28-year-old Ramesh Tiwari, who had traveled from



Devotees gather to take a holy dip at the Sangam on the occasion of 'Maghi Purnima' bath festival during ongoing Maha Kumbh Mela, in Prayagraj

the energy is truly something else." Despite the enormous footfall, the movement of devotees remained smooth, thanks to well-planned arrangements by the authorities. "The Maghi Purnima snan has been conducted peacefully and efficiently," said a senior government official Anuj Kumar Jha. "Over 40 million devotees have already taken the holy dip. Our entire team is working tirelessly to ensure that facilities, crowd management, and sanitation are up to the mark."

According to officials, nearly one-third of India's population has participated in the ongoing Magh Mela's holy baths, a staggering testament to the event's significance. "This is an unprecedented turnout," said Uttar Pradesh DGP Prashant Kumar. "On peak weekends, crowds swell, sometimes causing traffic

slowdowns, but our teams work round the clock to keep everything under control. The sheer scale of faith on display here is beyond words."

Key routes such as Andawa to Jhansi and the Shastris Bridge witnessed a steady flow of pilgrims. Even around the iconic Bade Hanuman Temple, where devotees often queue for hours, the crowd was well-regulated.

The grand event was also marked by spiritual declarations. Former Uttar Pradesh Shia Waqf Board Chairman Wasim Rizvi, now known as Jitendra Narayan Singh Tyagi after his conversion to Hinduism, took a dip in the Sangam and expressed his joy.

"Sangam Snan is not just about bathing, it is about inner transformation. It fills my soul with bliss," he said, standing on the ghats surrounded by his supporters. He went on to

announce his plans for a new organization aimed at supporting those who choose to embrace Sanatan Dharma. "We will provide financial aid to converts, help them establish businesses, and ensure they are welcomed into society with dignity."

His statements sparked mixed reactions among devotees, with some expressing support, while others preferred to focus on the spiritual essence of the gathering.

The Magh Mela, often considered a precursor to the grand Maha Kumbh, has once again reaffirmed Prayagraj's role as the epicenter of Hindu spirituality.

As Maghi Purnima draws to a close, the energy at the Sangam remains electric, with pilgrims continuing their prayers and taking one last dip before heading home-hearts full, spirits uplifted, and faith renewed.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh hails Aero India 2025 as historic success

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
BENGALURU

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Wednesday said India is going through a revolutionary phase of transformation, and the country's fighter jets, missile systems, naval vessels are not only protecting our borders but are also becoming the centre of attraction for the entire world. He said this at the indigenisation ceremony of Aero India 2025 here.

"Aero India has reached heights that are not only unparalleled but historic," the Defence Minister said. "I was personally present for the past three days in this event and if I have to express my



Photo: File photo

experience in three words, it is energy, energy and energy," he said.

"Whatever we could see in

from India but from across the world. The enthusiasm seen among our entrepreneurs, our startups and innovators is commendable."

Noting that the country is going through a revolutionary phase of transformation, the Defence Minister said, "We all know that India has historically been dependent on imports for its defence needs. If I look back about a decade ago, 65 to 70 per cent of defence equipment was being imported into our country."

"If we look at the situation today, you may call it resolution or a miracle, but almost the same percentage of defence equipment is being manufactured in the country

today," he said.

Rajnath Singh said, "Today we are standing at such a juncture where fighter jets, missile systems, naval vessels, or many such equipment and platforms, are not only protecting our borders but are also becoming the centre of attraction for the entire world."

"Today, we are exporting everything from small artillery to large platforms like Brahmos and Akash missile system to many countries. This is not only increasing our defence exports, but our new partnerships with different countries are also developing and strengthening at the global level," he said.

Operation Chaturbhuj to monitor devotees

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

A special security operation, Operation Chaturbhuj, was launched to ensure the safety of devotees from across the country and abroad for the holy bath on Magh Purnima in Mahakumbh Nagar.

This initiative was carried out under the directives of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, reinforcing stringent security measures. Additionally, a dedicated team from the Integrated Command and Control Center (ICCC) was crucial in

establishing a robust security framework by leveraging advanced technology for comprehensive surveillance. Every aspect of safety, convenience, crime control, and crowd management from Tuesday night onwards was meticulously monitored. The ICCC oversees the fairgrounds and the entire city through 2,750 high-tech cameras, an anti-drone system, and specialized security teams, ensuring round-the-clock vigilance.

Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Rajesh Dwivedi emphasized that 24/7 aerial

surveillance is being conducted via drones, while special security arrangements at the ICCC have significantly enhanced crowd management.

He added, "Furthermore, the anti-drone system remains on high alert in Mahakumbh Nagar, actively preventing unauthorized aerial activity."

On the auspicious occasion of Magh Purnima, stringent measures were in place to detect and neutralize suspicious drones, ensuring an incident-free and secure environment for all devotees."

Panchayat steps up against drug menace in Himachal Pradesh



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
BILASPUR

Two days after Auhar gram Panchayat here decided to stop facilities for the families whose members are caught with adulterated heroin, another Panchayat, Gatwar has also decided to debar the members from receiving benefits.

Deputy Pradhan of Gatwar Panchayat, Ajay Sharma, said that the decision was taken to save the youths and the society at large from addiction to drugs such as 'chitta' (adulterated heroin).

He said that the various schemes are being run at the Panchayat level for the people and actions against drug addicts or the people involved in the business are necessary. The Panchayat has decided if any person is found to be involved in drug consumption or business, a proposal would be brought to deprive the family of any benefits, he added. The facilities given by Panchayats include facilities provided under the Below Poverty Line

(BPL), the Integrated Rural Development Scheme (IRDP), the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and others. Sharma said that the approval of money for building a house, water storage tank and other facilities would not be provided to such families.

The Panchayat has also decided to start an awareness campaign to save the youth from the increasing menace of drug addiction and its ill effects, Gram Panchayat pradhan Naval Bajaj said.

Parents are making every effort to provide better education and living standards to their children. However, the youth falling into the trap of drug addiction is a matter of concern for the society. A campaign against drug addiction will be run in every ward and village under the Panchayat. The Panchayat has appealed for cooperation from self-help groups, youth groups, women groups and social service organisations to make this campaign successful.

Former cricketer Anil Kumble, wife take holy dip in Sangam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Former Indian cricketer and coach Anil Kumble took the holy dip in Triveni Sangam on the auspicious occasion of Magh Purnima in Prayagraj. Accompanied by his wife, Chaitna Ramtirtha, Kumble immersed himself in the revered waters, embracing the spiritual significance of the occasion.

Later, he shared photos of the event on social media platform X, captioning them with a single word: "Blessed."

Through this simple message, Kumble expressed that the holy immersion had granted him spiritual merit and the



Former Indian cricket captain Anil Kumble prays after taking holy dip at the Sangam on Maghi Purnima, during the ongoing Maha Kumbh Mela 2025

blessings of Prayagraj. Anil Kumble, known for his

masterful spin bowling, arrived in Prayagraj on

Tuesday. However, he chose the auspicious occasion of Magh Purnima for his sacred dip at Triveni Sangam. On this day, no VIP protocols are observed at the Mahakumbh, yet Kumble opted to join the devotees as a regular pilgrim. He boarded a boat to reach the confluence and took the holy dip, accompanied by his wife, Chetana.

The couple offered prayers to Lord Sun and performed traditional rituals before immersing themselves in the sacred waters. Kumble also captured the moment, sharing a selfie from the boat and a stunning image of the full moon on Magh Purnima with his fans.

BJP delegation calls on Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla amid political crisis

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
IMPHAL

A mid a political crisis in Astrife-torn Manipur, senior BJP leader Sambit Patra on Wednesday morning called on Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla at the Raj Bhavan here, sources said.

They held discussions for some time but the outcome of the meeting is not yet known.

Patra, the BJP's Northeast in-charge, later headed for a hotel, where he is likely to meet party MLAs during the day.

A BJP delegation led by Patra had on Tuesday met Bhalla at the Raj Bhavan amid a leadership crisis following the resignation of N Biren Singh as the chief minister of the ethnic violence-hit state on February 9.

Meanwhile, experts have warned that with no one staking claim to form the government so far, the BJP-ruled Manipur may head towards a constitutional crisis.

If the situation remains so, the state is likely to be under President's rule, they said.

Senior Supreme Court Advocate Arunabh Chowdhury told PTI, "In Manipur, the assembly is a live one... it is not under suspended animation or President's Rule. It is mandatory to hold assembly sessions as per the Supreme Court order.

Obviously, it will lead to a big constitutional crisis." There is no provision in Article 174 saying that this can be extended or be condoned beyond six months, he said.

Article 174 says that the Governor shall from time to time summon the House or each House of the Legislature of a state to meet at such time and place as he thinks fit, but six months shall not intervene between its last sitting in one session and the date appointed for its first sitting in the next session.

After six months, it will lead to a constitutional deadlock and the President's Rule under Article 356 is the only option, Chowdhury said.

Article 356 of the Constitution gives the President the power to impose this rule on a state on the advice of the Union Council of Ministers.

Chief Minister N Biren Singh had on February 9 resigned from his post and Governor A K Bhalla accepted the same. He requested the CM to continue in office until alternative arrangements are made.

The Governor has already declared the seventh session of the 12th Manipur Legislative Assembly, which was set to commence on February 10, as null and void. The last session of the assembly in the restive state concluded on August 12, 2024.

Aligning technologies with future warfare is not the only answer: General Anil Chauhan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
BENGALURU

Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan on Wednesday said aligning technologies with future warfare is not the sole solution to achieving victory in war. He emphasised the need to develop new concepts and doctrines to complement technological advancements.

Making these assertions in a seminar on aligning technologies with future conflicts at Aero India here, the CDS said "Aligning technologies with future warfare is only part of the solution to achieving victory. You must evolve

new concepts, create new doctrines, establish new organizations for such combat, and build a new culture and processes if you want to win." He added, "Technology will only provide a part of the answer."

Noting that warfare initially evolved on land before expanding into the maritime and air domains, the CDS said, "With each new domain, there has been an influence on the preceding one. Even within these domains, significant changes continue to occur." In the land domain warfare has evolved to include terrain-based and urban combat, he said. "In the

maritime domain, apart from surface warfare, battles are now extending underwater-almost to the seabed. In the airspace we are witnessing an expansion into near space." "We need to align technologies to fight in these increasingly complex domains, and that is where technology will assist us," he added.

Speaking on how combat is evolving due to technological advancements, General Chauhan said, "For generations warfare has been between human beings but today we are on the verge of redefining this. In the future combat may be between humans and

machines and later it could be entirely between autonomous machines." He also highlighted that warfare is becoming multi-domain, meaning that battles will be fought simultaneously across multiple domains.

As warfare grows more complex the need to develop technologies for cross-domain operations and cross-domain command emerge, the CDS stressed. "Warfare is also becoming more intelligent due to battlefield digitisation, the networking of terrestrial, aerial, and satellite systems, and the shift toward data-centric warfare," he added.

CM Mamata Banerjee slams BJP for Kumbh mess

SAUGAR SENGUPTA
KOLKATA

Consequent to Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's corruption diatribe on Bengal Government, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday mounted a blistering attack on the Centre and the BJP on a host of issues - including alleged fudging of voters' lists to win elections, mismanaging the Kumbh Mela as also suppressing facts post stampede deaths in Prayagraj and central deprivation of Bengal.

"Those who talk of corruption first look into their own acts... they are embodiment of corruption... let Nirmala Devi control their own

corruptions... she has stopped grants to us... even your own Gujarat Government is crying for grants... you attack us every time but how will you explain the ghost voters that swell the voters' lists causing you to win elections... from where this 40 lakh votes came," she asked in an apparent reference to the Maharashtra Assembly elections.

"You send ED and CBI to frighten the opposition into silence but allow your own corruption to go unchecked," Banerjee said roundly blaming the BJP for winning elections by fudging the voters' list and manipulating the Election Commission.

Banerjee was speaking to the

media after the State Finance Minister Chandrima Bhattacharya on Wednesday placed the last full-time Budget before the next year's Assembly elections. Saying that she was ready to take on the BJP she said, "though the BJP has introduced lakhs of fake voters from Bihar in the voters' lists (some other States) ... we will not allow them to do that in Bengal our administration is quite alert about that... we will thwart your plans."

Earlier state Finance Minister Bhattacharya presented a ₹3.89-Lakh Crore budget for 2025-26 with a significant focus on social welfare, and announced a four per cent hike in Dearness Allowance (DA) for State government

employees. The State Government employees who had been fighting a long-drawn case in the Calcutta High Court and then in the Supreme Court would now get a 18 per cent DA as compared to their central counterparts that get 53 per cent.

For the first time speaking vehemently on the Kumbh Mela deaths she said, in other places they ask for setting up commissions but how many commissions they set up after the deaths in Kumbh Mela where there is no account of how many people died... they stopped media from entering the area for full 24 hours... they blocked internet and did everything to hide the number of

deaths... I was told how dead bodies were thrown in the river... we saw similar things happening during the corona... thousands of sandals lay strewn in places as testimony to the number of deaths during the stampede." About 30 pilgrims had died in the stampede on January 29 at Prayagraj.

"There was no plan to manage the crowd... everything was concentrated on VIP movement... whereas here in Ganga Sagar I do not visit the Mela during the main occasion so as not to create problem in crowd management... this was not so in Prayagraj," Banerjee said.

Abhijit Mukherjee quits TMC, joins Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA

Trinamool Congress leader and former MP Abhijit Mukherjee on Wednesday returned to the Congress after a gap of four years. Mukherjee is the son of former President Pranab Mukherjee.

Mukherjee who joined the Congress in the presence of AICC in-charge Ghulam Ahmad Mir and PCC president Subhankar Sarkar said it was like "ghar wapsi" or homecoming for him.

When asked whether rejoining Congress was a politically correct move, given Congress' condition in the State, he said, "It does not matter what the Congress's situation is. I went there due



Photo: File photo

to a personal reason, I do not want to disclose. We carry forward orders, we do what responsibility we are given." Sarkar said that Mukherjee's rejoining the Congress would strengthen

the State party. His joining the Congress days after Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said that she will not ally with the tricolor party which had nothing left in it in the State.



www.dailypioneer.com

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

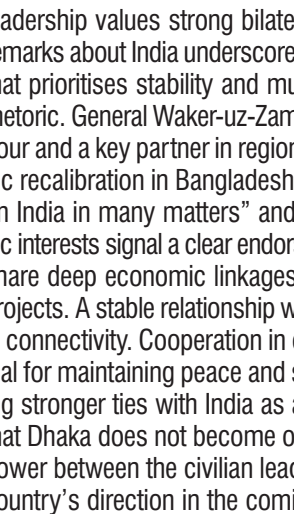
PAPER WITH PASSION

Yunus Govt in the crosshair

Bangladesh army shifts away from the Yunus Government as it calls for stronger ties with India amid chaos and downward slide

Bangladesh is currently facing a period of political uncertainty and unrest as the government led by Muhammad Yunus finds itself increasingly at odds with the country's powerful military establishment. The recent statements made by General Waker-uz-Zaman, the Chief of Army Staff, at the Dhaka International Marathon 2025, indicate a significant shift in the military's stance towards the civilian government. His emphasis on peace, stability and international cooperation—particularly with India—suggests growing dissatisfaction within the army ranks regarding the Yunus administration's policies and governance approach. The military in Bangladesh has historically played a crucial role in maintaining internal stability, often stepping in when political crises spiral out of control. With political tensions escalating under the Yunus government, the army appears to be distancing itself from the administration, signalling a potential realignment in the country's power dynamics. Several factors seem to be driving the military's dissatisfaction with the Yunus government. This indicates the military's concerns over the deteriorating economic conditions and increasing social divisions under Yunus's leadership. Persistent political unrest could be damaging to foreign investments and economic growth, both of which are essential for national development.

The military appears to be worried about governance inefficiencies and security concerns, especially as political violence and mass protests become more frequent. The Yunus government's inability to control these disruptions may be viewed as a failure to ensure stability, a key concern for the army. Bangladesh's military leadership values strong bilateral relations with key regional powers. General Waker's remarks about India underscore the army's desire for a pragmatic foreign policy approach that prioritises stability and mutual benefits rather than ideological stances or populist rhetoric. General Waker-uz-Zaman's statement emphasising India as an important neighbour and a key partner in regional security and economic cooperation suggests a strategic recalibration in Bangladesh's foreign policy. His remarks that Bangladesh "depends on India in many matters" and that both countries should respect each other's strategic interests signal a clear endorsement of closer ties with New Delhi. India and Bangladesh share deep economic linkages, including trade, energy cooperation and infrastructure projects. A stable relationship with India ensures continued economic growth and regional connectivity. Cooperation in counterterrorism efforts and border management is crucial for maintaining peace and stability. Bangladesh's military leadership might be viewing stronger ties with India as a means to maintain a balanced foreign policy, ensuring that Dhaka does not become overly reliant on any single regional power. The balance of power between the civilian leadership and the military will be crucial in determining the country's direction in the coming months.



leadership values strong bilateral relations with key regional powers. General Waker's remarks about India underscore the army's desire for a pragmatic foreign policy approach that prioritises stability and mutual benefits rather than ideological stances or populist rhetoric. General Waker-uz-Zaman's statement emphasising India as an important neighbour and a key partner in regional security and economic cooperation suggests a strategic recalibration in Bangladesh's foreign policy. His remarks that Bangladesh "depends on India in many matters" and that both countries should respect each other's strategic interests signal a clear endorsement of closer ties with New Delhi. India and Bangladesh share deep economic linkages, including trade, energy cooperation and infrastructure projects. A stable relationship with India ensures continued economic growth and regional connectivity. Cooperation in counterterrorism efforts and border management is crucial for maintaining peace and stability. Bangladesh's military leadership might be viewing stronger ties with India as a means to maintain a balanced foreign policy, ensuring that Dhaka does not become overly reliant on any single regional power. The balance of power between the civilian leadership and the military will be crucial in determining the country's direction in the coming months.

PICTALK



Devotees perform rituals during the Thaipusam festival at Vadapalani Murugan temple, in Chennai

Breaking barriers: Building a future for women in science

Trailblazing women scientists continue to defy the odds, proving that inclusion is not just a matter of fairness but a necessity for scientific and societal progress

In the 21st century, where scientific breakthroughs continue to shape our world, the persistent underrepresentation of women in science remains a glaring issue. Women have been at the forefront of some of the greatest scientific achievements across the globe in diverse fields from basic science to space science. Despite these inspiring role models, systemic barriers continue to stifle women's participation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). It's time we confront these challenges and build a future where women can truly thrive in science. What kind of scientific world are we building if we exclude half of our population? Without the full participation of women, we lose access to a vast pool of talent, creativity, and innovative solutions that could address some of our biggest challenges. Many girls are discouraged from pursuing science from a young age due to stereotypes that frame these fields as "unsuitable" or "too difficult." The so-called "leaky pipeline" begins to take its toll as early



as high school, with fewer girls opting for science-related studies and careers. Even for those who break through these initial hurdles, the challenges persist in higher education and professional life. Women in research face a lack of mentorship, unequal access to funding and systemic biases in hiring and promotions. The numbers speak for themselves: UNESCO reports that only 35 per cent of STEM students globally are women, and their representation in leadership roles remains even lower. In India, the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) confirms that while the number of women pursuing science has grown, their presence in top research positions and leadership roles is still dismal. Despite these odds, many Indian women scientists have

defied the status quo and achieved remarkable success. Dr Indira Hinduja revolutionised reproductive medicine by developing India's first test-tube baby in 1986 and pioneering the gamete intrafallopian transfer (GIFT) technique. Dr Soumya Swaminathan's leadership as Chief Scientist at the World Health Organization (WHO) played a crucial role in global health policy. Kalpana Kalahasti, a senior scientist at ISRO, was instrumental in India's triumphant Chandrayaan-3 mission and earned a spot in Nature's list of notable figures in 2023. These trailblazers not only pushed the boundaries of scientific knowledge but also broke societal barriers, paving the way for future generations of women in science. Does this make any difference to the society? Society benefits from more inclusive and comprehensive solutions when women are at the forefront of scientific innovation. Areas like maternal health, gender-specific medicine and community health interventions often flourish because of women scientists who understand these challenges first-

hand. Inclusion isn't just about fairness—it's about enriching science itself. So, how do we move forward? Building a future for women in science requires collective effort on multiple fronts. We must dismantle the structural barriers hindering women's advancement, provide mentorship programmes and promote policies that ensure equal hiring, funding, and career progression opportunities. Educational institutions should actively encourage girls to pursue STEM fields, while workplaces must offer flexible work environments that allow women to balance personal and professional responsibilities. It is time to tear down these barriers and build a future where every young girl who dreams of becoming a scientist can do so without limitations. When women are given equal opportunities to contribute to science, we all stand to gain—from groundbreaking discoveries to a more inclusive and prosperous world.

(The writer is the Dean-Academic Affairs, Garden City University, Bangalore, views are personal)



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

hand. Inclusion isn't just about fairness—it's about enriching science itself. So, how do we move forward? Building a future for women in science requires collective effort on multiple fronts. We must dismantle the structural barriers hindering women's advancement, provide mentorship programmes and promote policies that ensure equal hiring, funding, and career progression opportunities. Educational institutions should actively encourage girls to pursue STEM fields, while workplaces must offer flexible work environments that allow women to balance personal and professional responsibilities. It is time to tear down these barriers and build a future where every young girl who dreams of becoming a scientist can do so without limitations. When women are given equal opportunities to contribute to science, we all stand to gain—from groundbreaking discoveries to a more inclusive and prosperous world.

(The writer is the Dean-Academic Affairs, Garden City University, Bangalore, views are personal)

Mann ki baat: Leading the global revival of radio



SANTOSH MATHEW

As we celebrate World Radio Day, Mann Ki Baat reminds us that the essence of communication remains the same—connecting, inspiring and bringing people together

Radio is not just a medium; it is a lifeline that transcends borders, connects people and amplifies voices. On World Radio Day, as the world celebrates the power of this enduring platform, India stands at the forefront of a remarkable communication revolution. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's monthly broadcast, Mann Ki Baat, which recently aired its 118th episode, exemplifies how radio is experiencing a renaissance in the digital age, proving to be one of the most effective tools of governance, inspiration, and soft power diplomacy. When UNESCO designated February 13 as World Radio Day in 2011, the objective was clear: to recognise the influence of radio in fostering dialogue, spreading awareness, and bridging communities worldwide.

In India, Mann Ki Baat is a testimony to the enduring power of radio. Launched in 2014, this monthly programme has transformed into one of the largest and most effective communication experiments in the world, reaching millions of listeners not just in India but globally. With an unparalleled ability to engage audiences through storytelling, Modi's initiative underscores the relevance of radio in an era dominated by digital noise. At a time when many predicted the decline of traditional radio, Mann Ki Baat has revived and redefined its significance. The programme's strength lies in its simplicity and relatability. Every episode delivers not just policy discussions but also inspirational stories of common citizens, grassroots innovations, cultural heritage and national achievements. The 118th episode was no different, weaving narratives that resonated with the spirit of nation-building, environmental consciousness, and collective responsibility. Beyond its national appeal, Mann Ki Baat has become an instrument of India's soft power diplomacy. The global Indian diaspora tunes in eagerly, fostering a sense of connection with the homeland. The broadcast's reach extends beyond national boundaries, often being



translated into multiple languages, including regional South Asian tongues, strengthening India's diplomatic and cultural ties with neighbouring nations. As India emerges as a global leader, leveraging radio as a tool for soft power projection enhances its image as a nation that values dialogue, shared heritage and cooperation. South Asia, a region bound by deep historical, cultural, and linguistic ties, finds an unexpected bridge in Mann Ki Baat. The programme's themes—self-reliance, community-driven initiatives, environmental sustainability and youth empowerment—are not just relevant to India but also resonate with India's neighbours. In an era where integration efforts in South Asia often face political roadblocks, the revival of radio as a medium of cultural and ideological exchange holds immense potential. India's radio diplomacy, through Mann Ki Baat, can become a catalyst for fostering deeper South Asian engagement, promoting shared developmental narratives, and creating common aspirations among regional populations. The 118th episode once again demonstrated how radio can be used as a participatory medium. Modi's interactions with citizens, his references to



AS INDIA EMERGES AS A GLOBAL LEADER, LEVERAGING RADIO AS A TOOL FOR SOFT POWER PROJECTION ENHANCES ITS IMAGE AS A NATION THAT VALUES DIALOGUE, SHARED HERITAGE AND COOPERATION

letters and messages from listeners, and his emphasis on people-centric governance make Mann Ki Baat an inclusive space for dialogue. Unlike social media platforms that are often fragmented and dominated by echo chambers, radio, through this programme, emerges as a unifying force that connects the masses uninterrupted and intimately. From the fishermen in Tamil Nadu to the farmers in Punjab, from students in Meghalaya to entrepreneurs in Gujarat, Mann Ki Baat speaks to every Indian, transcending linguistic, geographic, and socio-economic barriers. It harnesses the power of storytelling to amplify the voices of unsung heroes, small businesses, and cultural custodians. Radio has always been a tool of influence, but Mann Ki Baat takes it a step further by combining traditional broadcasting with modern digital integration. The program is simultaneously aired on multiple platforms, including community radio stations, AIR (All India Radio), podcasts, and social media channels. This hybrid model ensures that the message reaches every demographic, from the rural farmer with a transistor radio to the urban professional tuning in via a smartphone app. On World Radio Day, as glob-

al discussions revolve around the revival and impact of radio, Mann Ki Baat stands as a shining example of how the medium can be harnessed for nation-building and diplomacy. Countries across the world can draw lessons from India's use of radio as a tool for constructive engagement, leadership communication, and global outreach. In an era where polarization is rampant, radio's ability to create a sense of collective consciousness is more valuable than ever. India, with its vast diversity, has found in Mann Ki Baat a unifying voice that reflects the aspirations of its people. The power of voice, the magic of words, and the intimacy of audio storytelling are elements that make this programme not just a political initiative but a cultural phenomenon. As the world looks for ways to reinvigorate traditional communication platforms, India's example showcases that radio is not just surviving but thriving in the digital age. Mann Ki Baat is leading this revival, proving that in the cacophony of digital noise, the human voice still holds the power to unite and inspire. (The writer is an Associate Professor Centre For South Asian Studies, Pondicherry Central University. Views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

AI FOR PUBLIC GOOD

Madam — Artificial intelligence has become a truly global technology. The adoption of AI in healthcare, education, finance, labour and transportation is impacting society on a global scale while fundamental breakthroughs are being facilitated by research collaborations around the world. Its rapid deployment also creates major challenges in terms of the reliability of information, the protection of basic rights and accessibility. It is the international community's responsibility to maintain balance in our societies and to craft AI that respects universal values. The Paris AI Summit has been focused on several key themes related to opportunities, benefits and governance of AI. Also, these themes include AI for public good, for global AI governance, for innovation and culture and for environmentally sustainable AI solutions. The aim of the summit is to strike a balance between technological advancement and the preservation of universal values. The Paris AI Summit is of significant importance for the future of AI due to its focus on global governance, accessibility and ethical development of AI. The AI Action Committee at Paris, co-chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, shed light on India and France's joint work in the five dedicated working groups to tackle key issues for tomorrow: Public interest AI, future of work, innovation and culture Trust in AI and global AI governance. The role of India in the Paris AI Summit is laudable.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

US TARIFFS ON ALUMINIUM, STEEL

Madam — US President Donald Trump has virtually dropped another bomb on the global economy with the announcement of levying a 25 percent duty on steel and aluminium imports and reciprocal duty on all other imports from all countries. India is one of the largest exporters of steel to the US. While the world was aware of Trump's unconventional policies, his blanket threat to impose reciprocal tariffs—without any exceptions—almost upends the World Trade

Gandhi's insight on education



propos the article "Rekindling Gandhian values in education." Mahatma Gandhi wrote a few articles in a simple manner on the value of education that should serve as a big motivation for the students of our country. If the students read those writings and apply them in the modern perspective, they will surely give a new dimension to our education system. Gandhi played a significant role in value

education by emphasising the importance of moral and ethical principles. He encouraged educators to teach values like truth, non-violence and respect for others. He felt that instilling these values in students would help them become responsible and compassionate individuals. Gandhi described himself as a curious and eager learner during his student days. He valued education and believed that it was essential for personal growth. We have to apply Mahatma Gandhi's ideas on value education as a demand of time. Gandhi's unique and refined views about value education are not only important but are worth applying not only in India but also in the rest of the world.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

Organisation's (WTO) mandate to promote free trade by eliminating tariffs, quotas and other restrictions.

The free trade regime in the last 20 years kept inflation in manufactured products under control globally. However, Trump's populist agenda to find jobs for his support base consisting of semi-literate people in the US could damage the US-led alliance based on the Bretton Woods system. While the immediate threat from Trump's tariff on steel and aluminium could be negligible, the Indian economy could face the heat from fleeing foreign investors which could affect stock valuations and rupee weakness which could result in imported inflation.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

AFFORESTATION NEEDED TO SAVE FORESTS

Madam — It is indeed a matter of concern that a government agency like NHAI is overenthusiastic in felling a huge number of trees but not interested in attending to the compensatory afforestation. The government brought amendments in the Forest Act last year, which is sure to reduce

the forest cover in the country. Already the country's forest cover has come down from the recommended level of 1/3 to 1/5 of the land area.

Now we can expect further deterioration in the status, as using forest land is permitted for shikar and industrial activities. The centuries-old valuable thick forests in the Northeast are threatened with their very existence in the coming years. Mines are given to private players to hasten the process of exploiting the fossil fuels. This is an act that goes against the concern of everyone over the fast-changing climate. Every mine project begins with the destruction of forests in the vast sheet of hill areas, which will take many decades to reconstruct by afforestation efforts. It is high time the moments to save forests take the form of a people's movement to sensitise all the concerned and save the globe to make it fit enough to live. The apex court's concern conveyed to NHAI is welcome.

Dattaprasad Shirodkar | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

ONE FAITH
ONE WORLDIt's easy to point fingers when things go wrong,
but true growth begins with self-reflection

RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

All of us have heard the famous phrase "United We Stand, Divided We Fall" during our school days through the simple story of an old farmer who, on his deathbed, taught the importance of unity to his disunited sons through a bundle of sticks. That story still holds an important place in our society and has even gained popularity because discord, disunity, strife and warfare have assumed unprecedented proportions in the modern world. Today, one of the most arduous challenges that face humanity is to establish harmony among people of different religions.

There is no doubt that political and religious leaders have time and again endeavoured to bring people onto a common platform and find ways and means to forge better understanding and acceptance of each faith. But despite their hard efforts, not much has changed. Hence, the greatest question of all at present is whether can the diverse religions and faiths ever be united. If so, then how? If we walk down history lane, we would find that one of the important reasons why the need for religious harmony originated is that the most



violent wars and conflicts in human history were based on religious intolerance and hatred. It might be a shocking statement, but it's the harsh reality that religions, which are supposed to make people more peaceful and loving, have today become the biggest cause of discord and bloodshed in the world. It's so appalling to see organized groups across the globe sworn to spread terror in the name of religion and carry out ethnic cleansing in the name of removing evil from the world.

If we closely examine the growth of each faith through the centuries, it reveals an interesting pattern. Even though there are some common values and tenets in all faiths, there are far too many misconceptions and conflicting beliefs that have continually fanned mistrust and hostility among the masses. It's quite imperative to know that, at the time of their inception, every religion had the power of purity, truth, and unity.

Gradually, cracks, factionalism, shallowness, delusion, deception and ritualistic adherence devoid of spiritual significance began to appear. Hence, instead of empowering spiritual values, religions perpetuated dogmas, disciplines, and barriers that segregate people on many lines. Many fall prey to the very evils they preach against, such as the lust for power, pleasure and money. There can be better understanding, tolerance, and acceptance of each faith, but there cannot be unity unless there is a single or common belief. So, what's the best way to reach a common solution acceptable to all faiths? According to divine knowledge imparted by the Supreme Almighty, everything in the eternal cycle of the human world drama goes through a change, which means that everything degrades from a perfect state to an imperfect, fragmented state. Be it human souls, nature, religions, or civilisations, almost everything passes through the sato (pure), rajo (mixed) and tamo (impure) stages as the time cycle spins from the Golden Age to the Iron Age.

As of today, we are witnessing the tamo-pradhan (most degraded) stage of all aspects of human existence, and religions are no exception to this process of change. Hence, we can envisage a unified faith only in terms of the spirituality inherent in all faiths. It is said that God is Truth, and true religion embodies that truth. Hence, when humans embrace that truth in their hearts, there will be a unified world. So, let us all stand united with one unified faith to welcome the new world where truth, peace and harmony will prevail.

(The writer is a spiritual educator and popular columnist; views are personal)

The MBA dilemma: Why degrees
alone no longer guarantee success

DINESH SOOD

Once considered a guaranteed gateway to lucrative careers, the MBA is under scrutiny as unemployment rates rise—even among graduates from elite institutions



The job market for MBA graduates has reached a critical juncture, sparking conversations that resonate with a growing number of aspirants and professionals grappling with the changing realities of employment. Once seen as a surefire ticket to high-paying corporate roles, the MBA degree is scrutinised for relevance in an evolving economic landscape. This issue is not confined to India alone; even graduates from elite institutions like Harvard, Stanford, and Wharton feel the squeeze. The Wall Street Journal recently reported that in 2024, 23 per cent of Harvard Business School's MBA graduates were jobless. Other top-tier business schools like Stanford and Wharton have seen similar dips, with unemployment rates hovering around 20 per cent.

The problem is not just limited to the United States. According to the International Labour Organisation's Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024, 13 per cent of the global youth labour force was unemployed in 2023—a staggering figure representing nearly 65 million people. This unsettling trend makes traditional, generalist MBA degrees less appealing than targeted skill certifications. A recent Forbes report highlighted how some MBA graduates have succeeded by lowering their expectations and opting for less conventional roles. In an era where industries are shifting dynamically, the rigid, cookie-cutter MBA model is struggling to keep pace. The need for a 360-degree reimagining of this degree has never been more pressing.

Degrees Alone Won't Cut It Anymore One fundamental truth is becoming evident: degrees alone no longer guarantee job or entrepreneurship security. The future belongs to professionals who continuously upskill and adapt to meet the ever-changing demands of the workforce. What used to be a clear, structured career trajectory for MBA graduates—typically leading to consulting, finance, or management roles—is now blurred. The stark reality is that a prestigious qualification, while valuable, no longer provides



WHAT
USED TO BE A
CLEAR,
STRUCTURED
CAREER
TRAJECTORY
FOR MBA
GRADUATES—
TYPICALLY
LEADING TO
CONSULTING,
FINANCE, OR
MANAGEMENT
ROLES—IS
NOW BLURRED

immunity against unemployment or underemployment. Even more telling is the global shift in job seekers' mindsets. While travelling to Canada, I recently observed an MBA graduate running a salon branded "MBA Barber Shop." This reflects an important reality—many skilled gig jobs are vital for holistic growth, but traditional academic pathways have often dismissed such careers as unworthy. Yet, most developed nations respect one's skills rather than qualifications or family background. We must ask: Why doesn't Indian society do the same? **Skill Respect Over Degree Prestige**

The changing job landscape demands a fundamental shift in how we perceive employment, education, and career success. Skill acquisition is about individuals learning new competencies and families being sensitised to alternative career paths. It is about communities understanding the implications of an evolving job market. It is about cities and regions acknowledging and respecting those who possess the skills necessary to sustain a livelihood, irrespective of whether they hold an MBA or a B.Tech degree.

The MBA has been a gateway to professional and financial success for decades. However, the economy's evolution demands a departure from this narrow thinking. In India and many other countries, social conditioning has led to an unspoken hierarchy of professions. White-collar corporate roles are celebrated, while vocational or blue-collar jobs are often overlooked. This mindset is outdated and damaging in a world where adaptability and skills matter more than mere academic credentials. **A 360-Degree Skills Revolution** What we need now is a complete rethinking of education and skill development. The traditional MBA

must evolve from a broad-spectrum business degree into a dynamic, skills-focused program that integrates emerging industry trends. A 360-degree approach should include everything from finance to marketing and HR. MBA programmes must incorporate niche skills such as data analytics, digital transformation, sustainability management and entrepreneurship in beauty-wellness, the most emerging sector. Instead of theoretical coursework, there should be a stronger focus on apprenticeships, live projects and problem-solving in real-world business scenarios.

Understanding AI, automation, and emerging technologies should be a core part of the curriculum to prepare graduates for future-ready roles. Rather than treating entrepreneurship as an alternative, business schools should actively promote and equip students with the skills to start and sustain their ventures. Business schools must recognise the gig economy's rise and train students to navigate freelance and contract-based work models. **Beyond Livelihood—Dignity in Work**

Redefining career success means placing equal value on all forms of work. Whether a person is an MBA graduate managing a corporate division, an AI consultant, a skilled tradesperson, or a self-employed barber, their ability to contribute meaningfully to society matters. The prestige of a job should be measured not by its title but by its impact and sustainability. Parents, educators, and policymakers have a role in fostering this change. We must instil in young minds that success is not confined to traditional white-collar professions. Regardless of their chosen field, a skilled individual should be celebrated just as much as a corporate executive. If an MBA graduate decides to become an artisan,

a chef, a salon owner or a renewable energy technician, they should be seen as pioneers, not failures. **The Need for Institutional Change**

Educational institutions must move beyond outdated frameworks and align themselves with industry demands. Business schools should foster adaptive thinking, preparing students for unconventional but lucrative career paths. The focus should be on problem-solving, digital proficiency, and entrepreneurial agility rather than rigid academic theories.

Governments and industries should also contribute by incentivising skill-based education. Scholarships, subsidies, and awareness campaigns can help shift societal perspectives on what constitutes a respectable and rewarding career.

Conclusion: A Future Built on Skills Once a golden ticket to corporate success, the MBA faces an existential crisis. If it is to remain relevant, it must undergo radical transformation. A degree is no longer a guarantee; what truly matters is an individual's ability to adapt, innovate, and deliver value in an ever-changing world.

As a society, we need to support and encourage young professionals in their quest to discover their true potential—even in jobs that were once considered "odd." In reality, no job is odd; what matters is its necessity and impact. By embracing a 360-degree perspective on skills and careers, we can build a more inclusive, resilient, and future-ready workforce. The time for change is now.

(The writer is a Co-Founder and MD of Orane International, a Training Partner with the National Skill Development Corporation, and a Network Member, of India International Skill Centres. View express are personal)

Ethics-driven AI in predictive healthcare: Building a foundation of trust and accountability

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is revolutionising predictive healthcare, offering early disease detection, personalised treatment plans and improved patient outcomes

In today's rapidly advancing healthcare landscape, Artificial Intelligence (AI) plays a transformative role, particularly in predictive healthcare. AI's ability to analyse vast datasets enables early disease detection, personalised treatment plans and improved patient outcomes. The global AI in healthcare market, valued at approximately \$15.4 billion in 2022, is projected to surge to \$187.95 billion by 2030, growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 37 per cent.

Yet, with this potential comes a responsibility to ensure that AI is used responsibly, ethically, and equitably. Establishing a framework that prioritises privacy, fairness, transparency and accountability is essential to protect patient rights and



GERALD JAIDEEP

maintain public trust. The Power of AI in Predictive Healthcare AI's role in predictive healthcare is primarily driven by machine learning and data analytics, empowering it to forecast diseases, assess risk factors, and recommend preventive measures. By examining patterns in com-

prehensive datasets, such as medical histories, genetic profiles, lifestyle information and real-time health data, AI can predict the likelihood of conditions ranging from diabetes and cardiovascular diseases to complex ailments like cancer and Alzheimer's.

This shift from reactive to preventive care can ease the burden on healthcare systems and improve patient quality of life. For example, AI-based diagnostics for diabetic retinopathy have shown an accuracy rate of over 87 per cent, enabling early detection and timely intervention. Similarly, IBM Watson's Oncology AI has achieved 90 per cent accuracy in cancer treatment recommendations that align with those of human oncologists. However, to har-

ness AI's potential responsibly, it's crucial to address the ethical challenges it introduces. **Safeguarding Data Privacy and Security**

The ethical use of AI in healthcare hinges on the responsible management of patient data. Predictive healthcare AI relies heavily on sensitive information, including medical, genetic, and behavioural data. Yet, the need for privacy is ever more pressing—72 per cent of Americans express significant concerns about data privacy in AI applications, particularly in healthcare.

In 2022, nearly 50 million healthcare records were exposed to data breaches in the United States, underscoring the need for strong data security protocols. To protect this information, AI systems must



prioritise rigorous security measures such as encryption, anonymisation and regular audits.

Patients should also provide informed consent, clearly explaining how their data will be used and stored. By centring data protection in AI development, healthcare can ensure patient confidentiality and foster the trust necessary for AI's

continued adoption. **Addressing Bias for Fair and Equitable Predictions**

AI's reliance on historical data introduces the risk of bias, which can lead to predictions that disproportionately impact certain demographic groups. Research has shown that AI models trained on biased data result in 35 per cent more misdiagnoses for Black and Hispanic patients compared to white patients. In healthcare, such biases could exacerbate disparities for marginalised populations.

Ensuring fairness requires AI systems trained on diverse, representative datasets, as well as continuous monitoring and adjustments to detect and correct biases. A study published in Nature Medicine found that AI systems trained on

inclusive datasets significantly reduce diagnostic discrepancies, underscoring the importance of inclusivity in training data. Collaboration with healthcare professionals and ethicists is also vital to developing AI solutions that are equitable and serve all patients effectively.

Promoting Transparency and Explainability in AI Models The complexity of AI algorithms often results in "black box" decision-making, where the reasoning behind predictions is not fully understood by users or developers. In predictive healthcare, this lack of transparency can hinder trust and adoption among patients and healthcare providers alike. In a survey by the American Medical Association, 67 per cent of healthcare providers

expressed reservations about using "black-box" AI systems, highlighting the need for explainable AI. Currently, only 23 per cent of AI-based diagnostic tools meet explainability standards to ensure transparency. By developing interpretable models, researchers can make AI's decision-making processes accessible to healthcare providers, enabling them to communicate AI-driven recommendations clearly and fostering patient involvement in care decisions.

As AI continues to advance, a strong ethical framework will be essential to uphold public trust and ensure that AI-driven healthcare remains a force for good.

(The writer is CEO, Medvarity; views are personal)

India thrashes England by 142 runs, sweeps series 3-0

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD
A robust batting front led by the Shubman Gill's attractive century heralded India's 142-run hammering of England in the third and final ODI as the hosts completed a dominant 3-0 clean sweep to culminate preparations for the Champions Trophy, here on Wednesday. India ticked all the remaining boxes with vice-captain Gill (112) following up his twin fifties earlier in the series with a seventh ODI ton of his career while middle-order mainstays Virat Kohli (52) and Shreyas Iyer (78) pushed India to a formidable 356 in the first half. Indian bowlers then took over the mantle to complete the England demolition job, bundling out the visitors for a mere 214 in 34.2 overs to complete a comprehensive victory — their second largest in ODIs in terms of runs against a familiar opponent. There was no change in the script for England, who came crashing down against spin after a sparkling start against

pace, which was provided by the pair of Ben Duckett (34) and Phil Salt (24) in tow. The slowness of the surface aided Indian bowlers as strike-making became difficult as the match progressed. Duckett took charge of England's response early on but played one shot too many. After smacking Arshdeep Singh (2/33) for four consecutive boundaries around the park in the fifth over, he again went after the left-arm seamer but was deceived by the 'pace off' knuckle ball. The mishit was collected cleanly by India skipper Rohit Sharma at mid-off and Arshdeep soon bounced out Salt, albeit off a slower one which the batter hit meekly to Axar Patel for a simple grab. Tom Banton gave a good example of himself playing his first ODI against India, hitting a couple of attractive reverse sweeps against spinners but he could not push on beyond a 41-ball 38 with four fours and two sixes. Joe Root perished for just 24 when an inside edge off Axar (2/22) crashed into his



stumps and Harshit Rana (2/31) hastened the end of England's resistance by getting the rid of Harry Brook (19) and Jos Buttler (6) in quick succession. From 84/2 after 10 overs, England's resolve petered out as Indian bowlers tightened the screws with regular strikes and the visitors also lacked gumption on a pitch which remained true in its nature. Earlier, Gill led the way with a fluent 112 while Kohli and Iyer also cashed in on ideal conditions in their last outing before the Champions Trophy, helping India set a 357-run target. Gill anchored India's innings en route to his seventh ODI ton — 112 off 104 balls

of scoring a century each across the three international formats at the same venue. Gill, meanwhile, has also scored an IPL hundred here at the Narendra Modi Stadium. Attacking the fast bowlers and spinners alike, Gill's knock was replete with rich strokes particularly down the ground. The opener displayed immaculate footwork at the crease early on to take the attack to the opposition and remained resolute to score off spin, until he was cleaned up by Adil Rashid (4/64). On his part, Kohli took his time to find the rhythm and when he did, the batting mainstay looked hitting his strides. Kohli made the most of a juicy overpitched delivery from Mark Wood which he drove through the covers for his first four, then got on top of the ball from Saqib Mahmood to swat it for another boundary through mid-wicket and punished the England pacer for being wayward as he cut him for his third four. While his stroke play was compelling in the run-a-ball fifty for his 73rd half-century, there were elements of struggle against leg-spinner Rashid. Rashid continued to have wood over Kohli as soon after he raised his bat for fifty, the England spinner had him caught behind with a loopy leg-break that took an outside edge before settling in the wicketkeeper's gloves. This was the fifth time Rashid has dismissed Kohli in ODIs. Kohli was stranded 37 runs short of becoming only the third batter ever to make 14,000 ODI runs, missing a personal landmark like his teammate Rohit Sharma earlier in the innings. It is expected to be completed during Champions Trophy. Coming off a terrific century in second ODI, Rohit (1) could not even get a start as a delivery from Wood which was angled in, straightened enough to take the outside edge and Phil Salt collected a sharp catch. Iyer only had himself to blame for missing out on a triple-digit score after he was caught behind on a delivery fired down the leg stump by Rashid, one that he needlessly chased and edged.



Starc withdraws, Smith to lead Australia in Champions Trophy

PTI ■ SYDNEY
Steve Smith-led Australia will be without their frontline pace attack at the Champions Trophy (CT) after fast bowler Mitchell Starc withdrew from the tournament citing personal reasons. The ODI World Cup holders have been forced to make several changes to their 15-member provisional squad due to injuries to captain Pat Cummins, pacer Josh Hazlewood, and all-rounder Mitchell Marsh, along with Marcus Stoinis' surprise retirement. "We understand and respect Mitch's decision," Chair of men's selectors George Bailey said on Wednesday. "Mitch is deeply respected for his commitment to international cricket and the priority he places on performing for Australia." Starc, who appeared to be in discomfort due to a left ankle issue during the latter stages of the final Test in Galle last week, will also miss the upcoming ODI series in Sri Lanka starting Wednesday. "His well-documented ability to play through pain and adversity, as well as forgoing opportunities in other parts of his career to put his country first, should be applauded," Bailey added. Cricket Australia said Starc has requested privacy and will

not be commenting on his decision. The development comes as a major blow for Australia, who will be without the three pacers — Cummins, Hazlewood and Starc — who played a crucial role in their 2023 ODI World Cup victory. "His loss is, of course, a blow for the Champions Trophy campaign, but it provides an opportunity for someone else to make their mark on the tournament," Bailey said. Smith, who is leading the side on the tour of Sri Lanka, will captain the team in the absence of Cummins and Marsh during the tournament, which will be played across Pakistan and the UAE. "The squad has changed significantly over the past month due to untimely injuries and the retirement of Marcus Stoinis," Bailey remarked. Pacers Spencer Johnson, Nathan Ellis, Sean Abbott, and Ben Dwarshuis have been named in Australia's final 15-man squad for the Champions Trophy. "The upside is that we have been able to call on players who have had international exposure and success over the past 12 months," Bailey said. "A strong core of some of our most experienced players will provide a strong foundation in our attempt to win this edition of the Champions Trophy.



Ghazanfar ruled out of both Champions Trophy and IPL

PTI ■ KABUL
Teenage Afghanistan off-spinner AM Ghazanfar has been ruled out of both the ICC Champions Trophy (CT) and the IPL due to a lower back fracture that will keep him on the sidelines for at least four months, the country's cricket board announced on Wednesday. Left-arm spinner Nangeyalya Kharote, originally named as a reserve, has replaced the 18-year-old in the main squad for Champions Trophy, which will be held in Pakistan and the UAE from February 19. The 20-year-old Kharote is a left-arm spinner and has played seven ODIs and six T20 Internationals since making his debut last year. Ghazanfar sustained the injury during Afghanistan's tour of Zimbabwe late last year, sidelining him for "at least four months". "AM Ghazanfar has been ruled out of the ICC Champions Trophy due to a fracture in the L4 vertebra (located in the lower back), specifically in the left pars interarticularis," the Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) posted on X. "He sustained the injury during Afghanistan's recent tour of Zimbabwe and will be sidelined for a minimum

of four months, remaining under treatment during this period," it added. The IPL is scheduled to take place from March 21 to May 25 and Ghazanfar was to make his maiden appearance at the event after being bought by Mumbai Indians. The ACB also informed that off-spinner Mujeeb Ur Rahman will continue to miss ODI action "until he has fully recovered," despite playing for Paarl Royals in the SA20 through January and early February. Mujeeb, who was not included in the provisional squad for Champions Trophy, last played an ODI during the 2023 World Cup. Afghanistan will begin their Champions Trophy campaign against South Africa on February 21 in Karachi, followed by matches against England and Australia. **Afghanistan squad for Champions Trophy** Shahidi Hashmatullah (capt), Ibrahim Zadran, Ikram Alikhil (wk), Rahmanullah Gurbaz (wk), Sediqullah Atal, Rahmat Shah (vice-capt), Azmatullah Omarzai, Gulbadin Naib, Mohammad Nabi, Rashid Khan, Fareeh Ahmad, Fazalhaq, Farooqi, Nangeyalya Kharote, Naveed Zadran, Noor Ahmad.

India, England teams support BCCI's 'Donate Organs, Save Lives' campaign

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD
India and England cricket teams took the field for the third and final ODI here on Wednesday wearing green armbands to support the BCCI's initiative of "Donate Organs, Save Lives" campaign. The BCCI informed this in a statement shortly after the commencement of the match here at the Narendra Modi Stadium. "Both teams are wearing green arm bands to support BCCI's initiative 'Donate Organs, Save Lives'. The initiative is spearheaded by ICC Chairman Mr Jay Shah," the BCCI release stated. The initiative was announced by ICC chairman and former BCCI secretary Shah on Monday. Shah wrote on X, "On the occasion of the 3rd ODI between India and England in Ahmedabad on February 12th, we are proud to launch an awareness initiative — Donate Organs, Save Lives." "Sport has the power to inspire, unite, and create lasting impact beyond the field. Through this initiative, we urge everyone to take a step towards giving the greatest gift of all — the gift of life. "One pledge, one decision, can save multiple lives. Let's come together and make a difference!" he added. The initiative was supported by several Indian players, including Virat Kohli and vice-captain Shubman Gill. "Score the ultimate century. Your organs can help others live beyond your lifetime. Register as a donor and make every life count," Kohli said in a video shared by the BCCI. Gill added, "Be the captain of life. Just like a captain leads the team to victory, you can lead someone to life by pledging to donate your



organs." Other Indian cricketers to support the initiative were batters Shreyas Iyer and KL Rahul. "One donor can save up to eight lives. Pledge today and hit a six for humanity," Iyer said. Rahul added, "Play the ultimate winning shot. Your decision to donate your organs can be the match winning moment in someone's life. Be a hero off the field too."

Shikhar Dhawan among four event ambassadors for Champions Trophy

PTI ■ DUBAI
Former India opener Shikhar Dhawan was on Wednesday named as one of the four event ambassadors for the ICC Champions Trophy (CT) to be held in Pakistan and Dubai from February 19 to March 9. Besides Dhawan, the ICC has also named Pakistan's 2017 Champions Trophy winning captain Sarfaraz Ahmed, former Australia all-rounder Shane Watson, and New Zealand's legendary fast bowler, Tim Southee as event ambassadors. The quartet will write guest columns and will also attend matches, sharing their thoughts on the event, where the world's best eight teams will compete for the top honour. "It is such a special feeling to be part of a



Champions Trophy, and to be given the opportunity to enjoy the upcoming edition as an Ambassador is an honour," Dhawan said in an ICC release. "It's the ultimate competition

journey for everyone involved." As India's highest run-scorer in the Champions Trophy, with an outstanding 701 runs across two editions, Dhawan has long been one of the most iconic players in the history of the competition. He also holds the distinction of being the only player to win two consecutive Golden Bats (for the highest run-getter) in the tournament. His remarkable achievements include being named the Player of the Tournament in the 2013 edition, as well as holding the record for the most centuries in Champions Trophy history. "Some of my most cherished cricketing memories come from playing in the Champions Trophy. In the coming weeks, we will see the world's best teams pouring

their heart and soul into every match, with everything they have worked for on the line," said Dhawan. Sarfaraz was elated that Pakistan has got the opportunity to host the tournament. India will play their share of matches in Dubai. "I will never forget how special it felt to don the white jackets and lift the trophy aloft as Pakistan captain back in 2017...I am delighted to see the competition return to the cricket calendar and see my country given the opportunity to host such a special event," he said. Southee and Watson echoed the sentiment with the latter saying, "With the top eight teams going head-to-head for the iconic white jackets, we are sure to see some extraordinary do-or-die cricket across three thrilling weeks."

Letter No. 821 Dated. 11.02.2025
Government of Odisha "e" procurement Notice
Bid Identification No. TENDER ONLINE SNPR-16 OF 2024-25

- Name of the work : Building Works as per DTCN available in the website. www.tendersodisha.gov.in
- Total No. of Work : 01 (One) Nos.
- Approximate Estimated Cost : 61.72lakh
- Period of Completion : 9 (Nine) Calendar months
- Period and time of availability of bid document in the portal for bidding : 15.02.2025 at 11.00AM to 24.02.2025 up to 5.00 PM
- Date and time of opening of Tender : 25.02.2025 at 11.00AM (Technical Bid) & (Financial Bid will be intimated later on) S.E.R.W.Division, Sonepur
- Name and address of the officer inviting bid :
(1) Other details can be seen from detailed notice
(2) inviting tenders, available in website www.tendersodishagov.in
(3) Corrigendum if any shall only be published in the website: www.tenderodisha.gov.in

Executive Engineer,
Rural Works Division, Sonepur

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA, "e"-PROCUREMENT NOTICE
WORKS DEPARTMENT
E-mail: ceroads.bbsr@gmail.com
EOI Identification No. CE-Roads-I-02/2024-25

- The Chief Engineer (Roads-I), Odisha (the "Authority") on behalf of the Works Department, Government of Odisha (the "Government") invites Expression of Interest (EOI) from eligible consulting firms as mentioned below:
- Nature of work : Authority's Engineer Services
- No. of work : 1No.
- Available of bid document : From 10.00 A.M. of 15.02.2025 to 5.30 P.M of 06.03.2025
- Date of opening of Bid : Dt. 07.03.2025 at 11.30 A.M.
- The Bidders have to participate in ONLINE bidding only. Further details can be seen from the website: <https://tenderodisha.gov.in>. Any addendum / corrigendum / cancellation of tender can also be seen in the said website.

Chief Engineer (Roads-I), Odisha

ODISHA HYDRO POWER CORPORATION LTD.
OFFICE OF THE SENIOR GENERAL MANAGER (ELECTRICAL),
BALIMELA HYDRO ELECTRIC PROJECT,
BALIMELA, DIST. MALKANGIRI, PIN-764051 (ODISHA)
E-mail: unit.head_balimela@yahoo.com ibep.balimela@gmail.com
"e"-Procurement Notice
NOTICE INVITING TENDER NO. BHEP/ST/2024-25 DATED 11.02.2025

The Unit Head, Balimela Hydro Electric Project, Balimela, Dist- Malkangiri invites percentage rate bids in double cover system i.e. Cover-I (Technical Bid) & Cover II (Price bid) for the work through e-procurement from eligible contractors as detailed in the table below.

| Sl. No. | Name of the Work | Approx. Estimated cost in Rs. | EMD in Rs. | Class of Contractor | Cost of bid documents in Rs. | Period of Completion |
|---------|---|-------------------------------|------------|--|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| 01 | Construction of toilet with attached bathroom at Valve House including other repair works, BHEP, Balimela | 16,73,073.00 | 17,000.00 | 'D' & 'C' class Civil Contractors registered with the state Govt./Central Govt./JES/Railways | 6,000/- + GST @ 18% = 7,080/- | 120 days |

Availability of bid document in the portal: From 11:00 Hrs of 12.02.2025 to 24.02.2025 (Up to 17:00 Hrs)
Last date & time of submission of bid: Up to 17:00 Hrs of 24.02.2025
The date & Time of opening of the bid: 12:00 Hrs onwards of 25.02.2025 (Only Technical bid)
Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal <https://tendersodisha.gov.in>
Unit Head, BHEP, Balimela

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER
RURAL WORKS DIVISION, SUNDARGARH
E-Mail: rw_sundargarh@yahoo.co.in

E-PROCUREMENT NOTICE
BID IDENTIFICATION NO. ONLINE-SESNG-30 OF 2024-25

- Name of the Work :- Building Works
- Total No. of works :- 07 nos Building
- Estimated cost :- From Rs.16.81 Lakhs to Rs.33.99 Lakhs
- Class of contractor :- 'B', 'C' & 'D'
- Period of completion :- 03 & 06 calendar months
- Type of Tender :- Single Cover
- Other details

| Procurement Officer | Bid Identification No. | Availability of Tender On-line for bidding | |
|---|------------------------------------|--|------------------------------|
| | | From | To |
| 1 Superintending Engineer, Rural Works Division, Sundargarh. | 2 Online-SESNG-30 of 2024-25 | 3 17.02.2025 11.00 A.M | 4 27.02.2025 06.00 P.M |

Further details can be seen from the website www.tendersorissa.gov.in
Superintending Engineer,
Rural Works Division, Sundargarh