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BHUBANESWAR, SATURDAY FEBRUARY 15, 2025; PAGES 12 ₹4

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

INDIA AND MODI RETURN WITH MUSCLE FROM THE USA

- Terrorist to be extradited
- Defence ties to be bolstered

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump announced after talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi that India will buy more oil, gas and military hardware, including F-35 fighter jets, from America to bring down trade deficit but asserted that Washington will not spare New Delhi from reciprocal tariffs.

At his Oval Office in the White House on Thursday (Friday India time), Trump warmly welcomed Modi with a long handshake and a bear hug while describing the prime minister as a "great friend" for a long time and a "terrific" man.

The US president, at a joint media briefing with the Indian prime minister following the talks, said both sides are looking at striking a major trade deal soon while calling import duties imposed by India on certain US products as "very unfair" and "strong".

"Whatever India charges, we will charge them," Trump said, adding "We are being reciprocal with India."

The Modi-Trump meeting took place hours after the US President announced a new reciprocal tariff policy for all the trading partners of the US in the latest in a series of such actions initiated by his administration.

In his remarks, Trump said he and PM Modi have

reached an agreement that could potentially make the US the "number one supplier" of oil and gas to India, suggesting it to be part of measures to bring down the US trade deficit with India that stands at around USD 45 billion.

The US president also said that both sides have decided to expand the overall defence partnership.

"Starting this year, we will be increasing military sales to India by many billions of dollars," Trump said.

"We are also paving the way to ultimately provide India with F-35 stealth fighters," he added. The F35 jets are known as the most lethal, survivable and connected fighter aircraft in the world.

Trump also announced that India and the US will be working together like "never before" to confront the threat of radical Islamic terror across the world.

"I am pleased to announce that my administration has approved the extradition of one of the very evil people of the world," he said, referring to the extradition of 26/11 Mumbai attack plotter Tahawwur Rana to India.

Rana, currently detained at a metropolitan detention centre in Los Angeles, is known to be associated with P a k i s t a n i - A m e r i c a n terrorist David Coleman Headley, one of the main conspirators of the terror attack.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a meeting with US President Donald Trump at the White House, in Washington, DC, USA



A US military aircraft carrying 104 deported Indian immigrants upon its landing in Amritsar on February 5, 2025

More deportation flights to arrive

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHANDIGARH

A US plane carrying 119 illegal immigrants is likely to land at Amritsar airport on February 15, the second such batch of Indians deported by the Trump government as part of a crackdown it resolved to carry out when it was sworn in last month.

According to official sources, the plane is expected to land at the airport around 10 pm on Saturday.

Among the 119 illegal Indian immigrants, 67 hail from Punjab, 33 from Haryana, eight from Gujarat, three from Uttar Pradesh, two each from Goa, Maharashtra and Rajasthan and one each from Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir, they said.

Another US plane carrying deportees is also expected to land on February 16.

The development came days after a US military aircraft carrying 104 illegal Indian immigrants landed at the Amritsar airport last week. Of them, 33 each were from Haryana and Gujarat and 30 from Punjab.

Most of the deportees hailing from Punjab had said they wanted to migrate to the US for a better life for their families. However, their dreams were shattered when they were caught at the US border and brought back in shackles.

After Donald Trump assumed office as the US President, the country's law enforcement agencies have launched a crackdown against illegal immigrants. Many people from Punjab and some other states, who entered the US through "donkey routes" — an illegal and risky pathway used by migrants to enter America or other illegal means by spending lakhs of rupees — are now facing deportation.

US CLEARS RANA'S EXTRADITION

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump has announced that his administration has approved extradition of 26/11 Mumbai terror attack accused Tahawwur Hussain Rana to India and Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said the state government is prepared to lodge him in jail.

Addressing a joint press meet along with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Washington on Thursday, Trump said,

"Today I am pleased to announce that my administration has approved the extradition of one of the plotters and very evil people of the world, and having to do with the horrific Mumbai terrorist attack, to face justice in India. So, he is going back to India to face justice."

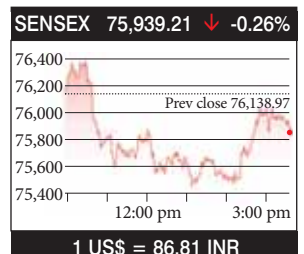
"We're giving him back to India immediately" and more such extraditions could follow as we have quite a few requests (from New Delhi), the US president added. The extradition of Rana was cleared by the US Supreme Court in January as it rejected his review

petition in the case.

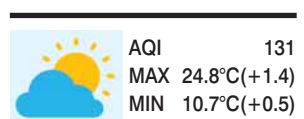
On his part, Modi thanked Trump for the decision. "I am thankful to the President that he has decided to hand over the culprit who committed the killings in India in 2008, to India now. Indian courts will now take appropriate action," he said.

Thanking Prime Minister Modi for his efforts to bring Rana for trial, Fadnavis said here "We kept Kasab, what is the big deal here? We will keep him for sure, when asked about Maharashtra's preparedness once Rana is extradited.

MARKETS



WEATHER



BJP to swear in government in Delhi next week

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The swearing-in ceremony of the BJP government in Delhi is likely to take place on February 19 or 20. The legislative party meeting of the BJP is expected to be held a day before the grand swearing-in that marks the return of the saffron party in the national Capital after a gap of 27 years.

Preparations to form the BJP government are expected to gain momentum after Prime Minister Narendra Modi returns to the Capital on Friday night following his trip to France and the United States of America. PM Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, BJP President JP Nadda and other senior party leaders will finalise key decisions regarding the new government which includes a chief minister, a council of ministers and perhaps one or two deputy chief ministers.

According to sources, after the arrival of PM Modi, the central leadership will appoint observers who will held discussions with newly elected MLAs to take a final decision before announcing the name for the chief minister.

The BJP asserted that it will soon announce the name of Delhi chief minister and slammed AAP leader Atishi over her claims of power cuts in the city, saying she should observe 13 days of mourning over her party's "death".



MHA seeks sanction to prosecute Jain

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on Friday sought the President of India's approval to prosecute former Delhi minister and AAP leader Satyendar Jain under Section 218 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Suraksha Sanhita (BNS), 2023 in the alleged disproportionate assets were to the tune of Rs 1.47 crore, about 217 per cent more than Jain's known sources of income during 2015-17.

The Pioneer was the first to report the disproportionate assets case.

The agency alleged that Jain, with the help of his family members and associates, amassed disproportionate assets between February 14,

2015, and May 31, 2017, while serving as a minister in the Delhi government.

Jain lost Shakur Basti seat to BJP's Karnail Singh by a margin of 20,998 votes.

According to sources, the request is based on evidence provided by the Enforcement Directorate (ED), which has found sufficient grounds for prosecution in the case. "On the basis of the material received from the Enforcement Directorate, sufficient evidence has been found to grant the sanction", sources said. The MHA's move comes after reviewing findings from the ED's investigation into alleged financial irregularities linked to Jain. The final decision now rests with the President.

Kerala ragging row turns political

KUMAR CHELLAPAN ■ KOCHI

Ragging of three freshers by third year students of Government Nursing College at Kottayam in Kerala is the fall out of the refusal of the former to part with hafta money demanded by the seniors to buy liquor and drugs, according to the cops investigating the case. Many parents expressed their reservation and apprehension over sending their wards to professional colleges in the state following the gruesome ragging incident at the Kottayam nursing college.

Lakshmana Perumal, father of one of the students, told media that the perpetrators of the crime belonged to the SFI, the student wing of the CPI(M) and enjoyed political patronage. "My son had told me about the cruelties perpetrated on him and others by the senior students for refusing to part with money to buy their daily quota of liquor and drugs," said Perumal while speaking to reporters.

All the five students held by the police on charges of ragging belonged to the SFI. The video of the cruel ragging that went viral shows that geometry divider was used by the seniors to engrave pictures on the rear side of the victims. According to a member of the investigation team, dumbbells were placed on the private parts of the victim students. While the victims were writing in pain and crying out loudly, the seniors poured some lotion into their mouths and were seen laughing out. Veena George, Kerala Minister for Health, told reporters that she could not watch the horrifying video. "The ideal punishment for them is to throw them out of the college once and for ever. Suspension is too small a punishment for the kind of crime they have done," said George.

VD Satheshan, leader of opposition and the chief minister in waiting, asked the CPI(M) to disband the SFI. "This outfit is



Kerala police personnel escort students who were arrested for allegedly ragging first-year students at the Government Nursing College, in Kottayam on February 12, 2025

responsible for all type of cruelties and anti-social activities happening in campuses in the State," said Satheshan.

Responses from the college principal and other senior teachers in the college sounded hollow and it was like passing the buck. While the principal said that an assistant warden has been appointed to be in the hostel 24X7, students said that they have not seen any such officials at any time.

It has come to light that the cruel act of ragging took place on the first anniversary of the death of Sidharthan, a first year veterinary science student at the Government Veterinary College in Wayanad. Sidharthan, a tribal student, was found dead in his hostel room under mysterious conditions on 20th February 2024 following three day and night ragging by the SFI students. Though the 16 accused were arrested within weeks and were suspended from the college, judiciary in Kerala came to their help and allowed them to attend regular classes. But a division bench of the Kerala High Court quashed on 5th February the order of the single bench which had allowed the accused to attend regular classes.

What's Asmita? BJD not satisfied with Min's reply

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Odia Language, Literature, and Culture Minister Suryabanshi Suraj responded in writing to a question from BJD MLA Arun Sahoo concerning the interpretation of the term 'Asmita'.

In a written reply to Sahoo's question, Suryabanshi explained that, as per the Odia dictionary, the word 'Asmita' conveys concepts of 'I' ness, self-awareness, and an understanding of one's unique existence.

The definition is sourced from the Odia dictionary published by the Odisha Sahitya Akademi, under the purview of the Government of Odisha's Department of Odia Language, Literature, and Culture. The dictionary was first published



in 2017 and re-issued in 2020.

Despite the Minister's detailed explanation, Sahoo expressed dissatisfaction, stating that the explanation did not fully address his inquiry about the term's deeper implications.

"I had asked about the meaning of 'Asmita' and got the answer that 'asmita' means 'I' ness, self awareness and ego. As I could not understand it,

I will ask the question again. It must be clarified further. I am looking for the answer on how much they are able to fulfill the 'asmita' they are talking about. I have got only partial answer of my question. I have been waiting for the full answer of it," said Sahoo.

In response, Minister Suryabanshi said, "I heard Arun Bhai giving statement about 'Asmita'. Definitely, he is more knowledgeable and experienced than me. I respect his opinion. We have given the reply on 'Asmita' by quoting the dictionary which has been prepared under the purview of the government. It's not possible for me to explain about 'Asmita' in only pen and paper. Odia 'Asmita' means to be in the feeling of Odia art, culture, language, tradition and development."

In Assembly Opp raises farmer issues and law and order

Speaker adjourns House

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha Assembly on the second day of its Budget Session on Friday witnessed repeated adjournments as the opposition parties caused disruption in the House over various issues.

The chaos stemmed from a protest over the worsening law and order situation and the issues related to alleged mismanagement in paddy procurement.

Speaker Surama Padhy had to adjourn the session twice.

At the outset, the opposition members trooped to the Well of the House even before the

Speaker took her seat and raised slogans against the BJP government in the state.

Congress MLAs demanded discussions on the law and order situation while BJD members alleged mismanagement in procuring paddy. They urged the Speaker to suspend all other businesses of the House.

In this situation, the Question Hour, Zero Hour and the adjournment motions could not be taken up.

The protesting members also rushed to the Speaker's podium and continued shouting slogans. Despite the Speaker's efforts to proceed with the Question Hour, the protests persisted, leading to an adjournment at

10:34 am until 12 noon.

When the session resumed, the situation remained unchanged. BJD members once again stormed into the Well, continuing their protest against the closure of Mandis, irregularities in paddy procurement and other related concerns.

The Speaker appealed to the members to return to their seats and allow the House to function, assuring them that their issues could be addressed during discussions on the adjournment motions. However, the agitated BJD members ignored her request and maintained their protest. With no other option to restore order, the Speaker adjourned the House until 4 pm.

Sorry state of education landscape in Odisha

Many students unable to perform subtraction, division

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Recent statistics has exposed significant challenges in the educational landscape in Odisha with startling figures indicating that a majority of eighth-grade students struggle with foundational arithmetic skills. In a written reply to a question in the State Assembly on Friday, Mass Educa-

tion Minister Nityananda Gond revealed that 68.5% of students are unable to perform basic subtraction and 45.5% face difficulties with division. Meanwhile, the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) has further brought to light a concerning downward trend. In 2014, 64.4% of students demonstrated inability to subtract, which has worsened to 69.5% by 2024. Similarly, the number of students proficient in division dropped from 37.9% in 2014

to 45.8% in 2024. In addition to educational challenges, the reply by the minister highlighted a severe lack of infrastructure in schools. It is found that as many as 415 primary schools, 115 upper primary schools and 25 high schools are devoid of toilet facilities for girl students. In response to these pressing issues, the government has allocated funds for construction of 724 girls' toilets during the 2024-25 fiscal year, informed Gond's written statement.

State's varsities grapple with faculty crisis

Over 1,300 professor positions lie vacant

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Odisha's education sector is facing a significant challenge as more than 1,300 professor seats are lying vacant across 17 State universities. Higher Education Minister Surjyabanshi Suraj revealed the staggering figures in the State Assembly following a query posed by MLA Aravind Mahapatra. The universities, confronted with this shortage, are using guest faculty to fulfill teaching requirements. A total of 963

vacant, Khallikote University requires 112, Rajendra University is short by 106 and Dharanidhar University has 111 vacancies, totalling a staggering 1,307 vacancies across all the universities. The prolonged faculty shortage in Odisha's universities poses significant long-term challenges for the State's higher education system. It threatens to undermine the quality of education, research output and the overall academic reputation of these institutions. Meanwhile, concerns are being raised about the impact on student learning outcomes, particularly in specialised fields and research-oriented programmes.

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Rains likely in State from Feb 19

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
With no significant synoptic system lying in the region and dry weather prevailing over the districts of Odisha, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) Regional Office here on Friday forecasted brief spells of rain in nine districts from February 19 to 21. The forecast anticipates light to moderate rainfall in these districts, offering a brief respite from the dry conditions affecting the region for the last several days. Rain is likely in Jagatsinghpur, Kendrapada, Bhadrak, Baleswar and Jajpur while light to moderate showers are expected in districts including Cuttack, Dhenkanal, Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj. Temperature has appreciably fallen by about two to

three degrees Celsius at a few places and no large change at elsewhere over the districts of the State. On Saturday, dry weather is very likely to prevail over the districts of the State. But shallow to moderate fog is very likely to occur during early morning hours at one or two places over the district of north coastal Odisha. The highest maximum (day) temperature of 35.9 Degrees Celsius was recorded on Thursday at Angul and the lowest minimum (night) temperature of 9.8 degrees was recorded at Rourkela. Minimum temperature is very likely to gradually rise by two to three degrees during next three days and no large change thereafter for two days over the districts of the State, the IMD said.

Online scam Doc orders for laptop, gets marble slab



Lodges plaint with police
PNS ■ SAMBALPUR
In an online scam, a doctor of Hospital Road in Sambalpur received a marble slab instead of a laptop he had ordered online. The doctor had placed the order for a laptop on February 4, expecting a seamless online shopping experience. However, upon delivery, he was confronted with an unexpected sight - a marble plate instead of the Rs 61,000 laptop he ordered. Perplexed by the contents of his package, the doctor

Educated wife can't claim alimony: HC

Ruling earns praise amid rising divorce cases
PNS ■ CUTTACK
Amidst calls for reform in the legal system to prevent misuse of marital laws while ensuring protection for genuine victims, the Orissa High Court has brought major relief for men after the Supreme Court observed that a well-educated wife with work experience, who can support herself financially by doing a suitable job, cannot remain idle to claim maintenance/alimony from her husband. Justice Gourishankar Satapathy observed that an educated wife has definite

prospects to work and earn for her sustenance. "Law never appreciates those wives who remain idle only to saddle the liability of paying maintenance on the husband by not working or not trying to work despite having proper and high qualifications," Justice Satapathy observed. He further added, "The intention and objective of the legislature in enacting Section 125 of CrPC is to provide succor to those wives who are unable to maintain themselves and have no sufficient income for their sustenance." The decision was taken after considering the husband's income and balancing it with his requirements together

with the fact that he has to take care of his dependent mother besides the responsibility to maintain for his wife. Justice Satapathy and the Orissa High Court is now being hailed on social media with praises coming from all quarters, particularly on X. According to the case records, a woman got married on September 9, 2013. After just two or three months, she started living separately since December 9 of the same year. Later, she moved the Rourkela family court seeking divorce and alimony. Even as the family court noted that the wife is a science graduate with a post graduate diploma in journalism

and mass communication, directed the husband to pay Rs 8,000 per month as maintenance. Following the family court's verdict, the husband challenged it in high court. Hearing the case, Justice Satapathy noted that the wife is not only a well-educated woman but has previously worked in some media houses. The judge also observed that she has definite prospects to work and earn for her sustenance and thereby reduced the alimony to Rs 5,000/month. "This court considers that the interest of justice would be best served if the quantum of maintenance is reduced by Rs 3,000 per month," Justice Satapathy said in his order.

Crorepati Accountant held for DA



PNS ■ CUTTACK
The Vigilance police on Friday arrested and forwarded to court S Partha Sarathi Bisoi, Accountant-cum-Data Entry Operator of Batasana GP under Kotpad block in Koraput district, for possession of disproportionate assets (DA). The anti-corruption agency during raids on the properties of Bisoi had found him in possession of DA to

the tune of 300% of his known sources of income, which he could not account for satisfactorily. Bisoi was found in possession of three buildings, 16 plots, a cashew processing unit of area over 8,500 sqft, gold of 285 grams, cash of Rs 2.45 lakh, a concrete mixture machine, a paddy threshing machine, a Bolero SUV, two two-wheelers and household articles worth Rs 46 lakh.

5,284 beggars identified in Odisha

Cuttack tops list with 1,060
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
A total of 5,284 individuals are engaged in begging in Odisha, informed Minister for Social Security and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Nityananda Gond on Friday. Gond disclosed the figures in a written reply to a query by BJP MLA Laxman Bag in the State Assembly. The minister's report revealed that Cuttack records the highest number of beggars with a total count of 1,060. Other districts with notable figures include Bargarh (595), Ganjam (545), Balangir (482), Sundargarh (417) and Puri (350). The minister further informed that in a bid to eliminate begging across the State, the government has launched several initiatives. Two notable projects include Neeladri Nilaya in Puri and Ekamra Nilaya in Bhubaneswar, which are part of the initial phase of this comprehensive programme. Gond emphasised the government's commitment to transforming the socioeconomic landscape through targeted and sustainable interventions. The State continues to strive towards social equity, ensuring support systems for vulnerable populations, he added.

India's first HPB Radiology Course held at AIIMS BBS

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
The AIIMS Bhubaneswar marked a significant milestone in medical education and training by successfully organising India's first-ever Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary (HPB) Radiology Course. Spearheaded by the Departments of Surgical Gastroenterology and Radio-diagnosis, the course was conducted under the aegis of the International Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary Association (IHPBA)-Indian Chapter. Designed to enhance the understanding of complex HPB surgical anatomy, the course provided in-depth insights into Ultrasonography, CT scan, MRI, and PET CT scan applications in HPB diseases. It aimed at refining diagnostic precision, improving surgical planning and optimising post-operative follow-up to enhance patient care outcomes.



Recognising the indispensable role of radiological interpretation in HPB diseases, this comprehensive course provided extensive training to HPB surgical trainees and faculty members from across the country. The programme

was structured into three online sessions covering the fundamentals of HPB radiology, followed by two days of intensive hands-on physical training. Renowned experts in HPB and liver transplant surgery,

HPB interventional radiology and advanced imaging techniques delivered lectures on the latest advancements and best practices. The event had Dr Ashutosh Biswas, Executive Director of AIIMS Bhubaneswar, as chief guest.

'My son victim of party's internal conspiracy'



Claims BJD leader Prafulla Ghadai
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Senior BJD leader Prafulla Ghadai has alleged that his son Preeti Ranjan Ghadai has been a victim of the party's "internal politics". He said that during the 2024 elections, Preeti Ranjan had to leave his Korei Assembly constituency and move to Sukinda because of the party's internal conspiracy. "Against his will, Preeti Ranjan had to leave Korei and go to Sukinda. When he was on his way to file a nomination for Sukinda, I saw him

crying. His supporters from Korei were also crying with him because they wanted him to contest from Korei. Even I shed tears after seeing the heart-wrenching incident," said Prafulla Ghadai during a public gathering in Sukinda. However, BJD leader and Opposition Chief Whip Pramila Mallik refuted the allegations of internal dispute within the party. Responding to allegations of conspiracy and internal politics, she said the BJD is as strong as before and is doing well under the leadership of its supremo Naveen Patnaik. "The party continues to run under Naveen Patnaik's leadership as it always has. There is no ego or arrogance growing within the party," Mallik stated. Questioning Ghadai's motives behind the allegations, she, instead, asked, "Why is Prafulla Ghadai making such claims now? He should be asked who exactly was conspiring."

Talk on ethnographic research held at CUO

PNS ■ KORAPUT
The Department of Sociology at the Central University of Odisha (CUO) organised a talk on "Collaborating Beyond Borders: Doing Ethnography Together in Global Higher Education". The event, held on February 11, featured Adam Woodage, Research Assistant, at the University of Cambridge, UK, as the keynote speaker. CUO Vice-Chancellor Prof Chakradhar Tripathi extended his best wishes for the successful conduct of the programme. Dr Kapila Khemundu, Associate Professor and Head of the Department of Sociology, delivered the welcome address, while Dr Deepthi Shanker, Associate



Professor of Sociology, coordinated and presented the session. Woodage led the discussions challenging conventional ethnographic methodologies, advocating for the adoption of newer, technology-mediated research approaches. The session also explored the future trajectory of ethnographic research within global higher education contexts. Beyond his academic pursuits, Woodage is a published author in the field of sports,

particularly football, and a tech-education entrepreneur. As part of his visit to the Central University of Odisha from February 10 to 15, Woodage is engaging with students and faculty from the Sociology, Anthropology, and related departments. His schedule also includes visits to local museums and libraries for research. The event concluded with a vote of thanks by Dr Nupur Pattnaik, Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology.

Joblessness in Kandhamal Youths increasingly fall into trap of labour brokers

Get exploited in outside States

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ BRAHMAPUR
Unemployment in Kandhamal district has driven many young men and women into the hands of human traffickers masquerading as labour brokers. Every Friday, buses leave from Raikira for Kerala, carrying workers unaware of the dangers ahead. Posters across villages and streets display contact numbers of agents offering employment, but in reality, many labourers face exploitation and abuse. Local sources reveal that a



broker, through his agents, is orchestrating this labour migration. Despite open advertisements, the administration remains indifferent, allowing traffickers to operate freely. Workers who reach Kerala often endure harsh conditions, non-payment of wages, and physical abuse. Many return traumatized and empty-

handed, while others perish, their families left grieving without justice. The ongoing cycle highlights the severe lack of employment opportunities in Kandhamal, forcing migration for survival. The district's agricultural sector struggles due to the absence of irrigation facilities, leaving farmers jobless after

the monsoon. Some residents collect forest produce or sell minor goods in village markets, but these earnings are insufficient. Despite tourism potential, no significant development has occurred, and the lack of industries to process local natural products further limits employment prospects. Exploiting this desperation, brokers manipulate youth into risky labourers outside the State. Despite repeated concerns, authorities have failed to curb human trafficking. Activists argue that administrative negligence has emboldened traffickers, leaving vulnerable

workers at risk. Without proper monitoring, labourers continue to be exploited, trapped in unsafe conditions with no safeguards in place. Local intellectuals demand immediate government intervention to ensure workers' safety and curb trafficking. They stress the need for sustainable employment initiatives, including skill development, irrigation projects, and industrial growth, to prevent distress migration. Until concrete measures are implemented, Kandhamal's youth will remain at the mercy of traffickers, risking their lives for the hope of a livelihood.

Drug trafficking continues unabated in Bargarh

Pushing crime rate in dist

MAHESH SATPATHY ■ BARGARH

Drug trafficking has become rampant in Bargarh district, spreading from rural to urban areas. Illegal trade of cough syrup, liquor, and drugs has led to a rise in crimes like assaults, loots and murders.

Despite efforts by the police and Excise sleuths, trafficking remains unchecked, challenging law enforcement.

The district has 39 licenced liquor distilleries, 84 branches, 23 closed foreign liquor shops, and 7 bars, con-



tributing significant revenue. However, smuggled liquor and cough syrup sales have surged, with these substances being sold openly in shops, hotels, and roadside stalls.

Illegal liquor shops have also emerged in villages. Authorities and local representatives seem to be indifferent,

prompting women to join the anti-liquor movement and demanding drug-free villages. Crime linked to liquor and drugs is rising.

Recently, a murder at an unlicenced liquor shop at Guduramunda under Bheden Block and another during the Dhanu Yatra festival highlight

the growing threat. Drug-related violence occurs in broad daylight, leaving locals feeling unsafe.

Though police and Excise teams conduct frequent raids, drug dealers resume operations soon after. Bargarh police recently seized a large quantity of cough syrup and ganja, briefly silencing the traffickers.

Superintendent of Excise Suban Kumar Naik stated that raids are conducted on regular basis under Padampur and Bargarh range, registering around 300 cases but still, drug trafficking continues unabated.

In Kalahandi India's 1st Drone Centres of Excellence launched

PNS ■ KALAHANDI

In a groundbreaking development, Member of Parliament Sujeet Kumar launched India's first-ever Drone Centres of Excellence (CoEs) under the Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana (SAGY) in partnership with leading drone technology company IG Drones.

Located in the Gram Panchayats of Sagada and Bhatangpadar in Kalahandi district, these centers represent a significant leap toward empowering tribal youth and women through advanced skill development in drone

technology. This is the first time that such centers of excellence have been launched under the flagship scheme by the Central Government, launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014 to drive inclusive rural development.

Adopted by MP Sujeet Kumar under the SAGY initiative—Sagada and Bhatangpadar villages have undergone remarkable transformations. By allocating Rs 10 lakh from his MPLAD fund, Kumar has brought cutting-edge technological education to these underserved areas,

aligning with the government's vision for an Atmanirbhar Bharat and Viksit Bharat 2047.

The initiative also supports the Prime Minister's Drone Policy, which envisions a significant expansion of drone operations in India, from 27,000 to over one lakh.

MP Sujeet Kumar, speaking about the initiative, highlighted its transformative potential. "The Drone Centres of Excellence are a testament to the power of technology in driving equitable development. By equipping tribal youth and women with cutting-edge skills, we are open-

ing up opportunities that were once out of reach and ensuring their participation in India's digital economy. This futuristic step was possible with the support of IG Drones which are establishing other centers of excellence in other parts of the country as well."

Expressing his enthusiasm, founder and CEO, IG Drones, B o d h i s a t t w a Sanghapriya said, "We are happy to take yet another step in empowering the tribal youth and highlighting Odisha as a drone hub at a national level."

Man on way to Kumbh dies in bus mishap

PNS ■ BALESWAR

A resident of Baleswar district, who was going by bus for taking a dip in the Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj in Uttar Pradesh, died when the vehicle met with an accident in Bihar.

The deceased was identified as Subas Behera (48), a resi-

dent of village Jagannathpur in the district. Reports said the bus 'Ram Jee' carrying 70 pilgrims from the Bhograi area left Chandaneswar for Prayagraj.

However, it met with the accident on Wednesday night near Mohania in Bihar. As many as 35 passengers were injured and three including

Behera, Rajkishor Sahu and Ajit Sasmal received critical injuries and admitted to a hospital at Varanasi.

The father of the deceased is a paralysis patient and mother is 70 years old. Neither of them was informed about the incident. Brother of the deceased left for Varanasi to bring back Behera's body.

In Puri Cash looted from Mahadev temple

PNS ■ PURI

Burglars continue to target religious shrines in the State, with the latest incident being reported from Puri on Friday. Miscreants allegedly looted valuables from the Bali Kapileshwar Mahadev Temple in the district.

The looters broke into the temple, forced open the donation box and looted cash on Thursday night. According to the complaint filed by temple authorities, the thieves also broke the main entrance.

The crime was discovered when the temple priest arrived in the morning and found the locks broken, with the donation box lying open. He immediately informed the temple trustee, who then reported the incident to the police, who launched an investigation.

"The main door was open and the steel Hundi box was missing. After getting information about it, we informed the police," said Rajesh Mohanty, trustee of the Bali Kapileshwar Mahadev Temple.



Mohanty further alleged that a gang was behind the loot in different temples, hotels and places in Puri.

A series of temple thefts have been reported across the State in recent months. On February 9, a similar incident occurred at Jagannath Temple in Phulbani, Kandhamal, where thieves looted valuables and cash from the donation box.

Prior to that, on January 20, miscreants had looted Siruli Mahavir Temple in Puri.

On January 16, 2025, miscreants looted cash and gold crowns from Saila Srikheta Jagannath Temple in Angul.

On January 4, 2025, the Panchamukhi Hanuman Temple in Cuttack was tar-

geted, deeply shocking devotees.

On December 23, 2024, thieves broke into Chingudikhola Kali Temple in Ganjam district and looted its donation box.

On November 25, 2024, four temples in Gardapara, Ganjam, were looted, with miscreants ransacking donation boxes and stealing sacred items.

The theft at Tara Tarini Temple in Ganjam in November 2024 left devotees stunned, as looters used cutter machines to gain entry and stole valuables worth lakhs.

Similarly, on November 12, 2024, Maa Santoshi Temple in Nuapada was looted.

In Subarnapur Reserve Constable found dead in barrack

PNS ■ SONEPUR

A Constable of the Reserve Police, identified as Dillip Mishra, was found dead on Thursday morning under mysterious circumstances at his barrack in Subarnapur district. Police are probing the death of Mishra.

According to official sources, the cop was previously deployed at Binika Papakshaya Loka Mahotsav, a

cultural event in the region.

"Mishra had been on duty at the festival since February 11 but had not reported to his duty on Wednesday. His body was later found in the police barrack, leading to a detailed probe to determine the events leading to his demise," Binika IIC Sarangadhar Panigrahi said.

"When some other constables in the barrack woke up in the morning at around 6.30

am, they found Mishra lying on the floor. His body had become stiff. I do not know whether he had been suffering from any disease or not," the IIC said.

"We have sent his body to hospital for postmortem. The exact cause behind his demise can be ascertained only after the report comes in. The deceased's family was duly informed and a detailed probe has been initiated," he added.

In Kendrapada 1,443 ration cards provided to govt employees

Action to be taken against illegal beneficiaries

RAJESH BEHERA ■ KENDRAPADA

The Food Security Act has become a medium to loot the subsidised food grains following 1,443 government employees, who were ineligible to get ration cards as per guidelines, have been availing subsidised food grains in Kendrapada district.

The matter has come to the fore here as the Civil Supply Department under Food Supplies and Consumer Welfare Department, conducted an inquiry recently.

If official sources are to be believed, as many as 1,443 government employees, including OAS officers, engineers, clerks, Home Guards, lecturers, teachers among others, have managed to enrol their names under the Food Security Act and are withdrawing subsidised rice every month in their ration cards.

As per official data, a total 29,290 quintals of rice were distributed every month in 1,443 ration cards possessed by the government job holders. As a result, a total 3,51,480 quintals of rice were looted every year by the government job holders.

According to Ganesh Chandra Samal, an intellectual, most of the card holders

managed to sell the rice at Rs 28 a kg in black market. As per a rough estimate, the government spent a sum of Rs 98, 41,440 to provide subsidised food grain to these illegal beneficiaries per year.

When the matter came to the notice of Civil Supply Department, the authorities issued notice to the ineligible card holders through the local dealers for voluntarily surrendering their ration cards. Meanwhile, several government job holders have surrendered their cards.

District Civil Supply Officer Srinibash Sahoo stated that as per the direction of the State government, steps would be taken against the ineligible beneficiaries.

In Brahmapur Tribal worker's body found in restaurant bathroom

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ BRAHMAPUR

A decomposed body was recovered from an unused bathroom of the first floor of Girija Restaurant at Dharm Nagar under the Town police station here on Tuesday night.

The deceased was identified as Premananda Malik (24), a resident of Mohana block in Gajapati district. He had informed his colleagues that he was going to his village four days ago but never returned.

Foul smell emanating from the bathroom led hotel staffs to break open the door, only to find Premananda's body. Being informed, police arrived at the scene, seized the body and sent it for postmortem.

Preliminary investigations suggested he may have died by suicide due to personal reasons, possibly linked to a relationship issue. However, officials stated that the exact cause

of death would be confirmed after the autopsy report.

The incident has raised serious concerns, as the upper floors of the hotel remain in use, with people visiting daily. Yet, no one noticed the missing worker or suspected anything unusual. This has sparked questions about how such an incident could go unnoticed for days.

Notably, many tribal youths from remote areas like Mohana migrate to Brahmapur to work in hotels and restaurants, striving to support their families. However, incidents like this highlight the vulnerability and hardships they face while working far from home. Authorities need to ensure better working and living conditions for such migrant workers to prevent similar tragedies in the future, said the intellectuals.

In Sambalpur Hospital fined Rs 2L for false billing



PNS ■ SAMBALPUR

The District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission, Sambalpur, has imposed a penalty of Rs 2 lakh on a private hospital for false billing.

The Vikash Multispecialty Hospital had billed a patient for Computed Tomography (CT) scan that was never performed. The commission ordered the hospital to compensate the complainant, Mahesh Muni, with Rs 2 lakh.

The commission has also directed the hospital to pay legal expenses of Rs 20,000.

In December 2023, Muni, a resident of Jagannath Colony,

Sambalpur, took his critically ill father to the Vikash Hospital. Despite intensive care, his father passed away three days later. The family received a bill totalling Rs 6,745, which included a charge for a CT scan among other medical tests.

Upon review, Muni found that the CT scan report was missing. He approached the hospital for the report, but it was not produced. Consequently, he took the matter to the district consumer forum, which ruled in his favour. The hospital is required to refund the Rs 1,800 charged for the CT scan along with an annual interest of 7%.

State's varsities grapple with faculty crisis

Over 1,300 professor positions lie vacant

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Odisha's education sector is facing a significant challenge as more than 1,300 professor seats are lying vacant across 17 State universities. Higher Education Minister Surjyabanshi Suraj revealed the staggering figures in the State Assembly following a query posed by MLA Aravind Mahapatra.

The universities, confronted with this shortage, are using guest faculty to fulfill teaching requirements. A total of 963 guest Lecturers are presently

engaged in these institutions. In a glaring example, the Utkal University has employed 59 guest Lecturers while Ravenshaw University utilises 89. In Sambalpur University, 64 guest teachers are active and Rajendra University relies on 113 guest Lecturers.

Other universities in the State face similar challenges. Vikram Deb University has 78 guest faculty members, Gangadhar Meher University employs 61, Khallikote University enlists 63 and Rama Devi University has 81 guest Lecturers on board.

As per the minister, Utkal University requires a total of 136 professors, Ravenshaw has 157 positions vacant,

Khallikote University requires 112, Rajendra University is short by 106 and Dharanidhar University has 111 vacancies, totalling a staggering 1,307 vacancies across all the universities.

The prolonged faculty shortage in Odisha's universities poses significant long-term challenges for the State's higher education system. It threatens to undermine the quality of education, research output and the overall academic reputation of these institutions.

Meanwhile, concerns are being raised about the impact on student learning outcomes, particularly in specialised fields and research-oriented programmes.

Pangolin: The ecosystem engineer

World Pangolin Day is celebrated on February 15. When we celebrated the first World Pangolin Day, many people started asking us various questions about the benefits of this animal. Most people did not even know that Pangolins are mammals and some people had the misconception that they are reptiles and birds.

Pangolins are myrmecophagous (anteating) toothless mammals that protect the forests from termite infestation. Pangolins play a very important ecological role in controlling the number of insects in an ecosystem. A single pangolin can eat about 70 million ants and other insects every year. If pangolins become extinct, it will have a huge impact on the environment.

As predators of ants and other insects, pangolins play an important ecosystem service by contributing to the control of insect popu-



SASMITA LENKA

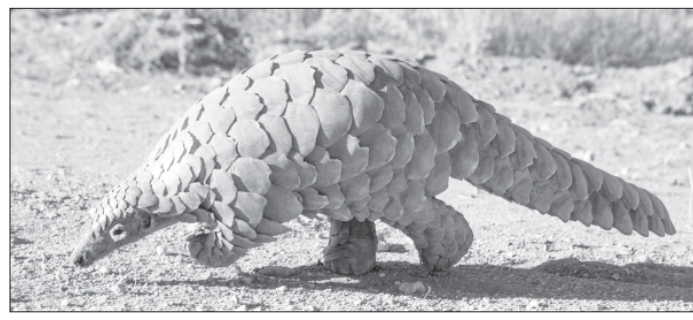
lations. By digging burrows, they affect soil processes including organic matter turnover and aeration, and act as biological turbulators.

Pangolins are considered as the guardians of forests because they protect forests from the effects

of termite and maintain a balanced ecosystem. An adult pangolin weighing 3 kilograms can eat more than 300 grams of ants in a single meal. As a result of their voracious appetite, a single pangolin can protect an area as large as 40 acres from termites and other harmful insects. In addition, abandoned pangolin burrows are often used as shelter by other animals in that ecosystem.

To satisfy their hunger, pangolins mix the decaying wood and termites that live in the forest with the soil and break down rocks and hard soil. It contributes to the mechanical breakdown of organic and inorganic matter that helps in the cycling of minerals and nutrients through the ecosystem. Pangolins and earthworms are both natural bio engineers, so their mode of action is also similar. They help in promoting fertility of the soil of a particular habitat.

If pangolins are allowed to live healthy and free in their natural



habitats, they can act as powerful pest controllers and maintain a balanced environment. They act as natural pesticides in the environment where they live.

Many people ask, "Who cares about natural pest control? We are in the 21st century; we have technology." Those people need to be explained that natural pesticides are very important in our forests because they help maintain a balanced cycle of life. For example, if you take ordinary soil, there are countless organisms like ants, wasps and fungi that, if left un-

checked, can be dangerous to all of us. They need to be controlled, and what better way than to control them biologically, that is, to maintain a healthy balance using natural creatures and by doing so, it controls pollution in our environment. Presence of pangolins in our ecosystem is very important for biodiversity and the environment.

By monitoring these indicator species like pangolin, we get a gauge of the health of the environment in which many live. Protecting pangolins also safeguards the biodiversity of their habitats,

which are rich ecosystems crucial for maintaining healthy flora, fauna and soils. These elements are vital for a balanced ecosystem, which in turn supports human health, food security, and mitigates the impacts of climate change.

Biodiversity and balanced ecosystem are critical for human health and well-being for several reasons. Healthy soils and diverse insect life, including pollinators, are crucial for food production, particularly in less economically developed regions. Bio-diverse ecosystems provide essential services like clean air and water, fertile soils, and pollination of crops, all of which are foundational to human survival. Bio-diverse environments with healthy soils and abundant plant life act as carbon sinks, helping to sequester carbon dioxide and reduce the effects of climate change. Healthy ecosystems contribute to overall human health by supporting clean water systems, reducing the risk of

floods, and maintaining a balance that prevents the spread of diseases.

Pangolins are prehistoric mammals, which have been around for 80 million years, are now threatened with extinction. Despite protective measures, pangolins in India are widely exploited and traded both domestically and internationally. Though the species have been assigned different conservation status, it is required to strengthen the monitoring and awareness programmes to minimise the threat of illegal trafficking of pangolins and save this prehistoric mammal from extinction. We must keep in our mind that if pangolins go extinct, there would be a cascading impact on the environment. It is the responsibility of human to save pangolins from extinction for a better and healthy future.

(The writer is Deputy Conservator of Forests and Deputy Director of Inquiry, Lokayukta, Odisha. Phone: 9439373730)

CBI seeks hearing dates for 2G case acquittal appeal involving A Raja

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The CBI on Friday informed the Delhi High Court that its appeal against the acquittal of former Telecom Minister A Raja and 16 others in the 2G spectrum allocation case was "ripe for hearing".

CBI counsel senior advocate Sanjay Jain urged Justice Vikas Mahajan to either fix multiple dates to hear the matter, having a voluminous record, or post it on another date to decide a hearing schedule. He said, "The matter is ripe for hearing. I request the court to give a bouquet of multiple dates." Justice Mahajan then posted the matter on March 18.



Former telicomm minister A Raja

File photo

A special CBI court on December 21, 2017 acquitted former UPA-era Telecom Minister Raja, who is now an MP from Nilgiris, DMK MP Kanimozhi and others in the CBI and ED cases stemming from the 2G scam. CBI and ED filed appeal challenging

the acquittal in the High Court in March 2018. After six years, the High Court on March 22, 2024 admitted the CBI appeal saying there were "some contradictions" in the trial court judgment requiring a "deeper examination".

abusing official position, criminal misconduct by public servant and taking bribes. Aside from Raja and Kanimozhi, the special court acquitted former telecom secretary Siddharth Behra, Raja's former private secretary R K Chandolia, Unitech Limited managing director Sanjay Chandra and three top executives of the Reliance Anil Ambani Group - Gautam Doshi, Surendra Pipra and Hari Nair - in the CBI case.

The special court also acquitted Swan Telecom (Private) Limited, Unitech Wireless (Tamil Nadu) Limited, Reliance Telecom Limited, film producer Karim Morani and Kalaigarn TV director Sharad Kumar in the CBI case.

Buddha's teachings offer solution to global conflicts, says PM Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Friday that many of the world's conflicts are an outcome of taking extreme positions instead of a balanced approach, asserting that Buddha's teachings of following the middle path and avoiding extremes offer solution to numerous global challenges.

In a video address to the fourth edition of Samvad, a global Hindu-Buddhist initiative for conflict avoidance, organised in Thailand, Modi said the shared traditions of Asia rooted in the principles of Dhamma provide answers to the environmental crisis plaguing the world.

Hinduism, Buddhism, Shintoism, and other Asian traditions teach people to live in harmony with nature, he said, adding they do not see themselves as separate from nature but as a part of it.

According to a statement, Modi highlighted the concept of



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses 'SAMVAD' programme in Thailand via video conferencing.

trusteeship, as advocated by Mahatma Gandhi, and emphasised that when using natural resources for progress, one must also consider our responsibility to future generations.

This approach ensures that resources are used for growth, not greed, he added. Noting that this edition of Samvad is hosting a religious roundtable, bringing together diverse religious leaders, He expressed confidence that valuable insights will emerge from this

platform, shaping a more harmonious world. Praising the host country Thailand for its rich culture, history, and heritage, Modi stressed that it stands as a beautiful example of the shared philosophical and spiritual traditions of Asia.

Underlining the deep cultural ties shared by India and Thailand spanning over 2,000 years, he said Ramayana and Ramakien connect the two nations and that their shared reverence for Lord Buddha

unites them.

Citing Buddha, he said the principle of moderation remains relevant today, offering guidance in addressing global challenges.

He mentioned the vibrant partnership across multiple sectors between the two countries, and said India's 'Act East' policy and Thailand's 'Act West' policy complement each other. He said another cause of conflict is perceiving others as fundamentally different, adding that differences lead to distance, and distance can turn into discord. To counter this, he cited a verse from the Dhammapada, which states that everyone fears pain and death.

The prime minister noted that he hailed from Gujarat's Vadnagar and represented Varanasi in Parliament, and said it is a beautiful coincidence that places associated with Lord Buddha have shaped his journey. He said, "Our reverence for Bhagwan Buddha is reflected in the policies of the Indian government."

SC slams TN Govt on delay in filing appeal against Isha Foundation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday slammed the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board for moving after two years against an order that quashed a showcause notice issued against Jaggi Vasudev's Isha Foundation for allegedly flouting environmental norms. A bench of Justice Surya Kant and Justice N Kotiswar Singh termed the petition filed by the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) as a "friendly match" played by bureaucrats wanting the apex court's stamp on the petition's dismissal.



Supreme court of India

File photo

"Mr Advocate General what prevented the authorities from approaching the court on time. There is a delay of 637 days in filing this petition, which is nearly two years. This is actually a friendly match where the bureaucrats want the stamp of the Supreme Court and the High

Court on dismissal of the petition," the bench said. The showcause was issued to the foundation for constructing buildings between 2006 and 2014 without reportedly obtaining mandatory environmental clearances but the Madras High Court quashed it.

Justice Surya Kant further told the State's law officer, "When the State comes belatedly, we become suspicious.

We start reading between lines. How can you say a yoga centre is not an educational institution? If they are not going as per plan, then you can challenge the non-compliance but you can't be allowed to demolish the structure constructed in over a lakh yards. It is not some kind of hutment."

The top court told State Advocate General PS Raman that now that Isha Foundation

had constructed a yoga and meditation centre in Coimbatore district's Velliangiri, the state must ensure environmental compliance. "Now that a yoga centre has been constructed and you are not saying that it is dangerous, then your concern must be to ensure that all environmental parameters are complied with like sunlight, greenery, sewage treatment plant. You can raise those issues. Everybody is obligated to comply with these norms," it said.

Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for Isha Foundation, urged the top court to hear the matter after Shivratni, saying a major function was scheduled to be held there. "We have all necessary approvals. They are talking only about environmental clearance. The yoga centre is 80 per cent green. It's one of the best centres in India," he said.

The Madras High Court, said the court, was right in its view on the claim of Isha Foundation that it is covered under the notification of Centre for an educational centre. When asked about the delay, Raman said the matter was stuck between two State departments. The bench posted the matter for hearing post Shivratni.

On December 14, 2022, holding that the facilities set up by Isha Foundation in Coimbatore would fall under the education category, the High Court set aside the TNPCB notice.

The High Court quashed the notice dated November 19, 2021, and allowed the plea of Jaggi Vasudev's Isha Foundation. The showcause notice was over construction of buildings in the foothills of Velliangiri without prior environmental clearance. The Centre had informed the High Court that the foundation was imparting yoga lessons aside from running a school and it fell under the education category.

NOTA votes hit record low of 0.99 per cent in 2024 Lok Sabha polls

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The None Of The Above (NOTA) option in EVMs recorded its lowest percentage share in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls since its introduction in 2013, according to data shared by the Election Commission (EC). The option was implemented in a Lok Sabha poll for the first time in 2014.

According to the polls panel's 'Atlas-2024', a book containing data from last year's Lok Sabha polls, there has been a gradual decline in NOTA votes over the past three Lok Sabha elections, from 1.08 per cent in 2014 to 0.99 per cent in 2024.

While the percentage might seem small, the total number of NOTA votes can still be significant, especially in seats with comparatively lower winning margins, where the NOTA votes could have

affected outcomes in some constituencies.

The distribution of NOTA votes across the states exhibits significant variation, reflecting regional political dynamics, voter preferences and levels of political engagement.

Bihar recorded the highest share (percentage) of NOTA votes at 2.07 per cent, followed closely by Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu with 2.06 per cent and Gujarat at 1.58 per cent. In contrast, Nagaland recorded the lowest share of NOTA votes at just 0.21%, suggesting a stronger alignment or preference for the contesting candidates in the state. Such varying trends across states may be influenced by factors such as political competition, the prominence of regional parties, voter education, and the overall electoral landscape within each region.

The variation highlights the diverse ways in which voters engage with the electoral process and express their preferences, either by actively participating in choosing a candidate or by using NOTA as a tool for protest or dissent.

Introduced in 2013, the NOTA option on electronic voting machines (EVMs) has its own symbol - a ballot paper with a black cross across it. The EC added the NOTA button on EVMs as the last option on the voting panel after a September 2013 Supreme Court order. Before the apex court's order, those not inclined to vote for any candidate had the option of filling what is popularly called Form 49-O. But filling out the form at the polling station under Rule 49-O of the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961, compromised the secrecy of the voter.

Experts share tips on healthy eating, sleep for exam success

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Adequate sleep, eating home-cooked food and avoiding binge eating to counter stress during examinations were among the mantras for school students shared by top nutrition experts as part of the prime minister's latest "Pariksha Pe Charcha" episode, aired on Friday.



File photo

Nutrition and health experts Shonali Sabherwal, Rujuta Diwekar and Revant Himatsingka shed light on the importance of healthy eating habits and the crucial role of quality sleep in academic success during a special session of "Pariksha Pe Charcha" - an annual event in which 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 students to Delhi's iconic Sunder Nursery for his annual interaction. Eminent personalities such as boxer MC Mary Kom and spiritual leader Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev have shared their experiences and knowledge on key aspects of life and learning in different episodes. On Wednesday, actor Deepika Padukone shared tips on stress management while opening up about her own struggles with depression.

Macrobiotic nutritionist and author Sabherwal said, "Homemade food is the best (for destressing)... millets and brown rice can be included in the diet. One should eat a balanced meal to keep cravings under control. Millets can keep you full for around eight hours."

Diwekar said it was fine to eat the things that made one feel better during exams but suggested avoiding binge eating to counter stress. "Especially junk food, processed foods and sugar..." she said. Talking about his "Label

Padhega India" initiative, foodfarmer and health and nutrition influencer Himatsingka said the idea was to know about the things one was consuming.

"If every person in India starts reading labels, they will know what they are eating. My goal is to include health in the school curriculum in the next five years," he said.

"Pariksha Pe Charcha" is an annual event in which Modi interacts with students appearing for board examinations. During this, he also answers students' queries related to exam stress and other issues.

The first edition of the interactive programme with school and college students was held at Delhi's Talkatora Stadium in 2018. A seventh edition was held in a town hall format at Bharat Mandapam, engaging participants from around the country and overseas.

BJP hails PM Modi's US visit as landmark, slams Rahul Gandhi for criticism

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The BJP on Friday hailed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's US visit as "landmark" and slammed Rahul Gandhi for his remarks on him, saying it has become a habit of Congress leaders to find fault in the prime minister's foreign visits.

In a social media post, BJP national spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla wrote, "PM Narendra Modi's impactful USA visit solidified India-US bonds like never before." "A landmark visit," he added, listing Modi's achievements during his US visit.

Party national spokesperson Syed Shah Nawaz Hussain said US President Donald Trump's announcement about his administration's go-ahead to the extradition of 26/11 Mumbai terror attack accused Tahawwur Rana is a "very big

diplomatic victory for India". "Tahawwur Rana, the master mind of 26/11 terror attack, will be brought to India. He (PM Modi) convinced the US for this. This is a very big diplomatic victory for India," Hussain said.

He also slammed Rahul Gandhi for accusing Modi of "covering up" the alleged corruption of businessman Gautam Adani, saying the Congress leader should keep in mind that Modi visited the US as the prime minister of the country and leader of its 140 crore people, not as a BJP leader.

"Finding faults with the prime minister's foreign visits has become a habit of the Congress," he said, responding to Gandhi's remarks. Earlier, Rahul Gandhi said Modi maintains silence when questions are asked in the country and terms it a person-

al matter when asked abroad. "If you ask questions in the country, there is silence. If you ask abroad, it is a personal matter! Even in America, Modi Ji covered up Adani Ji's corruption!" Gandhi charged in a social media post in Hindi.

The Congress leader criticised Modi, apparently latching on to his reply to a media query on Adani in the US. To a question on whether the issue relating to Adani figured in the talks, Modi at a joint media briefing with Trump in Washington said: "India is a democracy and our culture is 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'."

We consider the whole world as one family. I believe every Indian is mine." Modi further said such individual matters are not discussed in talks between two leaders. "Two prominent leaders of two countries never discuss such individual issues," he said.

Union Minister Athawale supports project 'Atmanirbhar' by Rotary Club

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Union Social Justice Minister Ramdas Athawale extended his support to Project 'Atmanirbhar', an initiative by Rotary Club of Delhi Imperial aimed at empowering individuals with physical challenges through prosthetic limb donation, training, and rehabilitation.

As part of its launch, 400 prosthetic limbs are to be distributed in the first phase. The initiative, led by President of Rotary Club of Delhi Imperial Rtn. Rajesh Aggarwal is being well supported by the members.

Project 'Atmanirbhar' is not just about prosthetic limb donation - it is a movement for self-reliance. The initiative goes beyond charity, focusing on identifying the right beneficiaries, and equipping them with the skills, confidence, and resources needed to rebuild their lives with dignity. The project aims to transform at least one life every single day over the coming year, ensuring that losing a limb does not mean losing a future. Athawale lauded the efforts stating, "Helping people walk again is not just a medical achievement but a step towards an inclusive society. This is the true spirit of social service. Initiatives like 'Atmanirbhar' address the root causes of social issues and empower those in need."

PM Modi, Amit Shah pay tribute to Pulwama martyrs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday paid homage to 40 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel who lost their lives in a terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama on this day in 2019.



File photo

"Homage to the courageous heroes we lost in Pulwama in 2019. The coming generations will never forget their sacrifice and their unwavering dedication to the nation," Modi said in a social media post. A suicide bomber crashed his explosive-laden vehicle into a bus ferrying CRPF personnel on February 14 in 2019, killing 40 jawans. Days later, India launched a retaliatory attack, which came to be

known as the Balakot airstrike. Paying tributes to the jawans, Shah said the Narendra Modi government is determined to completely destroy terrorists by carrying out a campaign with a "zero-tolerance" policy against them, Shah also said. "On behalf of a grateful nation, I pay my heartfelt tribute to the soldiers who were martyred in the cowardly terror attack in Pulwama on

this day in 2019," he said in Hindi in a social media post. Terrorism is the biggest enemy of the entire humanity and the whole world has united against it, the home minister added. "Be it through a surgical strike or an air strike, the Modi government is determined to completely destroy terrorists by carrying out a campaign with a 'zero-tolerance' policy against them," Shah said.

NTCA urges priority village relocation from tiger reserves for conservation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Voluntary relocation of villages from core areas of tiger reserves should be carried out on a "priority" to support wildlife conservation and ensure the inclusive growth of people living in forest areas, the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has said.

During a meeting of the NTCA, some members also said the current voluntary village rehabilitation package might not be attractive to all communities living in core and critical tiger habitats and suggested it be revised. According to the minutes of the latest NTCA meeting, Union Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav said green growth should be achieved through mitigation strategies in buffer and corridor areas while core and critical tiger

habitats made "inviolate", according to tiger management principles. Yadav, who is also the NTCA chairman, "emphasised" that "voluntary relocation of villages from core or critical tiger habitats of the tiger reserve, which is backed with statutory provisions, should be taken on a priority so that a win-win situation for tiger conservation and inclusive growth can be achieved and people living inside forest areas can be brought into the mainstream". He stressed that the needs of forest dwellers should be considered while carrying out voluntary relocations and highlighted the potential of tiger reserves as an "instrument for development of Tier II cities". Last year, a large number of people from tribal communities living in the core zones of India's tiger reserves protested against the NTCA's directive to

forest officials to speed up the relocation of 64,801 families from 591 villages in the core areas of 54 tiger reserves. Gobind Sagar Bhardwaj, the NTCA's member secretary, said in the meeting that village rehabilitation was a "completely voluntary process" and "informed consent of the gram sabha and the people affected is obtained" before relocation. The resettlement package for families was raised from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 15 lakh in 2021, he added. An NTCA member suggested that the relocation package be revised periodically based on inflation trends. He pointed out that the people being relocated from forest areas were usually reluctant to change and this should be considered while encouraging voluntary rehabilitation through capacity and skill development programmes. A Union tribal

affairs ministry official informed the NTCA that it had received several representations from organisations following the NTCA's letter requesting states to undertake voluntary village relocation. The ministry last month asked states to gather data on the number of villages and families living in tiger reserves, details of villages relocated outside, and the status of claims to forest land and produce settled under the Forest Rights Act, 2006. A tiger reserve consists of two zones - the core (critical tiger habitat) and the buffer (peripheral areas). According to the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, core areas must remain "inviolate for the purpose of tiger conservation". The buffer areas, in contrast, permit sustainable human activities alongside wildlife conservation.

Maha Kumbh 2025 to boost UP's economy by ₹3 Lakh Crore: CM Yogi

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■
LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has projected that the ongoing Maha Kumbh 2025 in Prayagraj will provide a massive ₹3 lakh crore boost to the state's economy. He emphasized that the grand religious gathering is not just a symbol of faith but also a significant driver of economic growth.

Addressing a gathering, CM Yogi highlighted that so far, nearly 50 crore devotees have participated in the sacred dip at the Maha Kumbh, showcasing Uttar Pradesh's efficient management and infrastructural capabilities. He asserted that the event has provided a long-awaited recognition to religious sentiments that had been suppressed for centuries.

CM Yogi responded to concerns about government expenditure on the event, stating that ₹1,500 crore had been invested in infrastructure and logistical arrangements, ensuring a seamless experience for pilgrims. He underscored that



An aerial view of devotees gathered to take a holy dip at Sangam, the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and mythical Saraswati rivers, during Maha Kumbh festival in Prayagraj.

this investment has led to a transformative revival of Prayagraj, generating significant returns through increased tourism and commercial activity. The Chief Minister also lauded the comprehensive transportation arrangements that have facilitated the movement of millions of

devotees. He noted that 40 regular flights are operating to and from Prayagraj, connecting the city to major destinations across the country. Additionally, the Indian Railways has introduced hundreds of special trains, while improved road networks have played a crucial

role in accommodating the massive influx of pilgrims. The Union Road Transport Minister, Nitin Gadkari's approval of several road projects has further strengthened Prayagraj's connectivity. Highlighting the administration's efficiency, CM Yogi cited the smooth

execution of the Mauni Amavasya Snan, which witnessed an unprecedented 8 crore devotees taking a dip in the holy Sangam without any major disruptions. He attributed this success to the well-coordinated efforts of the 'double-engine government', referring to the BJP-led state and central governments working in tandem.

For the first time in history, devotees at Maha Kumbh 2025 are being granted unrestricted access to sacred sites such as Akshayvat, Patalpuri, and Saraswati Koop, which had previously remained off-limits or restricted. CM Yogi acknowledged the Ministry of Defence's cooperation in leasing the land for the event over the past eight years, ensuring a smooth organization of the festival.

"The Maha Kumbh 2025 continues to be a historic event, intertwining faith, culture, and economic growth, cementing Uttar Pradesh's status as a hub of spiritual and economic transformation," Yogi said.

Traffic chaos returns to Prayagraj as devotees struggle to reach Sangam

BISWAJEET BANERJEE/HARI OM ■
PRAYAGRAJ

After three days of respite, Prayagraj was once again gripped by severe traffic congestion on Friday, as long snarls stretched from Balsan and A.N. Jha Marg to the New Yamuna Bridge and Naini Central Jail. By noon, the traffic on Mirzapur Road extended for nearly five kilometers, with vehicles crawling at a snail's pace. The situation was worse on the New Yamuna Bridge, where crossing the 1.5 km stretch took more than two hours.

Despite expectations that the crowd would ease after Maghi Purnima, the influx of visitors has continued to rise, pushing the city's roads into a state of paralysis. The Civil Lines route leading to the fairground witnessed multiple choke points, while major congestion was also reported in Jhansi, Naini, and Phaphama. Parking spaces were running out, leaving vehicles stranded for hours and devotees exhausted.

"I reached Naini station at 6 AM, but even after six hours, I have not been able to reach Sangam. The time taken from Rewa to Prayagraj was less than the time it is taking to get from Naini to the fairground,"



Devotees return from the ongoing Maha Kumbh

said Vikram Prasad, a pilgrim from Madhya Pradesh.

The problem began early in the day, with vehicles piling up on Mirzapur Road in Naini from 10 AM. Both lanes remained gridlocked, forcing commuters to inch forward at a frustratingly slow pace. The main entry routes into the fair from the city, particularly near the Harshvardhan intersection and Alopibagh Chungi Bridge, saw a massive build-up of vehicles. The congestion has significantly delayed travel to Sangam, with some pilgrims taking several hours to cover short distances. Despite a heavy deployment of traffic police, the overwhelming number of vehicles left them struggling to manage the flow. Officers

on duty could be seen directing traffic, but their efforts were often rendered ineffective due to the sheer volume of vehicles.

Devotees from Bihar, West Bengal, and Maharashtra have been particularly affected, spending hours trapped in the gridlock. "We had planned to offer prayers early, but we have been stuck in this jam for hours now. There is no proper arrangement to manage such a huge crowd," said Ramesh Gupta, a devotee from Patna. Traffic jam in nearby districts The return flow of pilgrims from Maha Kumbh has led to massive congestion in several districts of Awadh, including Ayodhya, Amethi, Sultanpur, Ambedkar Nagar, and Barabanki.

Mizoram announces village council elections for March 12

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
AIZAWL

The Mizoram state election commission (SEC) on Friday announced elections to 88 village councils (VCs) within Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) in south Mizoram's Lawngtlai district. State election commissioner H. Lalthlangliana told a news conference here that the elections will be held on March 12 and counting of votes will take place as soon as polling is over.

The last date for filing nominations is February 19, while contestants can withdraw their names latest by February 24. Scrutiny of papers will be held on February 21, he added. The last date for formation of the executive body is March 17 and the election process is scheduled to be completed by March 18. According to the election commissioner, of the 516 seats, 88 are reserved for women. A total of 37,883 voters,

including 18,721 women electors, are eligible to exercise their franchise.

Meanwhile, in the elections to village councils in nine districts or non-scheduled areas and local councils (LCs) within two urban local bodies held on Wednesday, the ruling Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) emerged victorious securing a majority in 267 out of the total 544 VCs and 54 out of 110 LCs.

Opposition party Mizo National Front (MNF) secured a majority in 122 VCs and 27 LCs, while Congress won in 43 VCs and 14 LCs. BJP secured a majority in one VC, and there were seven VCs and two LCs where only independent candidates were elected. There was no clear majority in 104 VCs and 13 LCs, according to the SEC. More than 75 per cent of over 4.3 voters cast their votes in the VC polls, while 64.72 voting percentage was recorded in the LC polls.

Kinnar Akhada Mahamandaleshwar, three followers injured in knife attack

BISWAJEET BANERJEE/HARI OM ■
PRAYAGRAJ

In a shocking incident ahead of the Maha Kumbh 2025, Kinnar Akhada's Mahamandaleshwar Kalyani Nand Giri and three of her followers were injured in a brutal knife attack late on February 14 in Prayagraj. The assault took place near Sangam Lower Marg when unidentified assailants stopped their vehicle under the pretext of seeking blessings.

According to police sources, Kalyani Nand Giri and her followers were returning from the Kinnar Akhada to her residence in Sadiyapur in a Fortuner SUV when a group of individuals signaled them to stop. As the spiritual leader stepped out of her vehicle, the attackers suddenly drew knives and launched an assault. Upon receiving information, the police rushed to the spot and transported the injured to



Photo: File photo

a hospital. Officials have confirmed an ongoing investigation, though the motive behind the attack remains unclear. "We are examining CCTV footage from the Sector 16 area, which suggests that around six individuals were involved in the attack. No suspects have been identified yet, and we are exploring all possible

angles, including internal conflicts within the Kinnar Akhada," a senior police officer said. The attack has raised serious security concerns, especially with the Maha Kumbh 2025 drawing massive crowds to Prayagraj. Authorities have assured increased patrolling and surveillance to prevent further incidents.

Himachal Government allocates ₹1800 Crore to upgrade obsolete medical equipment

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
SHIMLA

The Himachal government has allocated approximately ₹1800 crore to replace obsolete medical machinery and equipment, some of which have been in use for 30 to 40 years in government hospitals, an official statement said on Friday.

Studies indicate that late diagnosis can increase medical costs by 30-50 per cent for a patient. Considering the challenges faced by patients due to old medical equipment, Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu has directed the replacement of outdated machines, according to the statement. According to health department data, 9.5 lakh patients travel outside Himachal Pradesh annually for treatment, resulting in an economic loss of ₹1350 crore to the state's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Focusing on four key points,

the health department has prepared a project report to offer world-class healthcare services in government health institutions.

Robotic surgery will be introduced in all medical colleges, along with state-of-the-art radiology and laboratory equipment, a spokesperson for the state government said. Each medical college will be equipped with 3-Tesla MRI machines, 256-slice high-end CT scan machines, PET scan machines, and other advanced diagnostic tools to ensure the timely detection of diseases and accurate treatment of patients. Additionally, modular operation theatres will be set up in these institutions, he said. A 150-bed Cancer Care Centre will be established in Hamirpur, offering advanced treatment facilities such as radiation therapy and nuclear medicine, he added.

Eight arrested for duping citizens posing as Axis Bank representative

STAFF REPORTER ■
GURUGRAM

A loan racket was busted with the arrest of 08 individuals, including six women, police said on Friday.

The suspects ran a "call centre" in Delhi's Badarpur area that allegedly targeted citizens by posing as a representative of Axis Bank and duped amount in the name of file charge, DD and other charges, police said. Regarding this, the Gurugram received a complaint on February 4 for fraud of Rs 18,000 and a case was registered under the relevant sections at Cyber Police station Manesar, Gurugram. During investigation, a police team of the Gurugram police with the help of police technology, busted the call center that committed the fraud/cheating in the above case and arrested 08 accused from Badarpur, Delhi on Thursday.

The accused were identified as Raju Mandal of Uttar Pradesh, Rohit Kumar resident of New Delhi, Rozi of Orayya Uttar Pradesh, Ruby of Faridabad, Seema Sinha of Faridabad 6, Gyanati of Okhla, Delhi, Mantasha of Badarpur, Delhi and 8. Sayraa of Faridabad.

Police investigation revealed that the accused used to commit fraud by calling people and duped money in the form of various types of charges in the name of getting loans. The accused used to get salary for this fraud and also commission from the defrauded amount. The accused were committing fraud since May 2024, police said.

Manipur under President's rule: BJP central leadership's next move under scrutiny

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
IMPHAL

All eyes are now on the BJP central leadership over its next step in strife-torn Manipur, a day after President's rule was imposed in the northeastern state and the assembly put under suspended animation. Security has been beefed up across the state following the Centre's announcement of President's rule, officials said. President's rule was imposed in Manipur and the assembly put under suspended animation on Thursday evening, days after Chief Minister N Biren Singh resigned from his post that led



Security personnel conduct a search operation in the fringe and vulnerable areas of hill and valley districts of Manipur

to political uncertainty in the state. The decision came as the BJP failed to build a consensus

on a chief ministerial candidate, despite having several rounds of discussions

between its northeast in-charge Sambit Patra and legislators. Singh, who was heading the BJP government in Manipur, resigned as chief minister after nearly 21 months of ethnic violence that has claimed over 250 lives so far. The Manipur assembly has a tenure till 2027. Officials said on Friday that security forces were on high alert in state capital Imphal, particularly around the Raj Bhavan and the CM secretariat. "The Manipur Police increased deployment of personnel in Imphal area, especially in front of Kangla Gate, Sanjenthong, Moirangkhom,

Keisampat and Konung Mamang," an officer said. "The precautionary measures were put in place to prevent any unwanted activities by miscreants who want to take advantage of the prevailing political situation," another official said. Talking to reporters soon after the announcement of President's rule, Manipur BJP president A Sharda had said on Thursday that the assembly has been put under suspended animation in accordance with the constitutional process, and asserted that the House had not been dissolved yet. She said once the situation improves in the state, the

House can be reinstated. Reacting to the development, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said it is a belated admission by the BJP of their complete inability to govern Manipur. "Now, PM Modi can no longer deny his direct responsibility for Manipur," he said in a post on X. "Has he finally made up his mind to visit the state, and explain to the people of Manipur and India his plan to restore peace and normalcy?" Gandhi said. In another post on X, Congress general secretary, Communications, Jairam Ramesh said, "Finally what the Indian National Congress has been

demanding for almost 20 months has happened. President's rule has been imposed in Manipur." Meanwhile, the Manipur CPI(M) unit said the President's rule should be immediately revoked and fresh elections held at the earliest. CPI(M) state committee secretary Ksh Shanta told reporters that the party, along with other like-minded ones, will stand for Manipur's territorial integrity during President's rule. He also claimed that the selfish quest for power among legislators brought the state to such a situation.

Union Minister Dr Jitendra Singh warns against unqualified health advisers spreading disinformation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
AHMEDABAD

Union minister Dr Jitendra Singh on Friday expressed concern over a "new genre" of unqualified and "self-styled counsellors" advising people on health and lifestyle, and rued that there was no regulation for them unlike doctors. He also held such people responsible for spreading "disinformation". Singh, who is also a diabetes specialist, was addressing a gathering of doctors and healthcare experts after inaugurating the 'World Congress of Diabetes', which will go on till February 16. "A huge, huge caution against a new genre of self-styled counsellors in Delhi.

You have a variety of diet charts in the market today. More than information, it is disinformation in this country, which plays havoc," he said. "They will impress you with graphs and you think it's the final truth. Because that's what is driving our culture today. And unfortunately, you don't have any regulation for them, and there is no mandatory registration for them like regular doctors," he added. Earlier, uneducated quacks used to do such things, but now English-speaking people are doing it, the minister said. Singh also called for collective efforts to fight diabetes and obesity in the country.

Gurugram cracks down on littering: 29 FIRs filed

STAFF REPORTER ■
GURUGRAM

In a major crackdown against 133 vehicle owners and drivers, the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram (MCG) recommended 29 FIRs and imposed a penalty of ₹22.39 against them for throwing garbage and debris in public places. It may be noted that the MCG had formed the Sanitation Security Force (SSF) to monitor the growing waste management and cleanliness challenges in the district. Along with filing FIRs under various sections, the SSF also ensure the seizure of the vehicle used in hamper cleanliness system in the city. According to Dr Balpreet Singh, Additional Commissioner of MCG,

throwing debris or garbage in a public places is a punishable offence, and to curb such activities, the SSF of the Municipal Corporation is monitoring around the clock, seven days a week. "During the monitoring by the teams, 29 FIRs have been registered against 33 vehicle owners and drivers at various police stations, while 158 vehicles have been challenged and their owners or drivers have been fined ₹22.39 lakh," Singh said. Singh said that this action has been taken by the SSF team during continuous monitoring at Sector-31, 32, 10, 22, 42, 25, 34, 59, 48, and 43, in front of Airtel building, Gwal Pahari, IFFCO Chowk, Krishna Chowk, around Sheetla Mata Mandir and other places.

ISRO develops world's largest solid propellant mixer for rocket motors

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
BENGALURU

ISRO on Friday said it has developed and realised the ten-tonne propellant mixer for solid motors. Solid propulsion plays a crucial role in Indian Space Transportation Systems and vertical mixer is one of the critical equipment in solid motor production, ISRO said in a statement. "Solid propellants are the backbone of rocket motors, and their production requires precise mixing of highly sensitive and hazardous ingredients," the statement read. The space agency said that towards increasing the production scale of solid motor segments, Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota in collaboration with Central Manufacturing



Technology Institute (CMTI), Bengaluru has successfully designed and developed 10-tonne Vertical Planetary Mixers for processing the solid propellants. ISRO has termed it a significant technological marvel. It added that the 10-tonne vertical mixer is the world's largest solid propellant mixing equipment. The development involves

collaboration with academia and industries and has completed factory-level acceptance tests. This high-capacity mixer will enable productivity, quality and throughput improvement for heavy solid motors production. Stating that the Department of Space has undertaken multiple initiatives towards indigenous development of critical technologies,

materials and machinery as part of 'Atmanirbhara (self reliance) in Space', ISRO said. "The realisation of indigenous 10-tonne vertical mixer is a true testament to India's growing technological prowess, self-reliance and unwavering commitment to innovation," it added. The 10 tonne vertical mixer is handed over to Director, SDSC SHAR by Director, CMTI in the presence of ISRO Chairperson V Narayanan on Thursday in CMTI, Bengaluru. ISRO said the 10-tonne vertical mixer weighs about 150 tonnes with a length of 5.4 m, breadth of 3.3 m and height of 8.7 m. The system has multiple agitators, which are hydrostatic driven and will be remotely operated using PLC-based control system with SCADA stations.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

US U-turn on Ukraine war

Trump and Putin have agreed to negotiate an end to the Ukraine war, a move that could have far-reaching implications for global peace and trade

The US President Trump has had a good relations with Russian President Vladimir Putin and that is now showing in the policy shift of the US. The US stance on the Ukraine war now seems to be taking a U-turn as in all likelihood the US would now go soft on Russia and leave Ukraine in the cold. In a significant geopolitical development, US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin have agreed to initiate negotiations aimed at ending the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. This move marks a notable shift in US foreign policy and has elicited varied reactions globally. President Trump held a 90-minute phone conversation with President Putin, discussing a range of topics, with a primary focus on the situation in Ukraine. Following the call, Trump announced that both Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy had expressed a willingness to pursue peace, leading to the initiation of negotiations to end the war. Trump indicated that these talks would commence immediately, with a potential meeting with Putin in Saudi Arabia in the near future.



Ukrainian and European leaders have expressed concerns about being sidelined in the negotiations and the potential for unfavourable concessions. The decision by the US to engage directly with Russia has raised questions about a potential shift in its support for Ukraine. By recognising Ukraine's NATO membership as 'impractical' and the return of Russian-occupied territories as 'illusory,' the US appears to be moving away from its previous stance of isolating Russia. This shift has led to concerns that Ukraine may be left in a precarious position, especially if European allies are unable to fill the void left

by a potential US withdrawal. The announcement of potential peace talks has had immediate effects on global markets. European stock markets have shown optimism, with indices such as Spain's Ibex 35 reaching new highs. Oil prices have also declined, with Brent crude falling below \$75 per barrel, as traders anticipate a relaxation of sanctions on Russian producers. However, uncertainties remain. Analysts caution that while a de-escalation could stabilise energy and food markets, the specifics of any agreement will determine the long-term impacts. The agricultural sector, in particular, is closely monitoring the situation, given that Russia and Ukraine together account for a significant portion of global wheat exports. A resolution to the conflict could ease supply constraints, but logistical challenges and infrastructure damage in Ukraine may continue to pose obstacles. India, as a major importer of commodities like sunflower oil, stands to be affected by these developments. A potential end to the conflict could lead to more predictable trade flows and possibly lower prices for key imports. While Trump-Putin negotiations it offers a glimmer of hope for peace, the potential shifts in alliances and the impacts on global markets warrant careful consideration by all stakeholders involved.

PICTALK



A foreign devotee during the Mahakumbh Mela 2025, in Prayagraj

Kumbh Mela: The catalyst for Gandhi's freedom struggle



RAJDEEP PATHAK

It was at this grand confluence of faith and politics that Gandhi fully grasped his growing influence, reinforcing his resolve for satyagraha

One of the most notable episodes in the history of the Kumbh Mela occurred in 1915 when Mahatma Gandhi visited the Haridwar gathering shortly after returning from South Africa after twenty-one years. Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Gandhi's political mentor, had advised him to undertake a nationwide tour to understand India's socio-political landscape before formulating his strategies - and plunging himself into the dynamics of the freedom movement. It was during this tour that Gandhi decided to attend the Kumbh, primarily to visit Mahatma Munshiram at his Gurukul in Rishikesh and to oversee the activities of the Servants of India Society. While Gandhi's views on various issues such as cleanliness and sanitation, including that of communal harmony were critical - which Gandhi distinctly mentions in his autobiography too - his brief political debut at Haridwar Kumbh Mela pointed towards the necessity of bridging the communal divide to achieve a more conscientious goal for freedom. Gandhi was also awestruck, not only by the overwhelming crowds but also by the chaos, superstition, and lack of hygiene. He noted the rampant disregard for cleanliness, which tarnished the sanctity of the event.

"The banks of the Ganga, a symbol of purity, were defiled by human waste and negligence," he lamented in his speeches decades later. In 1947, remembering his Kumbh experience, Gandhi remarked, "We must ensure that our religious gatherings become sanctuaries of cleanliness and serenity, not breeding grounds for disease and disorder." It was also here in Haridwar that Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi first grasped the profound impact his humble efforts in South Africa had on Bharat's people. Reflecting on this experience, he wrote in *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*: "My business was mostly to keep sitting in the tent, giving darshan and holding religious and other discussions with numerous pilgrims who called on me. This left me not a minute



which I could call my own. I was followed even to the bathing ghat by these darshan-seekers, nor did they leave me alone whilst I was having my meals. Thus, it was in Haridwar that I realised what a deep impression my humble services in South Africa had made throughout the whole of India."

The Kumbh Mela at Haridwar proved to be a pivotal moment in shaping Mahatma Gandhi's sense of purpose and his eventual entry into the political arena of India's freedom movement. This deepened his realisation that the people of India looked up to him, not just as a spiritual figure, but as a leader capable of addressing the nation's struggles. This realisation planted the seeds of confidence and responsibility within Gandhi, inspiring him to expand his mission of service and truth to the broader cause of India's liberation - which resulted in his first non-violent satyagraha in 1917 in Champaran, Bihar. The overwhelming response he received at the Kumbh Mela reinforced his belief in the power of collective action and solidified his resolve to dedicate his life to the fight for India's freedom.

It is also fascinating to note that Mahatma Gandhi's visit to Haridwar and his entry into the political arena coincided with a landmark moment in history - the All India Hindu Mahasabha formation during

the Kumbh Mela. In April 1915, amidst the spiritual fervour of the Haridwar Kumbh, Gandhi joined luminaries such as Swami Shradhdhanand, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, and other visionaries at the inaugural conference of the Sarvadeshak (All India) Hindu Sabha, marking a pivotal chapter in India's socio-political awakening. Gandhi's participation at the Kumbh was also available to British intelligence, who had made records - now available in the Regional State Archives. The colonial period introduced a fresh perspective to the Kumbh Mela, with European observers chronicling its magnificence and adding valuable historical context. Fascinated by the immense scale and diversity of the pilgrimage, the British left behind detailed records that provide significant insights into the evolution of the Maha Kumbh Mela which also can be found in the well-documented writings of James Prinsep, a British colonial administrator.

It is worth referring to The Sunday Guardian's article, *Beyond Faith: How Kumbh Mela Reshapes the Course of History*, which highlights the Kumbh Mela's role in India's independence movement. A 1920 British intelligence document, displayed at the Allahabad Museum, reveals a pivotal 1918 meeting during the Mela. This meeting adopt-

ed a memorial supporting political reforms, demanded Panchayats, permanent settlements, and tenant protections, and founded the UP Peasants Association. Led by Pt Madan Mohan Malviya, the association grew to 450 branches, fostering unity among peasants and opposing zamindar dominance. The Sunday Guardian further highlights the pivotal role of the Kumbh Mela in shaping India's post-independence democracy, particularly during the Emergency. The JP Movement gained significant momentum at this Kumbh, with the Sadhu Samaj lending strong support. Events such as the 'Dharma Sansad' and 'Sadhu Sammelans (congregation)' cemented widespread support for the Janata Party across the Hindi heartland. The 'Maha Kumbh Mela' transcends its role as a spiritual gathering, reflecting the profound confluence of the sacred and the secular.

While it offers a space for deep introspection and devotion, it also acts as a mirror to the socio-political currents that shape Indian society. This timeless festival continues to evolve, bridging spiritual and worldly realms. The Kumbh Mela remains a powerful testament to India's enduring cultural legacy.

(The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)



THE KUMBH MELA AT HARIDWAR PROVED TO BE A PIVOTAL MOMENT IN SHAPING MAHATMA GANDHI'S SENSE OF PURPOSE AND HIS EVENTUAL ENTRY INTO THE POLITICAL ARENA OF INDIA'S FREEDOM MOVEMENT

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SAJJAN KUMAR CONVICTED IN SIKH RIOTS

Madam — Congress leader Sajjan Kumar stands convicted in yet another case related to anti-Sikh violence in Delhi after the death of the then PM Indira Gandhi, gunned down by two Sikh security guards more than 40 years ago. There were no FIRs and the Congress goons roamed across Delhi to burn alive the Sikhs along with damaging their property continuously for 3 days when the Army was called to contain the violence. The moot question is, "Who was responsible?"

Obviously, the violence had the blessings of Rajiv Gandhi, who took over as PM immediately after the death of her mother and justified the killings on camera, yet no case was made against him or the family, and even the courts remained aloof to the bare fact about the responsibility of Rajiv Gandhi while hearing the petitions pertaining to the violence. Sajjan Kumar or Jagdish Tytler were only carrying out the orders to finish the Sikhs as much as possible within 3 days. The same courts as well as the media tried and tried Gujarat CM Narendra Modi for the violence that erupted after the gruesome burning alive of 59 Hindus. Doesn't it establish that the special family is much bigger than scores of poor Hindus in the eyes of the media and judiciary?

Jai Prakash Gupta | Ambala Cantt

US BANS ASSOCIATED PRESS

Madam — The decision by U.S. President Donald Trump to ban the renowned news agency Associated Press (AP) from entering the White House is a severe blow to democracy. This is not merely a restriction on a media institution but an attempt to crush independent journalism. The Trump administration accused AP of misusing the term "of America," but can this truly justify curbing press freedom? The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution guarantees the press the right to operate fearlessly, impartially, and independently. However, when those in power seek to evade

New Income Tax Bill simplifies taxation



The newly tabled Income Tax Bill brings much-needed reforms to India's tax system and deserves commendation. By replacing the outdated Income Tax Act of 1961, the bill aims to simplify tax laws, reduce litigation and remove obsolete provisions, making the tax process more transparent and efficient for both taxpayers and the government. One of the most notable changes is the

increased tax rebate under Section 87A, which will now provide up to Rs 60,000 for individuals with a net taxable income of Rs 12 lakh or below. This is a significant step towards reducing the tax burden on the middle class, offering greater financial relief.

Furthermore, the introduction of two clear deductions under the new tax regime, a Rs 75,000 standard deduction and NPS contributions, enhances tax planning options for individuals, making it simpler to manage finances. Although the income tax slabs remain unchanged for FY 2025-26, the streamlined approach will likely benefit taxpayers in the long run, fostering greater compliance and reducing unnecessary complications. Overall, this bill paves the way for a more modern and efficient tax system that is better suited to today's economic landscape.

Vishal Mayur | Tumakuru

accountability, their first move is often to silence the voice of truth.

The role of the media is to provide the public with unbiased information and critically examine government policies. Blocking a media organisation from entering the White House, the epicentre of power, is a direct attack on the press. History bears witness that wherever governments have attempted to suppress the press, dictatorship has followed. An independent media is the fourth pillar of democracy, and any restriction on it is an infringement on public rights. In a true democracy, power does not lie with the ruling authorities but with the people. Freedom of the press is the most powerful tool to amplify the voice of the citizens.

Jai Prakash Gupta | Tirunelveli

RAGGING MUST STOP

Madam — The Kottayam Nursing College ragging incident is a crude reminder that ragging is very much prevailing in our colleges without any deterrent and despite ragging being a

criminal offence. These ragging incidents continued for three months, telling how much ordeal freshers had to face during that period.

Till about the 90s, ragging in the educational institutes used to be a platform to create affinity, closeness, and rapport between first-year students and seniors. Sadly, it has now taken an unfortunate turn and become a tool to torture. Merely getting parents and students to sign the undertaking was never going to help and prevent ragging from taking place. Punishing culpable students is an absolute must, but college administration must be held accountable in such cases too. One out-of-the-box idea could be to set a rule that any student who is found guilty of ragging and torturing juniors would not be allowed to participate in final placement or not be given passing out certificates. We have to hit it where it hurts them most.

Bal Govind | Noida

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

WazirX hack exposes crypto risks:

A call for stringent regulations

Such cyberattacks expose regulatory gaps across jurisdictions and underscore the need for investor protection and the need for stricter crypto regulations



NIRUPAMA SOUNDARARAJAN

At the 2023 G20 Summit under India's presidency, world economies pledged to create a global regulatory framework for crypto assets. While each country must establish its regulations, international collaboration is equally important.



This need for both domestic and global regulatory frameworks is exemplified by the recent WazirX case, which underscores the urgency of addressing vulnerabilities in the crypto ecosystem. WazirX, one of India's leading cryptocurrency exchanges, suffered a cyberattack in July 2024 by the North Korean hacker group Lazarus. This has been confirmed by a joint statement issued by the governments of the United States, Japan and South Korea and the three countries have pledged to collaborate to counter this.

In India, the attack has raised concerns about cybersecurity risks and the reliability of custodial exchanges. Custodial exchanges, where assets are held centrally pose significant risks, as evidenced by this cyber-attack. This episode has exposed broader systemic risks and has revived the con-

asset rebalancing exercise, which ensures hack victims will receive 85 per cent of their portfolio value as of July 18, 2024. Following the breach, WazirX faced a significant shortfall in ERC-20 tokens, leaving it unable to fully cover user balances. Since matching individual token losses would be complex and impractical, the proposed Scheme aims to distribute available assets equitably among all creditors, based on their claim values at the time of the attack.

This standardised valuation approach ensures fairness and transparency and has been approved by the Singapore court.

The Scheme of Arrangement The Scheme of Arrangement promises to offer a legally binding path to recovery, ensuring equitable treatment of all creditors, regardless of the size of their claims or the type of cryptocurrency they hold. This approach takes an egalitarian stance, providing all users with a fair opportunity to recover their assets. The restructuring and resolution process will only proceed with the approval of a majority of creditors. To enhance recovery prospects, the

Scheme includes the issuance of Recovery Tokens (RTs), which would give creditors a stake in future platform profits and assets. If the Scheme is rejected, WazirX may face liquidation, which would likely erode value, force the sale of assets at distressed prices and drag out the recovery process for years with uncertain outcomes.

The Way Forward WazirX's restructuring plan represents a bold approach to crisis management, prioritising immediate user recovery and laying the groundwork for a more resilient crypto ecosystem. However, the broader lesson from this case is the urgent need for a robust regulatory framework for virtual digital assets in India. As the G20 emphasised, global cooperation and regulatory consistency are key to addressing the risks in the crypto ecosystem. India must develop a comprehensive regulatory framework to better protect investors and mitigate future risks, ensuring the country's preparedness for a rapidly evolving digital economy. (The writer is CEO & Co-founder, The Policy Consensus Centre; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

SHAPING INDIA'S AI FUTURE

As AI redefines global power dynamics, India is emerging as a key player in its governance and innovation



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

Prime Minister Modi's Paris and Washington visit, meetings with the two most powerful leaders from the developed world, comes at a time of shifting geopolitical sands. The buzzword around both these high-level bilaterals was high-end technology cooperation in a world, increasingly getting fragmented. India was the co-chair of the AI Action Summit in Paris, along with the host country France. This is the third global-level event on Artificial Intelligence, making it a Kumbh of technology leaders, policy makers, experts, corporates and world leaders in France. The theme was how to harness the power of this nearly mind-bending technology, whose evolution has been compared to the invention of the wheel and humans learning to use fire safely.

Almost simultaneously, China released a nimble version of the generative AI tool DeepSeek, which is currently a huge challenger to US billions of dollars infused into US technology companies' almost monopolistic dominance on AI tools and standards. US President Biden in his last week at the Oval Office had passed an executive order called the Interim Final Rule (IFR) on Framework for Artificial Intelligence Diffusion, essentially imposing export controls on high-end software and hardware required for AI development across nations which may be considered inimical to US interests (i.e. China) but also, close allies like India.



While the global technology industry stakeholders have requested the new President to be consistent with the Trump Administration's previously stated, Regulatory Freeze Order, and suspend implementation of the AI Diffusion Rule until the Secretary of Commerce and other relevant officials can review the rule appropriately and pursue robust stakeholder engagement so that the rules reflect the government's objectives and ensure companies can engage with key US trading partners. President Trump is yet to revoke the executive order signed by his predecessor, even though he did sign a fresh one on January 23, which potentially hints at a pause.

Three days into the Oval Office President Trump signed the executive order on AI development and deployment stating the purpose as "The United States has long been at the forefront of artificial intelligence (AI) innovation, driven by the strength of our free markets, world-class research institutions, and entrepreneurial spirit. To maintain this leadership, we must develop AI systems that are free from ideological bias or engineered social agendas. With the right Government policies, we can solidify our position as the global leader in AI and secure a brighter future for all Americans. This order revokes certain existing AI policies and directives that act as barriers to American AI innovation, clearing a path for the United States to act decisively to retain global leadership in artificial intelligence. It is the policy of the United States to sustain and enhance America's global AI dominance in order to promote human flourishing, economic competitiveness, and national security."

India is aiming to have an equal say on global high tables of AI governance, innovation and development. It has an ambitious AI mission of its own, which is heavily dependent on high-end chips and Graphic Processing Units (GPUs) currently available from US technology companies. Any restrictions on access to these high-end processors would upset the ambitious goal envisaged under the India AI mission. The conversation in Paris, India's announcement to host the fourth global AI summit in Delhi, and conversations with President Trump and other leaders this week, are steps in the right direction.

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

Palestine in ruins: The unbearable cost of war

As political instability deepens and global powers debate the future of Gaza, millions of Palestinians face an uncertain and harrowing future



K C TYAGI

On October 7, 2003, Hamas fighters successfully launched a massive attack on Israel, but the price that Palestinians had to pay for it is heartbreaking. It will take three centuries to recover from the destruction caused by this war, which lasted for more than 15 months. According to a United Nations survey, it may take more than 350 years to rebuild Palestine, which has been reduced to rubble. The estimated loss in the first four months of the war was \$18.5 billion. At present, about 69 per cent of the structures in Gaza are either damaged or destroyed. More than 50 million tons of rubble have accumulated in the Gaza region, which may take more than 15 years to remove. Piles of rubble are visible throughout Palestine due to bombings and ground operations.

A United Nations report states that the accumulated rubble is approximately 12 times the size of the Great Pyramid of Giza in Egypt. According to estimates, even if more than 100 trucks work continuously, it may still take more than 15 years to clear the debris. Three generations born in tents will likely have to make them their permanent homes for a long time. Reconstruction will require billions of dollars, yet no international institution is willing to invest in an ungoverned region that has seen five wars in less than two decades.

Using satellite data, the United Nations estimated last month that 70 per cent of structures in Gaza have been destroyed, including more than 245,000 residential buildings. The World Bank estimated losses of \$18.5 billion in the first four months of the war—an amount nearly equal to the combined economic output of the West Bank and Gaza in 2022. Major roads have been turned into deep trenches, essential water and electricity infrastructure has been destroyed, and most hospitals are no longer functional due to being targeted during the bombings. According to the United Nations, more than 50,000 people have died in Gaza, 44 per cent of whom are children. The children who have survived are suffering from sickness, stress, insomnia, depression, and fear. They are terrified of every stranger. The children of Gaza have lost the will to live. Amidst the devastation, 96 per cent of children express a desire not to live, and 49 per cent say they would have preferred to die. Among those who feel this way, 72 per cent are boys and 46 per cent are girls. A Netherlands-based organisation, War Child Alliance, has collected shocking and heartbreaking data. The alliance gathered this information from 500 parents or caretakers, including families whose children were crippled in the war or separated from their families. Their findings revealed that 92 per cent of the children surveyed are unable to accept the reality of war. The smell of gunpowder lingers in Gaza's atmosphere. The situation is so dire that 79 per cent of children experience nightmares, and 73 per cent have become so overwhelmed that their behaviour has turned aggressive. Many scream and moan in their sleep. These children have witnessed their homes and schools reduced to rubble. Their young minds are shattered, unable to comprehend why they are being punished and what crime they have committed.

Devastated by this horrific situation, the entire Palestinian government, including



DESPITE MULTIPLE RESOLUTIONS CALLING FOR A CEASEFIRE IN THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY, ALL PREVIOUS EFFORTS HAD FAILED. ISRAEL WAS EVEN INCLUDED IN THE LIST OF SHAME, A DOCUMENT THAT RECORDS ALLEGED RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AGAINST CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT

Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh, has resigned. In his resignation letter, he acknowledged that Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are starving. Tensions escalated further when an American airman involved in military operations set himself on fire outside the Israeli embassy in Washington, DC, repeatedly shouting, "No more involvement in genocide." The United Nations has passed a ceasefire resolution, endorsed by 158 nations, including India.

Despite multiple resolutions calling for a ceasefire in the UN General Assembly, all previous efforts had failed. Israel was even included in the List of Shame, a document that records alleged rights violations against children in armed conflict. In this report, Israel is accused of committing severe violations of children's rights. This inclusion has angered Israel and damaged its international reputation. Several key European Union countries, which previously sympathised with Israel, have now condemned its actions. Despite continued American support, Israel's economy has begun to collapse. In recent months, GDP growth has been only 0.7 per cent. The Israeli army has requested \$16 billion, equivalent to 3 per cent of the country's GDP. Even after the ceasefire, the military requires \$8 billion annually to address new security challenges.

The fiscal deficit has now reached 8 per cent of GDP. Israel is also deeply concerned that fighting has spread to its major business hubs, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. In January, Israel's debt stood at 62 per cent of GDP, which is still lower than the average for most wealthy nations in the OECD. However, prominent credit rating agencies such as Fitch and Moody's have already downgraded Israel's credit rating once this

year, with the possibility of further downgrades shortly.

Following the Hamas attack last year, Israel revoked work permits for 80,000 Palestinian workers. No replacements have been hired, leading to a 40 per cent decline in the construction industry. The same trend is observed in the high-tech sector and other industries. Inflation reached an annual rate of 3.6 per cent last month. If the war had continued any longer, the value of the Israeli shekel might have dropped further, forcing banks to rely on their reserves. Although a ceasefire is in place, this does not mark the end of the war. A recent statement by US President Donald Trump has crushed any hopes of peace efforts. Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, is currently visiting the US, where he has been given priority among the foreign guests invited by the President. However, Netanyahu faces growing protests in Israel, driven by both economic instability and widespread public dissent. The situation worsened when Israel's Defense Minister, Benny Gantz, resigned from his position along with other members of his party, putting additional pressure on the government. Both leaders have sparked global controversy following a press conference at the White House, where they announced plans for the US to occupy the Gaza Strip and transform it into a resort city.

The proposed project would turn Gaza into a hub for employment and tourism in West Asia. The entire area would be levelled to develop infrastructure, and the 2.3 million people currently living in Gaza would be relocated to countries such as Egypt and Jordan. However, both Egypt and Jordan have firmly rejected this proposal. Experts argue that international laws and treaties will pose a significant obstacle to

any US attempt to occupy Gaza. Meanwhile, major Arab nations are mobilising against Trump's plan, with Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, and Turkey openly opposing it.

Hamas has strongly condemned the proposal, labelling it ethnic genocide. Several US lawmakers, both Democrats and Republicans, have also voiced their opposition. In the past, Trump had similarly expressed intentions to occupy Greenfield Island, take control of the Panama Canal, and annex Canada as the 51st state of America. The Israeli parliament has enacted several controversial laws that have further inflamed tensions with Palestine and Arab nations. For example, the Jewish State Bill officially declares Israel as a Jewish state, effectively relegating non-Jewish communities to second-class citizenship. Additionally, the decision to shift the capital from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem is widely seen as an act of provocation against Palestinians. Israel also occupies the Syrian territory of the Golan Heights, which has been under Israeli control since the 1967 war.

A massive city, known as Trump City, is currently being developed in the region. The month of Ramadan is approaching, which is likely to bring additional hardships. Tensions surrounding the Al-Aqsa Mosque also intensify during this time, as restrictions are often imposed on Muslim worshippers. At present, the likelihood of renewed conflict appears higher than the prospect of lasting peace. The international community is also deeply concerned about the Trump administration's decision to withdraw US representatives from the United Nations.

(The writer is a former Member of Parliament; views are personal)

India stands on the brink of an AI-driven revolution

By prioritising comprehensive AI education, ethical governance and transparent regulations, India can lead the global AI revolution

India is emerging as a dominant force in Artificial Intelligence (AI), shaping its economy, security, and global influence. At the ongoing AI Summit in Paris, India's leadership in AI highlights its commitment to technological advancement and innovation. The Prime Minister's prominent role at the summit underscores the country's strategic focus on AI, positioning it as a counterforce to China's deepfake threats. Whether in AI, digital transformation, or healthcare, India is rapidly evolving into a global technology powerhouse, striving for AI self-reliance and economic growth.

AI is no longer a futuristic concept—it is an immediate reality reshaping India's digital landscape. Projections sug-

gest that AI will contribute \$500 billion to the Indian economy by 2025, accounting for 10 per cent of the national GDP. The technology is revolutionising industries, from agriculture to healthcare and revitalising cultural and linguistic heritage. India is not merely adopting AI; it is actively leading the revolution through ambitious government initiatives, collaborations with tech giants and extensive investment in AI infrastructure. The Indian government has launched several initiatives to position the country as a leader in AI. The IndiaAI Mission and the establishment of India's first AI University in Maharashtra reflect a strong commitment to technological leadership. Partnerships with global tech



VINAY PATHAK

firms like NVIDIA are helping develop AI solutions tailored to India's unique challenges. AI-driven tools in agriculture, such as CropIn and Intello Labs, assist farmers in predicting weather patterns, optimising irrigation, and detecting crop diseases, thereby boosting productivity and sustainability. India's corporate sector is also investing heavily in AI.

Companies like Infosys and TCS are deploying AI-driven solutions to streamline business processes, automate customer service, and optimise supply chains. Infosys' Nia platform enhances efficiency and reduces operational costs, while Zoho's AI-powered CRM tools empower small and medium enterprises to compete globally. Generative AI tools like ChatGPT are increasingly being utilised by job seekers, with 87 per cent leveraging them to refine resumes and prepare for interviews.

Despite its rapid progress, India faces significant challenges in AI adoption. A critical skills shortage in AI-related professions remains a pressing issue. To address this, the National Programme on AI,



launched by NITI Aayog, aims to train over a million workers in AI skills. Additionally, states like Karnataka and Telangana are establishing AI hubs to nurture innovation and talent development. However, while India produces over 1.5 million engineers annually, only a small percentage have the specialised expertise required for AI development. AI's rise also brings security concerns. Cyber threats are

growing, with increasing vulnerability to sophisticated cyberattacks. In 2023, a major Indian bank suffered a ransomware attack, disrupting services for millions of customers. AI-powered cyber tools, while beneficial, can be exploited by malicious actors. The dangers of misinformation and AI-generated deepfakes are also becoming more apparent. The viral deepfake video of actor Rashmika Mandanna in 2023 highlighted the risks of AI-driven disinformation. Similarly, AI-powered voice cloning scams are on the rise, posing significant fraud risks.

AI is also playing a crucial role in preserving India's cultural and linguistic heritage. Institutions like IIT Madras are developing AI models to revive

endangered languages such as Toda and Gondi.

The Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute is using AI to digitise ancient manuscripts, ensuring the preservation of India's historical knowledge. AI is further enhancing the entertainment sector through immersive experiences, such as virtual reality tours of historical sites and AI-curated regional literature and music recommendations.

In healthcare, AI-driven tools like Niramai are revolutionising early cancer detection, while telemedicine platforms like Apollo Telehealth are providing medical access to rural communities. The education sector is benefiting from AI-powered platforms. In disaster management, AI is helping predict natural disasters and

coordinate relief efforts. The Indian Meteorological Department employs AI to analyze weather patterns and issue early warnings for cyclones and floods, thereby minimising casualties.

AI is not merely a technological tool; it is a transformative force shaping India's future. However, the country must strike a balance between innovation and regulation to ensure ethical AI deployment. As AI evolves, India must establish a robust framework to address ethical concerns, security risks, and workforce reskilling. Collaborative efforts between the government, industry, and academia will be key in ensuring AI benefits for the society.

(The writer is an assistant professor at IIT, Sonapat; views are personal)

EU commission pledges swift response to Trump's tariffs

PTI ■ BRUSSELS

The European Union's executive branch on Friday vowed to "take firm and immediate action" against US President Donald Trump's imposition of tariffs on steel and aluminum.

The European Commission said in a statement that Trump's proposed "reciprocal" trade policy goes "in the wrong direction." "The EU will take firm and immediate action against unjustified barriers to free and fair trade, including when tariffs are used to challenge legitimate and non-discriminatory policies," the Commission said. "The EU will always protect European businesses, workers and consumers from unjustified tariff measures."

The Commission, which negotiates trade relations on behalf of the 27-nation bloc, said the EU has some of the lowest tariffs in the world and sees no justification for increased U.S. tariffs on its exports.

"Tariffs are taxes. By imposing tariffs, the US is taxing its own citizens, raising costs for business, stifling growth and fuelling inflation," it said.

"Tariffs heighten economic uncertainty and disrupt the efficiency and integration of global markets."

Earlier this week, the Commission said US tariffs on steel and aluminum would not go unanswered.

It is not yet clear what countermeasures would apply. Trump slapped similar tariffs on EU steel and aluminum during his first term, which enraged European and other allies. The EU imposed countermeasures in retaliation at the time, raising tariffs on US-made motorcycles, bourbon, peanut butter and jeans, among other items. The EU estimates that annual trade volume between both sides stands at about \$1.5 trillion, representing some 30% of global trade. While the bloc has a substantial export surplus in goods, it says that is partly offset by the US surplus in the trade of services. The EU says that trade in goods reached 851 billion euros (\$878 billion) in 2023, with a trade surplus of 156 billion euros (\$161 billion) for the EU. Trade in services was worth 688 billion euros (\$710 billion) with a trade deficit of 104 billion euros (\$107 billion) for the EU.

Taiwan pledges to invest more in US after Trump tariff threats

PTI ■ TAIPEI

Taiwan President Lai Ching-te said Friday he would communicate more with the US over President Donald Trump's concerns over the chip industry and invest more in the US, hours after Trump ordered reciprocal tariffs on trade partners. Trump said on Thursday that Taiwan had taken away the US chip business and said that he wanted it back in the country. Taiwan's TSMC is the world's largest chipmaker and produces chips for companies including Apple, Intel and Nvidia.

In a news briefing after holding a meeting of the National Security Council at the presidential office, Lai said that he was aware of Trump's concerns. He described Taiwan's semiconductor industry as well as the global semiconductor industry is part of an "ecosystem" in which countries specialise in different areas.

"The global semiconductor industry is an ecosystem, and it's a division of work," Lai said.

"In response to President Trump's latest actions, Taiwan needs to respond calmly, and communicate well with the industries," Lai said.

"We hope to create a win-win scenario, not just to ensure benefit to the US but also to ensure that Taiwan's industries has room for growth." His comments came hours after Trump ordered reciprocal tariffs on trade partners that tax US imports, a move that could threaten a global trade war. The US does not recognise Taiwan as a country, but is its strongest backer and biggest arms provider. But bilateral relations between the two are less certain amid Trump's seemingly transactional approach to geopolitical relations.

Lai said his government would propose a "global semiconductor democratic supply chain partnership initiative" and said he would be willing to work with partners such as the US to build a more resilient and diversified semiconductor supply chain.

Lai said that Taiwan will maintain communication with the

US to help the new government better understand that Taiwan is an "indispensable partner in the United States' process of rebuilding its manufacturing industry and consolidating its high-tech leadership." Over the past two years, more than 40% of Taiwan's overseas investments are US bound, Lai said, exceeding that of investments in China. Lai also said Friday that he would propose a "special budget" to increase defense spending to over 3% of Taiwan's gross domestic product. (AP)

Judge sets 5-day deadline for Trump administration to start lifting its USAID funding freeze

Washington (AP) A federal judge has ordered President Donald Trump's administration to temporarily lift a funding freeze that has shut down US humanitarian aid and development work around the world, and he has set a five-day deadline for the administration to prove it's complying. The judge's ruling late Thursday cited the financial devastation that the near-overnight cutoff of payments has caused suppliers and nonprofits that carry out much of US aid overseas.

The ruling was the first to challenge the Republican administration's funding freeze. It comes amid a growing number of lawsuits by government employees' groups, aid groups and government suppliers asking courts to roll back the administration's fast-paced dismantling of the US Agency for International Development, or USAID, and US foreign assistance overall. Trump and his aide Elon Musk say the 6-decade-old aid agency and much of foreign assistance overall is out of line with the Republican president's agenda. Administration officials "have not offered any explanation for why a blanket suspension of all congressionally appropriated foreign aid, which set off a shockwave and upended" contracts with thousands of non-profit groups, businesses and others, "was a rational precursor to reviewing programmes," Judge Amir H. Ali said in his

ruling. Contractors, farmers and suppliers in the US and around the world say the Trump administration's funding freeze has stifled them on hundreds of millions of dollars in pay for work already done, has forced them to lay off staff and is rapidly putting many near the point of financial collapse. Farmers and other suppliers and contractors describe fortunes in undelivered food aid rotting in ports and other undelivered aid at risk of theft.

The judge ordered the administration to notify every organization with an existing foreign-aid contract with the federal government of his temporary stay. He set a Tuesday deadline for the administration to show it had done so and was otherwise complying with the order. There was no immediate public response from the Trump administration.

The judge issued the temporary order in the US in a lawsuit brought by two organisations, the AIDS Vaccine Advocacy Coalition and the Global Health Council, representing health organisations receiving US funds for work abroad. In his order, the judge noted that the Trump administration argued it had to shut down funding for the thousands of USAID aid programs abroad to conduct a thorough review of each program and whether it should be eliminated.

However, lawyers for the administration had failed to show they had a "rational reason for disregarding ... the countless small and large businesses that would have to shutter programs or shutter their businesses altogether," the judge added. The ruling also bars Secretary of State Marco Rubio and other Trump officials from enforcing stop-work orders that the Trump administration and Musk have sent to the companies and organizations carrying out foreign aid orders. The judge also rejected the Trump administration's argument that it was buffering the impact of the funding freeze, offering waivers to allow funding to keep flowing to some aid partners.

Vance to meet Zelenskyy amid concerns about US-Russia talks

PTI ■ MUNICH

Vice President JD Vance hammered home the US demand that the NATO alliance step up defense spending on Friday, ahead of a security meeting in Europe at a time of intense concern and uncertainty over the Trump administration's foreign policy.

The future of Ukraine is the top item on the agenda at the Munich Security Conference following a phone call between U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian leader Vladimir Putin this week, when they pledged to work together to end the 3-year-old Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Vance is expected to meet Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy later Friday for talks that many observers, particularly in Europe, hope will shed at least some light on Trump's ideas for a negotiated settlement to the war.

Vance started his day in Munich meeting separately with NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and British foreign secretary David Lammy. He used the engagements to reiterate the Republican Trump administration's call for NATO members to spend more on defense. Currently, 23 of NATO's 32 member nations are hitting the Western military alliance's target of spending 2% of the nation's GDP on defense.

"NATO is a very important military alliance, of course, that we're the most significant part of," Vance told Rutte. "But we want to make sure that NATO is actually built for the future, and we think a big part of that is ensuring that NATO does a little bit more burden sharing in Europe, so the United States can focus on some of our challenges in East Asia."

Rutte said he agreed that Europe needs to step up. "We have to grow up in that sense and spend much more," he said. Hours before Vance and Zelenskyy were set to meet, a Russian drone with a high-explosive warhead hit the protective confinement shell of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in the Kyiv region, the Ukrainian president said. Radiation levels have not increased, Zelenskyy and the UN atomic agency said.

Zelenskyy in Munich told reporters that he thinks the



United States Vice-President JD Vance, third left, meets with Germany's President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, second right, and Germany's Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, center right, on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference in Munich, Germany, Friday. AP/PTI

Chernobyl drone strike is a "very clear greeting from Putin and Russian Federation to the security conference."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Friday denied Ukraine's claims. And Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said the Munich organizers haven't invited Russia for several years, a decision she called "strange and politicised."

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio was supposed to join Vance and Zelenskyy but was delayed when his Air Force plane had to return to Washington after developing a mechanical problem en route to Munich. He took a different aircraft, but it was unclear whether he would arrive in time for the meeting.

Trump, who upended years of steadfast US support for Ukraine during his call with Putin on Wednesday, has been vague about his specific intentions — other than suggesting that a deal will likely result in Ukraine being forced to cede territory that Russia has seized since it annexed Crimea in 2014.

"The Ukraine war has to end," Trump told reporters Thursday. "Young people are being killed at levels that nobody's seen since World War II. And it's a ridiculous war."

Trump's musings have left Europeans in a quandary, wondering how — or even if — they can maintain the post-WWII security that NATO afforded them or fill the gap in the billions of dollars of security assistance that the

Democratic Biden administration provided to Ukraine since Russia's February 2022 invasion.

Trump has been highly skeptical of that aid and is expected to cut or otherwise limit it as negotiations get underway in the coming days.

Both Trump and US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth this week undercut Ukraine's hopes of becoming part of NATO, which the alliance said less than a year ago was "irreversible," or of getting back its territory captured by Russia, which currently occupies close to 20% including Crimea.

"I don't see any way that a country in Russia's position could allow ... them to join NATO," Trump said Thursday. "I don't see that happening."

But British Prime Minister Keir Starmer told Zelenskyy on Friday that Ukraine must be allowed to join NATO. Trump in recent days said he wants to reach an agreement with Ukraine to gain access to the country's rare earth materials as a condition for continuing US support for Ukraine's defense against Russia. He confirmed earlier this week that aides were working toward striking such a deal.

Asked Friday if a deal might be completed in Munich, Vance responded, "We'll see."

Vance, in an interview with the Wall Street Journal, said that the US would hit Moscow with sanctions and potentially military action if Putin won't agree to a peace deal with Ukraine that guarantees Kyiv's long-term independence.

The warning that military options "remain on the table" was striking language from a Trump administration that's repeatedly underscored a desire to quickly end the war.

The US reassurances may have somewhat allayed Zelenskyy's fears, although they will not replace any lost military or economic support that President Joe Biden's administration had provided.

The Ukrainian leader conceded Thursday that it was "not very pleasant" that Trump spoke first to Putin. But he said the main issue was to "not allow everything to go according to Putin's plan."

"We cannot accept it, as an independent country, any agreements (made) without us," Zelenskyy said as he visited a nuclear power plant in western Ukraine.

The track Trump is taking also has rocked Europe, much as his dismissive comments about France and Germany did during his first term.

French Deputy Foreign Minister Benjamin Haddad described Europe as being at a turning point, with the ground shifting rapidly under its feet, and said Europe must wean itself off its reliance on the United States for its security. He warned that handing a victory to Russia in Ukraine could have repercussions in Asia, too.

"I think we're not sufficiently grasping the extent to which our world is changing. Both our competitors and our allies are busy accelerating," Haddad told broadcaster France Info on Thursday.



President Donald Trump congratulates Robert F. Kennedy Jr., after he was sworn in as Health and Human Services Secretary in the Oval Office at the White House, Thursday in Washington. AP/PTI

'Russian drone struck Chernobyl reactor shell but radiation levels normal'

Kyiv (PTI): A Russian drone with a high-explosive warhead hit the protective containment shell of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in the Kyiv region during the night, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Friday.

Radiation levels have not increased, Zelenskyy and the UN atomic agency said. Russian officials made no immediate comment, and it was not possible to independently confirm Ukraine's claim of Russian responsibility. The UN atomic agency did not attribute blame, saying only its team stationed at the site heard an explosion and were informed that a drone had struck the shell.

Zelenskyy said that the strike

damaged the structure and started a fire, which has been put out. The strike came two days after US President Donald Trump said he would meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin to discuss ending the war, in a move that seemed to identify Putin as the only player that matters and looked set to sideline Zelenskyy, as well as European governments, in any peace talks. Ukraine intends to provide detailed information to US officials about the Chernobyl strike during the Munich Security Conference starting Friday, the head of Ukraine's Presidential Office, Andrii Yermak, wrote on his Telegram channel. The UN International Atomic Energy Agency said the

Chernobyl strike occurred at 1:50 am local time (2350 GMT). It said there was "no indication of a breach in the ... inner containment" shell. The outer shell that was hit is a protective cover built in 2016 over a heavy concrete containment structure. The inner layer was placed on the plant's fourth reactor soon after the 1986 disaster, which was one of the worst accidents in nuclear history. The containment shells seek to prevent radiation leaks. The three-year Russia-Ukraine war has brought repeated warnings of dangers to Ukraine's four nuclear plants, especially at the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in southern Ukraine, which is Europe's

biggest and one of the 10 largest in the world. IAEA chief Rafael Rossi said on X that the Chernobyl strike and the recent increase in military activity near the Zaporizhzhia plant "underline persistent nuclear safety risks," adding that the IAEA remains "on high alert."

The IAEA said its personnel at the site responded within minutes of the strike, adding there were no casualties. "Radiation levels inside and outside remain normal and stable," the IAEA said on X. Zelenskyy claimed on Telegram that the Chernobyl strike showed that "Putin is certainly not preparing for negotiations" — a claim Ukrainian officials have repeatedly made.

London's Lord Mayor to promote capital flows in India

London (PTI): The Lord Mayor of London is on his way to "bang on doors" with the message of free trade and greater two-way capital flows as he begins a week-long visit to India on Saturday.

Alderman Alastair King, who as the 696th Lord Mayor is the global ambassador for the financial hub of the City of London, will be in Mumbai for a wide range of discussions centred around his chosen theme of "Growth Unleashed" for his mayoralty.

Alderman King has meetings scheduled with British government trade officials as well as key Indian banking and financial institutions such as HDFC, State Bank of India (SBI), Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).

"The theme 'Growth Unleashed' is to encourage British businesses to get out to extraordinary growth markets such as India, bang on doors and build their businesses," the Lord Mayor told PTI, ahead of his visit to Mumbai this weekend.

The visit comes ahead of a proposed visit by UK Business and Trade Secretary Jonathan Reynolds later this month to formally relaunch the India-UK Free Trade Agreement (FTA), stalled by the general election cycle in both countries last year. "I think the timing is very good. There was a bit of a lull in relation to pushing forward for the Free Trade Agreement, and I'm very pleased to see that Minister Reynolds is off to India as well. We can [meanwhile] talk about the opportunities to people involved in financial, professional, legal and maritime services that the Free Trade Agreement will present," said King.

Pope Francis hospitalised to treat bronchitis

Rome (PTI): Pope Francis was hospitalised Friday to treat a weeklong bout of bronchitis and undergo diagnostic tests, the Vatican said, confirming the latest issues with the 88-year-old's pontiff's health that forced him to cancel his agenda through Monday at least. Francis was diagnosed with bronchitis on February 6, but had continued to hold daily audiences in his Vatican hotel suite. He attended his general audience Wednesday and presided at an outdoor Mass on Sunday. But he had handed off his speeches for an aide to read aloud, saying he was having trouble breathing. On Friday, he appeared bloated and pale during the handful of audiences he held before going to the hospital. The bloating appeared to indicate that the medication he was taking to treat the lung infection was making him retain water. Francis, who had part of one

lung removed as a young man, has long battled health problems, especially bouts of acute bronchitis in winter. He uses a wheelchair, walker or cane when moving around his apartment and recently fell twice, hurting his arm and chin. Francis was hospitalised at Rome's Gemelli hospital, where he was last admitted in June 2023 to have surgery to remove intestinal scar tissue and repair a hernia in the abdominal wall. A few months before that, he spent three days in the hospital to receive intravenous antibiotics for a respiratory infection. The Vatican said Francis was admitted after his Friday audiences. In addition to regular Vatican officials, the pope met Friday morning with the Slovak Prime Minister, Robert Fico, and CNN head Mark Thompson. "This morning, at the end of the audiences, Pope Francis will be admitted to the Agostino

Gemelli Polyclinic for some necessary diagnostic tests and to continue in a hospital setting treatment for bronchitis that is still ongoing," a Vatican statement said. No details were given about the duration of Francis' hospitalization, but it later announced he was cancelling his participation in Holy Year events through Monday. The pope had a busy weekend agenda planned with an audience with artists in town for the Jubilee on Saturday, a Mass for them on Sunday and a trip to Rome's famed Cinecittà studios on Monday. While a Vatican cardinal would preside over the Mass in Francis' place, the Vatican said the other events were cancelled "due to the impossibility of the pope to participate." The Vatican announcements, delivered ahead of Francis' hospitalization, came in sharp contrast to its 2023 hospitalization for bronchitis that caused

confusion. Initially, the Vatican had said he had gone in for scheduled tests, but the pontiff later revealed he had felt pain in his chest and was rushed to the hospital where bronchitis was diagnosed. He was put on intravenous antibiotics and was released April 1, quipping as he left that he was "still alive." Francis spent 10 days at the same hospital in July 2021 following intestinal surgery for a bowel narrowing. He credited his personal nurse then with saving his life for having insisted he get the problem checked out. It wasn't the first time he credited a nurse with saving his life. Francis recounted his near-death experience with his youthful lung infection in his recent autobiography "Hope," in which he credited his survival to a nurse, an Italian nun named Sister Cornelia Caraglio.

Is AI making us stupider?

PTI ■ BRISBANE

There is only so much thinking most of us can do in our heads. Try dividing 16,951 by 67 without reaching for a pen and paper. Or a calculator. Try doing the weekly shopping without a list on the back of last week's receipt. Or on your phone. By relying on these devices to help make our lives easier, are we making ourselves smarter or dumber? Have we traded efficiency gains for inching ever closer to idiocy as a species? This question is especially important to consider with regard to generative artificial intelligence (AI) technology such as ChatGPT, an AI chatbot owned by tech company OpenAI, which at the time of writing is used by 300 million people each week. According to a recent paper by a team of researchers from Microsoft and Carnegie Mellon

University in the United States, the answer might be yes. But there's more to the story.

The researchers assessed how users perceive the effect of generative AI on their own critical thinking. Generally speaking, critical thinking has to do with thinking well.

One way we do this is by judging our own thinking processes against established norms and methods of good reasoning. These norms include values such as precision, clarity, accuracy, breadth, depth, relevance, significance and cogency of arguments.

Other factors that can affect quality of thinking include the influence of our existing world views, cognitive biases, and reliance on incomplete or inaccurate mental models. The authors of the recent study adopt a definition of critical thinking developed by American educational psychol-

ogist Benjamin Bloom and colleagues in 1956. It's not really a definition at all. Rather it's a hierarchical way to categorise cognitive skills, including recall of information, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. The authors state they prefer this categorisation, also known as a "taxonomy," because it's simple and easy to apply. However, since it was devised it has fallen out of favour and has been discredited by Robert Marzano and indeed by Bloom himself. In particular, it assumes there is a hierarchy of cognitive skills in which so-called "higher-order" skills are built upon "lower-order" skills. This does not hold on logical or evidence-based grounds. For example, evaluation, usually seen as a culminating or higher-order process, can be the beginning of inquiry or very easy to perform in some contexts.

Sarfraz Dogar's oath as acting CJ of Islamabad High Court draws ire of fellow judges, Oppn

Islamabad (PTI): President Asif Ali Zardari on Friday gave oath to Sarfraz Dogar as acting Chief Justice of Islamabad High Court, a move that has drawn ire of judges and opposition parties. Dogar made headlines when he was transferred last month to the Islamabad High Court (IHC) from the Lahore High Court (LHC). Judges, lawyers and opposition parties criticised the development as Dogar was 13th on the seniority list of the judges but rose to the second position in IHC. He was tipped to rise to the top after the elevation of the IHC Chief Justice Aamer Farooq to the Supreme Court. Five other IHC judges opposed his rise and challenged Dogar's seniority. However, ignoring all concerns, Dogar was sworn-in at a ceremony held here at the Aiwan-e-Sadr, the official residence of the president of Pakistan. The official notification read: "President of Pakistan appointed Justice Muhammad Sarfraz Dogar as Acting Chief Justice of Islamabad High Court with effect from the day he takes oath of his office till the appointment of regular chief justice."

The appointment was made under Article 196 of the Constitution. Dogar's rise was

opposed by fellow justices Mohsin Akhtar Kayani, Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri, Babar Sattar, Sardar Ejaz Ishaq Khan, and Saman Rafiq, who consider his elevation as a violation of rules for determination of seniority of judges. Leading opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) also opposed Dogar's new role as the party founded by jailed former prime minister Imran Khan fears

that it would lead to manipulation of cases related to Khan, his wife Bushra Bibi and other PTI leaders. "The appointment of Justice Sarfraz Dogar may impact the hearing of cases of PTI leaders," said PTI Senator Ali Zafar while speaking in the Senate.

PUBLIC NOTICE
This is to inform the public at large that my client (ICI Bank is advancing a loan to Mr. Vishal Anand S/o Mr. Ashok Kumar for LAP (Loan Against Property), the Freehold Property No. K.H-178, area measuring 200 Sq. Yds. Kavi Nagar, Ghaziabad, U.P. ("said property"). Mr. Ashok Anand became the owner of the said property by virtue of Will executed by Mr. Kharani Lal Anand dated 12.05.2002. On the basis of the same, the property was mortgaged in the name of Mr. Ashok Anand Pursuant to it, Mr. Ashok Anand executed a Registered Gift deed dated 03.08.2022 in favour of Mr. Vishal Anand (Son), who has now approached my Client for a Loan Against Property. If anybody has any claim or objection upon the said property by way of inheritance, share, sale, agreement, lease, license, gift, possession legal heirs, partners, encumbrance however or otherwise is required to intimate in writing to the undersigned within 07 days from the date of publication of this notice with supporting documents. After the expiration of notice period, the claim, if any of such person shall be treated as null and void and be treated as waived.
Tapan Rayghar (Advocate), G-220, Karkardooma Court, Delhi-110032, Ph. No. +91 88000 96522

PUBLIC NOTICE
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Tapan Rayghar (Advocate), G-220, Karkardooma Court, Delhi-110032, Ph. No. +91 88000 96522

Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar
Short Term E-Tender Notice for Sophisticated Equipments
E-Tender Notice
Short Term E-Tenders are invited for the purchase of Universal Testing Machine, Archery Equipments and Naturally Ventilated Poly-House be submitted online latest by 1-03-2025 upto 4:00 p.m. Detailed information can be obtained from website www.eproc.punjab.gov.in. Any corrigendum/ Addendum related to these e-tender will be uploaded, if required, on Punjab Govt. website: eproc.punjab.gov.in
Director of Research
NA/12/28086/2023/41661 Dated CHD :- 2/14/2025

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
COMMERCE & TRANSPORT (TRANSPORT) DEPARTMENT
CORRIGENDUM-1
Expression of Interest from Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) operators to operate and maintain the hangar and associated facilities for MRO services at Biju Patnaik International Airport (BPIA), Bhubaneswar (Odisha)
This notification is in continuation to EOI Reference No: 922 dt. 30.01.2025 regarding invitation of EOI from Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) operators to operate and maintain the hangar and associated facilities for MRO services at Biju Patnaik International Airport (BPIA), Bhubaneswar (Odisha) and the last date of submission of proposal has been extended from 17.02.2025 to 03.03.2025.
Eligible and interested Bidders may download the EOI document from the website of Commerce and Transport Department (<https://ct.odisha.gov.in/tenders>) and submit their offer by email at ctsec.or@nic.in by 1700 hours on 03.03.2025.
Sd/-
Additional Secretary to Govt.
Commerce & Transport (Transport) Department
Government of Odisha
OIPR-38001/110020/2425

RELIABLE DATA SERVICES LIMITED
CIN: L72900DL2001PLC110145
Regd. Office: GF-22, Hans Bhawan, 1, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi - 110002
Website: www.rdspl.com / E-mail: cs@rdspl.com / Phone no. 011-23578813
Extract Of Unaudited Financial Results for Quarter Ended December 31, 2024, On Stand Alone and Consolidated Basis, Figure Rs. in Lakhs

Sr. No.	Particulars	STANDALONE				CONSOLIDATED			
		QUARTER ENDED		YEAR ENDED		QUARTER ENDED		YEAR ENDED	
		31.12.2024 (Un-Audited)	30.09.2024 (Un-Audited)	31.12.2023 (Un-Audited)	31.03.2024 (Audited)	31.12.2024 (Un-Audited)	30.09.2024 (Un-Audited)	31.12.2023 (Un-Audited)	31.03.2024 (Audited)
1	Total Revenue from operations	2050.51	1396.11	1239.52	5226.09	3340.74	2370.99	2052.78	7937.90
2	Net Profit/(Loss) for the period (before exceptional, extraordinary items and tax)	313.15	125.50	97.63	386.32	543.62	174.30	148.88	698.12
3	Net Profit/(Loss) for the period before tax (after exceptional, and extra-ordinary items)	313.15	125.50	97.63	386.32	543.62	174.30	148.88	688.12
4	Net Profit/(Loss) for the period after tax (after exceptional, and extra-ordinary items)	237.22	113.92	68.93	327.28	411.70	136.39	106.11	529.01
5	Paid up Equity Share Capital (Face value of Rs.10/-each per share)	10320000.00	10320000.00	10320000.00	10320000.00	10320000.00	10320000.00	10320000.00	10320000.00
6	Earnings Per Share (of Rs.10/-each) Basic & Diluted (Rs.)	2.30	1.10	0.67	3.17	3.99	1.32	1.03	5.13

Note:
1. The above is an extract of the detailed format of Unaudited Standalone and Consolidated Financial Results filed with the Stock Exchange under Regulation 33 of the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015 as modified by circular No. CIR/CFD/FAC/52/2016. The full format of the Unaudited Financial Results are available on the Stock exchange websites i.e. www.bseindia.com, www.nseindia.com, and the company website www.rdspl.com
2. The above Financial Results were reviewed and recommended by the Audit Committee and have been approved and taken on record by the Board of Directors of the company at its meeting held on 14 February 2025.
For and on Behalf of RELIABLE DATA SERVICES LIMITED
Sd/-
SANJAY KUMAR PATHAK
CHAIRMAN CUM MANAGING DIRECTOR
(DIN: 00912040)

MADHYA PRADESH ROAD DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION LTD.
(Govt. of M.P. Undertaking)
45-A, Arera Hills, Bhopal- 462 011, Madhya Pradesh, CIN : U45203MP2004SGC016758
MPRDC Ph. No. : 0755-2527290, 2765205, Fax : 0755-2572643, Website : www.mprdc.gov.in
NIT No. : 14762/665/MPRDC/Procu/2025
Bhopal, Date : 14.02.2025

NOTICE INVITING TENDERS
Madhya Pradesh Road Development Corporation Limited (MPRDC) Bhopal invite online tender for following Work.

S. No.	Name of Work	PAC Value (in INR Cr.)	Bid Security (EMD) (in INR Lakhs)	Bid Document (in Rs.)	Completion Period (l/c Rainy Season)
1.	Rehabilitation and Upgradation of Ingoria-Depalpur Road in two lane with Paved shoulder in the state of Madhya Pradesh.	195.01	50.00	50,000/-	24 Months
2.	Rehabilitation and Upgradation of Ingoria-Unhel Road in two lane with Paved shoulder in the state of Madhya Pradesh.	112.76	50.00	50,000/-	24 Months

The dates for purchase, submission, etc. are mentioned in the key dates. Tender forms can be purchased online upto 15:30 hrs. on 24.03.2025 from website www.mptenders.gov.in. The bidders have to submit the Technical bid as well as Financial Bid online only. The Addendum/Corrigendum (if any) shall only be published on the website of www.mptenders.gov.in only. If holiday is declared by Govt. of M.P. on the date of opening, the same will automatically be shifted to subsequent working days. MPRDC reserves the right to accept/reject any/all tenders without assigning any reason thereof.
M.P. Madhyam/118820/2025
MANAGING DIRECTOR

UNITED LEASING AND INDUSTRIES LIMITED
Reg. Office: Plot No 66 Sector 34 EHTP Gurgaon, Haryana, India, -122001
CIN NO. L17100HR1983PLC033460, Phone: 0124-4200274, Email: teanuniteltd3@gmail.com

EXTRACT OF STANDALONE UN-AUDITED FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR THE QUARTER ENDED ON 31ST DECEMBER, 2024
(Rupees in Lakhs)

Sr. No.	Particulars	Quarter ended 31/12/2024 (31-12-2024)		Preceding 3 Months ended (30-09-2024)		Corresponding 3 months ended in the previous year (31-12-2023)	
		Un-Audited	Audited	Un-Audited	Audited	Un-Audited	Audited
1.	Total Income from Operations	229.87	172.94	244.44	719.58		
2.	Net Profit for the period (before tax, Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	4.64	14.22	13.60	8.39		
3.	Net Profit before tax for the period (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	4.64	14.22	13.60	8.39		
4.	Net Profit for the period (after tax, Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	4.64	14.22	13.60	8.39		
5.	Total Comprehensive Income for the period (comprising profit for the period (after tax) and other Comprehensive Income (after tax))	-	-	-	-		
6.	Equity Shares Capital (Face value Rs.10/- Per equity share)	300.00	300.00	300.00	300.00		
7.	Earnings Per Share of Rs. 10/- each (for continuing and discontinued Operations) Basic and diluted	0.15	0.47	0.45	0.28		

Notes:
1. The above Financial Results were reviewed by the Members of Audit Committee and approved by the Board of Directors at their respective Meeting held on 14th February, 2025. The Statutory Auditors of the company have carried out a Limited Review of the Financial Results for these financials.
2. The Company has adopted Indian Accounting Standards (Ind AS) notified by Ministry of Corporate Affairs from 1st April 2017, with a transition date 1st April 2016 and accordingly these financial Result have been prepared in accordance with the companies (Indian Accounting Standard) Rules, 2015 prescribed under section 133 of the Companies Act, 2013 and other accounting principles generally accepted in India.
3. Figures for the prior period have been regrouped and / or rearranged wherever considered necessary as per the revised format prescribed by SEBI under SEBI (LODR) Regulations, 2015 and amended as per the Schedule III of the Companies Act, 2013.
For UNITED LEASING & INDUSTRIES LIMITED
Sd/-
ASHISH KHANNA
MANAGING DIRECTOR
DIN: 01251582
Place: New Delhi
Date: 14-02-2025

PUBLIC NOTICE
Information is given to general public at large that Abdul Rashid S/o Abdul Majid who is/are purchasing the Built up Third Floor, area measuring 100 Sq. Yards, Built on Property No. 895-A, out of Kharsa No. 11/3, Sector 10, Sitapur, Ghaziabad, U.P. Mehrauli New Delhi from Mr. Jagdamba Pershad Wahal S/o Mr. Shri Kail Pershad Wahal who was the owner of property by virtue of Regd. General Power of Attorney dated 13.02.2024 (Doc. No. 2024/7/1249) executed by Dr. Chandar Kant Wahal S/o Late Shri Kail Pershad Wahal. Intend to mortgage the same against the financial assistance from Shubham Housing Development Finance Company Limited. Death Certificate & Surviving Member Certificate of Mrs. Sayawati are not available with Seller i.e. Mr. Jagdamba Pershad Wahal. Seller is the sole and absolute attorney that they hold undivided ownership of the property. There are no existing claims, disputes, or encumbrances regarding the ownership of said property. To comply the requirements of BANK/NBFC, we give this public notice that if any person/s having any objection regarding ownership and/or creating mortgage of the said property is/are hereby requested to intimate in writing to the undersigned within 07 days at below address:
NCR LAW ASSOCIATES Advocate & Consultants
Mob. Nos. 9999721152/9999826427

PUBLIC NOTICE
Reg. Residential Plot No. 9, area measuring 25 sq.yds. i.e. 20.90 sq.mtrs., "said portion" out of total area measuring 50 sq.yds., falling in Kharsa No.939, Situated Adarsh Nagar Colony, Village Makampur, Pargana Loni, Tehsil & Distt. Ghaziabad (U.P.) (Hereinafter referred to as the "Said Property").
Be it known to all that our clients, Mr. Rajveer Singh & Mrs. Laxmi Singh (hereinafter called the "Purchaser") intend to purchase the said portion from Mr. Satya Prakash GFA of Mrs. Mamta Devi (hereinafter called the "Attorney-holder"). In this connection, the Attorney-holder has informed the purchaser that she is the sole and absolute attorney holder in respect of the said portion vide POA documents viz., GPA, ATS and Will dated 13.12.2024 executed by Mrs. Mamta Devi in his favour. The Attorney holder has further informed that Mr. Mohini Devi owned the said portion vide POA documents viz., GPA, ATS and Will dated 09.10.2024 executed by Mrs. Mohini Devi in her favour. Mrs. Mohini Devi owned the said portion vide Sale Deed registered as Document No. 3847 dated 18/4/2022 (SRO-Ghaziabad-IV). Thus, the Attorney holder is the sole and absolute attorney in respect of the said portion. The Attorney holder has also informed the purchaser that the said portion is not mortgaged anywhere and there is no charge or dispute or any litigation pending regarding the said portion.
Any person including Bank/s, Financial Institution/s, relative/s having any claim, right, title or any interest of any nature whatsoever into or upon the said portion is hereby called upon to make the same known, in writing, with documentary evidence, by Registered AD Post, to the undersigned at the address mentioned herein below within 07 days of publication of this notice and in the event of no response having been received to the notice, the title of the attorney-holder in respect of the said portion shall be deemed to be clear of any charge or encumbrance of any nature whatsoever and any subsequent claim shall not bind our clients/Purchaser, in any manner whatsoever.
Shivkant Arora, Advocate
Mis Intellectual Law Offices
A-74, LGF, Defence Colony,
New Delhi-110024

FEDDERS HOLDING LIMITED
(Formerly known as IM+ Capitals Limited)
Regd. Office: C-15, RDC, Raj Nagar, Ghaziabad-201001 (U.P.)
CIN: L74140UP1991PLC201030, Email: imcapitalscompliances@gmail.com
Website: www.imcapitals.com

STATEMENT OF UNAUDITED STANDALONE AND CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR THE THIRD QUARTER AND NINE MONTHS ENDED 31ST DECEMBER, 2024
(Rs. in Lakhs except in Earning Per Share)

Sl. No.	Particulars	Standalone		Consolidated					
		Quarter Ended		Quarter Ended					
		31.12.2024 (Unaudited)	31.12.2023 (Unaudited)	31.12.2024 (Unaudited)	31.12.2023 (Unaudited)				
1.	Total Income from operations	42.88	133.41	179.28	623.22	9,343.92	19,287.36	33,874.86	42,193.54
2.	Net Profit/(Loss) on ordinary activities after tax	8.16	87.19	(28.74)	415.25	403.39	4,186.28	3,108.81	8,146.35
3.	Net Profit/(Loss) for the period after tax (after Extraordinary items)	8.16	87.19	(28.74)	415.25	403.39	4,186.28	3,108.81	8,146.35
4.	Total Comprehensive Income/ (Loss) for the year (Comprising Profit/(Loss) for the year (after tax) and Other Comprehensive Income/ (Loss) (after tax))	8.16	87.19	(28.74)	415.25	239.71	4,190.05	3,022.28	8,158.77
5.	Equity paidup share capital	1,483.00	891.76	1,483.00	891.76	1,483.00	891.76	1,483.00	891.76
6.	Earnings per share (Not annualised):								
	Basic (*)	0.01	0.10	(0.19)	0.47	0.27	4.69	2.10	9.14
	Diluted (*)	0.01	0.10	(0.19)	0.47	0.27	4.69	2.10	9.14

Note:
1. The above results were reviewed and recommended by the Audit Committee & approved by the Board of Directors at their respective meetings held on 13th February, 2025. The Statutory Auditors have conducted a limited review of the above Financial Results.
2. The above is an extract of the detailed format of Unaudited Quarterly Results filed with the Stock Exchanges under Regulation 33 of the SEBI (Listing and Other Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The full format of the unaudited standalone and consolidated financial Results are available on the Stock Exchange websites, www.bseindia.com and on the company website www.imcapitals.com
By order of the Board
Sd/-
VISHAL SINGHAL
Whole Time Director
DIN: 03518795

verka
HAR DILLI, HAR DILLI
THE PUNJAB STATE COOPERATIVE MILK PRODUCERS FEDERATION LTD.
SCO 153-155, SECTOR 34-A, CHANDIGARH-160022, EPABX NO. 0172-5041812,66
Notice Inviting Tender
www.verka.coop

Sealed tenders are hereby invited for the purchase and supply of following items:-

Sr. No.	Name of Work/Item	Period/Tentative Qty
1.	For Verka Head Office, Chandigarh Ice Cream Stabilizer.	Annual/5085 No's
2.	For Verka Chandigarh Dairy a) Manual tenders:- i. Lids for ice cream cups (65ml & 80ml). ii. Lids for ice cream cones (125ml). b) e-tenders:- i. Chikki ii. Krisp refined palm kernel oil iii. Mango pulp concentrate iv. Ice cream cones with foil wrappers (125ml), (butterscotch, chocolate & cookie delight). c) Advertisement Material Glow Sign Board, Non Lit Board, Sun Board, Standee, Umbrella, Poster, Dangler etc. d) Hiring of three Refrigerated Vehicles for supply of Ice Cream.	Annual 01.04.2025 to 31.03.2026 April 2025/1500 MT Annual 03 Years Annual/ Cap.10000kg-05 Cap.15000kg-02 Cap.20000kg-02
3.	For Verka Sangur Dairy a) Pest Control Services.	Annual
4.	For Verka Ferozepur Dairy a) Hiring of insulated road milk tankers for transportation from verka Ferozepur dairy to various Milk plants in Punjab to any other destination etc, on Annual Rate Contract as per Transport Policy. b) Hiring of Mahindra Pickup/ Max Pickup etc, to lift the Cattle feed from various sub store of Milk Union Ferozepur to MPCSS as transport policy.	Annual 01.04.2025 to 31.03.2026 Annual 01 No. 01 No.
5.	For Verka Jalandhar Dairy a) Hiring of insulated vehicles for supply of packed milk and fresh milk products in Jalandhar, Kapurthala and Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar district and Verka Amritsar, Ludhiana Dairy. b) Hiring of vehicles for procurement section, accounts sections, sale depot section, marketing section & quality assurance section. i. Car swift dzire, Toyota Etios or equivalent or Sub compact SUV. ii. Bolero Jeep	Annual Annual Annual Annual
6.	For Verka Gurdaspur Dairy a) Hiring of car(dzire) for marketing section (Sedan vehicle only)	01 No.
7.	For Cattle Feed Plant, Bhattian(Khanna) Pest/ Rodent Control service	Annual

NOTE:
1. For complete details regarding above tender (NIT), please visit our website i.e. www.verka.coop & e Tendering portal i.e. eproc.punjab.gov.in.
2. Corrigendum, if any, will be uploaded on website only.
NA/12/28104/2023/41680 Dated CHD :- 2/14/2025
Dy. General Manager (Purchase)

ATS HEIGHTS PRIVATE LIMITED (Under CIRP)

Regd. Off.: 711/92, Deepali, Nehru Place, New Delhi - 110019
CIN: U70200DL2010PTC205410; Phone No.: 0120-7111500; Fax No.: 0120-7111550
Email Id.: compliances@atsgreens.com; Website: www.atsgreens.com

ANNEXURE I Format for publishing financial results in newspapers [Regulation 52 (8), read with Regulation 52 (4), of the SEBI (LODR) Regulations, 2015]

(Amounts in INR Lakhs, unless otherwise stated)

S. No.	Particulars	For the Quarter Ended	For the Quarter Ended	For the Year ended
		31.12.2024	31.12.2023	31.03.2024
		Unaudited	Unaudited	Audited
1	Total Income from Operations	106.49	0.39	4.26
2	Net Profit / (Loss) for the period (before Tax, Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items#)	18.82	(7.07)	(49.47)
3	Net Profit / (Loss) for the period before tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items#)	18.82	(7.07)	(49.47)
4	Net Profit / (Loss) for the period after tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items#)	17.82	(5.23)	(527.83)
5	Total Comprehensive Income for the period [Comprising Profit / (Loss) for the period (after tax) and Other Comprehensive Income (after tax)]	17.82	(5.23)	(527.83)
6	Paid up Equity Share Capital	1.00	1.00	1.00
7	Reserves (excluding Revaluation Reserve)	(3,346.92)	(2,767.78)	(3,267.57)
8	Securities Premium Account	-	-	-
9	Net worth	(3,345.92)	(2,766.78)	(3,266.57)
10	Paid up Debt Capital / Outstanding Debt	233,446.74	236,920.59	233,446.74
11	Outstanding Redeemable Preference Shares	-	-	-
12	Debt Equity Ratio	69.77	(71.82)	(71.47)
13	Earnings Per Share (of Rs. 10/- each) (for continuing and discontinued operations) - 1. Basic: 2. Diluted:	178.24 178.24	(52.26) (52.26)	(5,278.33) (5,278.33)
14	Capital Redemption Reserve	-	-	-
15	Debt Redemption Reserve	-	-	-
16	Debt Service Coverage Ratio	0.0001	(0.0006)	(0.0002)
17	Interest Service Coverage Ratio	-	(0.050)	(1.180)

Note:
a) The above is an extract of the detailed format of quarterly/annual financial results filed with the Stock Exchanges under Regulation 52 of the SEBI (Listing and Other Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The full format of the quarterly/annual financial results are available on the websites of the Stock Exchange(s) and the listed entity
b) For the other line items referred in the Regulation 52 (4) of the Listing Regulations, pertinent disclosures have been made to the Stock Exchange(s).
c) # - Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items adjusted in the Statement of Profit and Loss in accordance with Ind AS Rules / AS Rules, whichever is applicable.

Kashinath Jha
sd/-
Director
Gaurav Katiyar
Interim Registration Professional
Reg. No.: IBB/IPA001/IP-P00209/2017-18/10409
Santosh Kumar
sd/-
Director
Place: Noida
Date: 13.02.2025

India, US aim to double bilateral trade to \$500 Billion by 2030

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

India and the United States (US) have resolved to more than double the two-way trade to \$500 Billion by 2030 and announced plans for a bilateral trade agreement with a view to bringing down duties and increase market access.

According to the joint statement issued after the meeting of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump here, the two leaders have also pledged the bilateral trade relationship to promote growth that ensures fairness, national security and job creation.

"To this end, the leaders set a bold new goal for bilateral trade - Mission 500 - aiming to more than double total bilateral trade to \$500 Billion by 2030. Recognising that this level of ambition would require new, fair-trade terms, the leaders announced plans to negotiate the first tranche of a mutually beneficial, multi-sector Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) by fall of 2025," it said.

The statement further said that both sides committed to designate senior representatives to advance these negotiations and to ensure that the trade

relationship fully reflects the aspirations of the Catalysing Opportunities for Military Partnership, Accelerated Commerce and Technology (COMPACT).

"To advance this innovative, wide-ranging BTA, the US and India will take an integrated approach to strengthen and deepen bilateral trade across the goods and services sector, and will work towards increasing market access, reducing tariff and non-tariff barriers, and deepening supply chain integration," it added.

Normally in a free trade agreement, two trading partners either eliminate or significantly reduce customs duties on maximum number of goods traded between them. Besides, they also ease norms to promote trade in services and boost investments.

During the first term of President Donald Trump, India and the US had discussed a mini-trade deal, but was shelved by the Joe Biden administration as they were not in favour of a free trade agreement.

The leaders also welcomed early steps to demonstrate mutual commitment to address bilateral trade barriers.

In 2023, the US and India



President Donald Trump and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi hold a news conference in the East Room of the White House PTI

bilateral trade in goods and services stood at \$190.08 Billion (\$123.89 goods and \$66.19 services trade). In that year, India's merchandise exports to the US stood at \$83.77 Billion, while imports were \$40.12 Billion, leaving a trade gap of \$43.65 Billion in favour of India.

The country's services exports to America was \$36.33 Billion in 2023, while imports were

aggregated at \$29.86 Billion. The trade gap (difference between imports and exports) was \$6.47 Billion in favour of New Delhi.

Further, the statement said that the US hailed India's recent measures to lower tariffs on American products of interest in the areas of bourbon, motorcycles, Information and Communications Technology

(ICT) products and metals, as well as measures to enhance market access for US agricultural products, like alfalfa hay and duck meat, and medical devices.

"India also expressed appreciation for US measures taken to enhance exports of Indian mangoes and pomegranates to the US," it said, adding the two countries pledged to collaborate to

enhance bilateral trade by increasing US exports of industrial goods to India and Indian exports of labour-intensive manufactured products to America.

The two sides will also work together to increase trade in agricultural goods.

It added the two leaders agreed to drive opportunities for companies of the two countries to make greenfield

investments in high-value industries.

They welcomed ongoing investments by Indian companies worth about \$7.35 Billion, such as those by Hindalco's Novelis in finished aluminium goods at their state-of-the-art facilities in Alabama and Kentucky, JSW in steel manufacturing operations at Texas and Ohio, Epsilon Advanced Materials in the manufacturing of critical battery materials in North Carolina, and Jubilant Pharma in the manufacturing of injectables in Washington.

These investments support over 3,000 high-quality jobs for local families, the statement said.

The Modi-Trump meeting came hours after the US president announced a new reciprocal tariff policy to match higher duties charged by all its trading partners.

At a joint media briefing with Modi, Trump announced that he and Modi agreed on a deal that would facilitate India to import more US oil and gas to bring down Washington's trade deficit. In his remarks to the press, Trump called import duties imposed by India on certain US products "very unfair" and "strong".

While announcing the new tariff policy, the president also spoke about how India is

"right at the top of the pack" when it comes to tariffs. Earlier also, he has termed India as "tariff abuser" and "tariff king".

According to experts, Trump's announcement on imposing reciprocal tariffs has created an uncertain trade environment between India and the US, though the plan for a major trade deal could help promote two-way commerce.

The bilateral trade between India and the US was around \$130 Billion last year and the trade gap stands at around \$45 Billion in New Delhi's favour.

In 2024, India's main exports to the US included drug formulations, biological (\$8.1 Billion), telecom instruments (\$6.5 Billion), precious and semi-precious stones (\$5.3 Billion), petroleum products (\$4.1 Billion), gold and other precious metal jewellery (\$3.2 Billion), ready-made garments of cotton including accessories (\$2.8 Billion), and products of iron and steel (\$2.7 Billion).

Imports included crude oil (\$4.5 Billion), petroleum products (\$3.6 Billion), coal, coke (\$3.4 Billion), cut and polished diamonds (\$2.6 Billion), electric machinery (\$1.4 Billion), aircrafts, space crafts and parts (\$1.3 Billion), and gold (\$1.3 Billion).

Wholesale price inflation eases to 2.31 per cent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Wholesale Price Inflation (WPI) moderated marginally to 2.31 per cent in January due to the decline in prices of food items especially vegetables, government data released on Friday showed.

The WPI based inflation was 2.37 per cent in December 2024. It was 0.33 per cent in January 2024.

As per the data, inflation in food items eased to 5.88 per cent in January, as against 8.47 per cent in December 2024. Inflation in vegetables came down significantly to 8.35 per cent, as against 28.65 per cent in December 2024.

In the eggs, meat and fish category inflation declined to 3.56 per cent as against 5.43 per cent last month. Within vegetables, tomato prices declined to 18.9 per cent while inflation in potato continued to be high at 74.28 per cent, and in onion it spiked to 28.33 per cent in January.

The fuel and power category witnessed a deflation of 2.78 per cent in January, against a deflation of 3.79 per cent in

December. In manufactured items, inflation was 2.51 per cent as compared to 2.14 per cent in December 2024.

Retail inflation data released on Wednesday showed that Consumer Price Index (CPI) based inflation eased to a 5-month low of 4.31 per cent in January on easing prices of food items. ICRA Senior Economist Rahul Agrawal said, "We project the WPI to average at 2.4 per cent in FY2025 and inch up further to 3 per cent in FY2026, despite expectations of a cooling in the prints for the food segment".

According to CARE Ratings Chief Economist Rajani Sinha, food prices are likely to ease in the coming months driven by seasonal correction in prices. However, there are headwinds as far as global commodity prices are concerned.

Their prices have been hardening amid growing uncertainty around the impact of the US protectionist trade policies.

This would exert an upward pressure on the WPI non-food component.

India-US TRUST initiative to boost NCMM



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The India-United States (US) Transforming Relationship Utilising Strategic Technology (TRUST) initiative will help in giving a push to the government's National Critical Mineral Mission, which encourages public and private sector companies to acquire critical mineral assets abroad.

The National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM),

approved by the government for a period of seven years till 2030-31, at an outlay of ₹34,300 Crore, proposes development of stockpiles of critical minerals within the country.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump have agreed on the TRUST initiative, to emphasis on creating strong supply chains of critical minerals, advanced pharmaceuticals.

As per a joint statement

issued after the Trump-Modi meeting in Washington, both the countries have decided to launch a recovery and processing initiative for strategic minerals like lithium and rare earth.

The National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM) aims to build a resilient value chain encompassing exploration, mining, beneficiation, processing and recovery from end-of-life products, Mining body FIMI said.

"NCMM also seeks to encourage Indian public sector undertakings and private companies to acquire critical mineral assets abroad and enhance trade with resource-rich countries.

TRUST will greatly help to achieve the objectives of NCMM," said R K Sharma, Special Advisor at Federation of Indian Mineral Industries (FIMI).

The two sides will also work together on economic corridors and connectivity infrastructure under the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) and I2U2 meworks.

Centre invites applications for NFRA Chairperson

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has invited applications for the posts of chairperson and three full-time members in the National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA).

The NFRA is an independent regulatory body overseeing financial reporting and auditing standards in the country.

For chairperson, the applicants will be a person of eminence, ability, and integrity with at least 25 years of expertise in accountancy, auditing, finance, or law and for full-time members, they must have at least 20 years of experience in the same fields, according to a release.

The chairperson will receive a consolidated monthly salary of ₹5.62 Lakh without house and car or the pay and allowances are equivalent to a secretary to the government of India, as per the NFRA's (Manner of Appointment and other terms and conditions of Service of Chairperson and members) rules. For full-time, members will have the option of drawing

either a consolidated monthly salary of ₹5 Lakh or receiving pay as admissible to an additional secretary.

Those drawing a government pension will have their pay reduced by the gross pension amount. Separate applications must be submitted for the post of Chairperson and members, the release said.

The Chairperson and all members, before being appointed, will have to submit a declaration to the government confirming that they have no conflict of interest, or lack of independence in respect of such appointment as Chairperson or member, failing which their appointment will not be considered.

The appointees cannot be associated with any audit firm, including related consultancy firms during their tenure and for two years after demitting office. The term of office for both Chairperson and full-time members will be three years or until they attain the age of 65 years, whichever is earlier, with the possibility of re-appointment for one more term.

Girlyveda launches 'Harmo Balancer' for women

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Girlyveda, a brand that has catered to the health and wellness of women, has launched Harmo Balancer, an ayurvedic supplement that assists women in overcoming hormonal imbalance problems.

The new product will help in controlling the symptoms of Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), a hormonal condition that affects women of reproductive age.

Girlyveda aims to serve as a reliable, safe, and effective way to assist Indian women in managing this condition.

Globally, the prevalence of PCOS ranges from four per cent to 21 per cent, 20-29 and in India, the prevalence varies from two per cent to 35 per cent. Harmo Balancer is a unique Ayurvedic blend of powerful herbs like Kachnaar, Gudmar, Shatavari, and Ashoka that balances hormones, regulates menstrual cycles, and improves insulin sensitivity.

Speaking about the new product, Danny Kumar Meena, Founder, Girlyveda, said, "Women's health is often overlooked, and conditions like PCOS are still not widely understood. At Girlyveda, we believe in providing chemical-free, Ayurvedic solutions that empower women to take control of their health naturally. Harmo Balancer is designed to support hormonal balance, promote menstrual health, and help manage the symptoms of PCOS without any harmful side effects."

Rupee rises 12 paise to close against USD

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee extended its recovery and settled 12 paise higher at 86.81 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday amid easing American currency.

However, higher crude oil prices and incessant selling of domestic equities by foreign institutional investors capped a sharp gain in the local unit, forex traders said.

Also, they said, the aggressive dollar chase was halted after the US government announced the implementation of reciprocal tariffs on April 1,

giving its trading partners some relief.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 86.86 and touched the high of 86.79 against the greenback during intraday. It also touched the low of 86.90 before ending the session at 86.81 (provisional) against the dollar, logging a gain of 12 paise from its previous close.

On Thursday, the rupee settled almost flat with a marginal gain of two paise at 86.93 against the US dollar. The unit had closed 16 paise lower on Wednesday, a day after

surging 66 paise, witnessing the highest single-day rise in nearly two years.

Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said the rupee gained on the weak US dollar index.

He further said that the US dollar declined as President Donald Trump delayed the implementation of reciprocal tariffs to April 1 which calmed market nerves.

"Persistent outflows by FIIs may pressurise the rupee further. However, any further intervention by the RBI may support the rupee at lower levels. Traders may

take cues from retail sales and industrial production data from the US, Choudhary said, adding the "USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 86.60 to 87.10".

The domestic unit has been facing extreme volatility for the past few months due to several global macroeconomic uncertainties.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said the rupee along with other Asian currencies has depreciated against the US dollar on account of uncertainty pervading the global macroeconomy.

RBI supersedes board of New India Co-op Bank

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A day after imposing several restrictions on city-based New India Co-operative Bank, the Reserve Bank India (RBI) on Friday superseded its board citing poor governance standards.

A large number of bank's customers had gathered at its branches on Friday following RBI's restrictions, which included a bar on issuing new loans and suspension of deposit withdrawals for six months.

The bank has 28 branches, mostly located in the Mumbai region. In a statement, the RBI said it has appointed Shreekant, a former chief general manager of State Bank of India (SBI) as

'Administrator' to manage the affairs of the bank.

The Board of Directors of New India Co-operative Bank, Mumbai, has been superseded for 12 months, the RBI said in a statement. It has also appointed a 'Committee of Advisors' to assist the Administrator in discharging his duties.

The members of the Committee of Advisors are Ravindra Sapra (former General Manager, SBI) and Abhijeet Deshmukh (chartered accountant).

"The action is necessitated due to certain material concerns emanating from poor governance standards observed in the bank," it said.

On Thursday, the RBI had imposed several restrictions on

the lender including on withdrawal of funds by depositors, amid supervisory concerns.

The restrictions came into force from the close of business on Thursday and would remain in force for a period of six months and are subject to review.

"Considering the bank's present liquidity position, the bank has been directed not to allow withdrawal of any amount from savings bank or current accounts or any other account of a depositor," the RBI said while imposing the restrictions.

The lender, however, has been allowed to set off loans against deposits subject to the conditions stated in the RBI directions.

BSES launches toll-free support for consumer issues

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Power discom on Friday said the consumers can reach BSES through multiple channels in case of any disruption or local fault. It has issued two toll free numbers and Whatsapp numbers- for BSES Rajdhani Power Limited (BRPL) and BSES Yamuna Power Limited (BYPL).

The toll free numbers and Whatsapp numbers for BRPL is 19123 and 8800919123, while for BYPL, the numbers are 19122 and 8745999808, respectively.

According to State Load Despatch Centre (SLDC) data, the city's peak power

demand has remained stable, ranging between 4200-4500 MW since February 8.

BSES discoms are ensuring a seamless, reliable and quality power supply, successfully meeting Delhi's winter electricity demand.

BSES is committed to ensure reliable and quality power supply to over 50 Lakh consumers and two Crore residents across south, west, east, and central Delhi. Smart power procurement strategies, including long-term Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs), banking arrangements with other states, along with a robust distribution network, are ensuring an uninterrupted

power supply. To maintain a sustainable and eco-friendly power supply, up to 2000 MW of renewable energy is significantly contributing to meeting BSES' winter power demand.

As part of commitment to ensure a reliable power supply, BSES discoms have dedicated war rooms for real-time monitoring of the power supply situation. Led by senior officials, these war rooms enable swift decision-making and response.

Additionally, BSES field teams remain on high alert, ready to address any exigencies promptly.

Modi, Trump advance India-US civil nuclear cooperation

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and United States (US) President Donald Trump vowed to move forward to facilitate building American-designed nuclear reactors in India under the framework of the epochal civil nuclear deal sealed by the two nations over 16 years back.

In their talks at the White House on Thursday, the two leaders decided to significantly expand energy cooperation.

The civil nuclear deal changed India's overall engagement with the US as it paved the way for building the bonds of a strategic partnership, especially

in areas of high technology and defence.

"The leaders announced their commitment to fully realise the US-India 123 Civil Nuclear Agreement by moving forward with plans to work together to build US-designed nuclear reactors in India through large-scale localisation and possible technology transfer," according to a joint statement.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, while presenting the Union budget on February 1, announced plans to amend India's nuclear liability law as well as the Atomic Energy Act. Certain clauses in India's Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010 have emerged as

hurdles in moving forward in the implementation of the civil nuclear deal.

Both sides welcomed the recent budget announcement by the government of India to take up amendments to the Atomic Energy Act and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act (CLNDA) for nuclear reactors, the statement said.

It said the two sides further decided to establish bilateral arrangements in accordance with CLNDA, that would address the issue of civil liability and facilitate the collaboration of Indian and US industry in the production and deployment of nuclear reactors.

INBRIEF

DMRC'S DIRECTOR DR AMIT JAIN, IRTS CO-AUTHORED A BOOK "LEAD SMART IN THE AI ERA"



NEW DELHI: DMRC's Director (Operations & Services), Dr Amit Kr Jain, IRTS have co-authored a book titled "Lead Smart in the AI Era" which elaborates on how Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reshaping industries and leadership paradigm. This book is an important document on AI and its role in shaping leadership.

VIT-AP ORGANISES CONFERENCE ON 'INNOVATION AND SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS PRACTICES'

AMARAVATI: VIT-AP School of Business at VIT-AP University, in collaboration with the University of Newcastle, Australia, organises a two-day International Conference on 'Innovation and Sustainable Business Practices in the Digital Era' on February 14-15.





Stories That Felt Like Home

A festival where stories lived, music felt like home and strangers left as part of a family, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**



PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR

Some stories are meant to be read, some meant to be watched, but the best ones? They are meant to be heard. Words, when spoken the right way, don't just tell a story, they create a world. That's exactly what happened at the Kathakar International Storytellers Festival.

Now in its 18th edition, Kathakar, India's first and Asia's largest oral storytelling festival, was brought to life by the Gahilote sisters, Rachna, Prarthana and Shaguna. Organised by Nivesh, HHACH and Babaji Music and supported by the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Tourism and Delhi Tourism. Three days, countless stories and a sea of people who arrived as strangers but left as part of something bigger.

Day 1: Conversations That Stayed

The festival opened with a speech about something that hit home, how, in a world of 15-second videos and endless scrolling, we are forgetting how to listen. The morning was reserved for school children and honestly? Watching them sit, eyes wide, completely absorbed in stories was proof that no matter how much the world changes, a good story will always find its audience.

The evening, however, was when the magic truly began. Kutle Khan Manghaniyar took the stage, his hypnotic Rajasthani folk beats turning the space into a desert courtyard under the open sky. Then came Mohit Chauhan and Imtiaz Ali, in



AS LONG AS THERE ARE STORIES, THERE WILL BE STORYTELLERS. AND AS LONG AS THERE ARE STORYTELLERS, THE WORLD WILL ALWAYS LISTEN.



conversation with Prarthana Gahilote. The *kissey* felt like a late-night chat between two old friends, except the audience got to listen in. Chauhan spoke about the feeling behind a song, while Ali shared how stories take shape when you truly see people. Every word felt like a quiet nudge, reminding everyone that art isn't just about creating, it's about understanding.

The first day felt like an old book, one whose pages smelled of nostalgia, yet felt fresh.



Day 2: Music Felt, Words Heard

Usifu Jaloh from Sierra Leone, a storyteller who lived every word. With every movement, every shift in tone, he pulled people into his world. It didn't matter if you understood the language; you felt it. That's the beauty of storytelling, sometimes, emotions speak louder than words.

Later, Anurag Basu and Mohit Chauhan took the stage, turning a planned talk into an intimate exchange between two artists who just get each other. Basu spoke about how streaming platforms are changing the way we consume stories.

Bhupinder Babbal, fresh off the success of *Arjan Valley Ve*, set the perfect mood before the man everyone had been waiting for, Lucky Ali, walked in. The first notes of *O Sanam* sent a ripple through the crowd. Some people froze, some closed their eyes, others just felt. By the time he sang *Dooba Dooba*, the audience wasn't singing along, they were reliving something. A road trip, a lost love, a version of themselves from years ago. Day 2 felt like a storm - powerful, unexpected, impossible to ignore. The kind that reminds us why we turn to art, to remember, to feel, to belong.

Day 3: The Last Turns Slowly

The last day of a festival always carries a touch of melancholy, the realisation that this small world, built over three days, is about to fade away. Sajid Ali reflected on how films like *Laila Majnu* and *Chamkila* continue to resonate, perhaps because some stories are not just written, they are lived.

As the evening set in, music once again took centre stage. The Niazi Brothers performed *Chaap Tilak* and something shifted in the air. The claps, the swaying bodies, the voices rising as one, this was not simply a performance; it was a moment shared. The last day was like the final chapter of a book one does not want to finish. It carried joy, even in its farewells. And is that not the best way to conclude a story?

A FORGOTTEN ART WORLD



Samvega: Aesthetic Shocks is about artists whose voices have been quiet for too long, now finally heard, says **TEAM VIVA**



What does it feel like to stand before a work of art and sense something shift inside you? To encounter colours, patterns and forms that seem to hold centuries of wisdom? To realise that an artist whose name you have never heard has created something that speaks to you across time? *Samvega: Aesthetic Shocks* is an exhibition that invites this kind of experience. Featuring eleven artists whose works have remained largely unseen, the show brings forward a legacy of brilliance long overdue for recognition. Curated by Minhaz Majumdar.

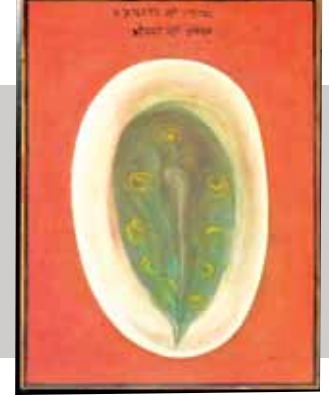
There is something deeply moving about seeing these works gathered in one space. They hold a quiet urgency, a sense of voices that have waited too long to be heard. Some pieces feel meditative, drawing you in with intricate patterns and balanced compositions. Others disrupt that stillness, shifting perspectives and challenging the way art is traditionally viewed. Some works reveal themselves slowly, while others strike instantly, demanding attention in unexpected ways.

The Sanskrit term *Samvega* refers to an aesthetic shock, a moment of deep realisation that transforms perception.

STEP INSIDE AND LET THE WORKS SPEAK. THE ARTWORKS CAPTURE ESSENCE THROUGH SACRED GEOMETRY, COSMIC SYMBOLISM OR INTENSITY, INVITING CONTEMPLATION AND CONNECTION

Some of the artists in *Samvega* have inherited these traditions through generations of training, while others have forged their own paths, developing styles in quiet dedication. Their works reflect a world where mathematics and mysticism, structure and spontaneity, come together in visual form. *Samvega* is the culmination of that journey, ensuring these artists receive the recognition they deserve. This is the kind of exhibition that stays with you. It is a reminder that art is not simply something to be admired from a distance, but something to be felt.

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR



Layers of Shared Expression

BY SAKSHI PRIYA

What happens when artists, each with their own vision, style and philosophy, come together under one roof? *Forms /// Formation*, explores the relationships between artistic practice, collaboration and individual expression. Featuring painting, sculpture, ceramics, photography and printmaking, the exhibition offers a rare opportunity to see how different generations of artists engage with shared ideas while maintaining their distinct voices.

At the heart of the show is the exchange of influences, both direct and indirect. Anupam Sud's etching *At Sunset* presents a quiet, introspective moment, where shadowy figures dissolve into their surroundings. Madhur Sen's ceramic sculpture *Cold Winter Night* captures the weight of silence in its smooth, muted textures, evoking a sense of time suspended. Ananda M Banerji's



acrylic-on-canvas painting uses deep reds and ochres to create a hypnotic rhythm, while *Red Sky*, a mixed-media work on archival material, feels like a fleeting memory made permanent.

Biman Das, a Padma Bhushan awardee, presents a recent sculpture that bridges tradition and contemporary sensibilities, reflecting his mastery of form and material. Meanwhile, photography adds another layer to the exhibition, with Aditya Arya's cyanotype prints, deep blue impressions that carry an almost

dreamlike quality, inviting viewers to reconsider the boundaries between past and present.

Art thrives on conversation, between artists, between works and between those who come to see them. *Forms /// Formation* is a reflection of this ongoing process, where ideas take shape and shift in unexpected ways. The exhibition runs until **16th February 2025** at *The Stainless Gallery, New Delhi*. Take the time to step inside, look closely and become part of the dialogue.



ICC announces prize money for Champions Trophy

PTI ■ DUBAI

Winners of the upcoming Champions Trophy (CT) will walk away with a whopping \$2.24 Million cash reward after the International Cricket Council (ICC) announced a 53 per cent hike in its prize money pool for the eight-team tournament starting February 19.

The winners' purse would be close to 20 crore in Indian currency. The runners-up will receive half the amount, \$1.12 Million (INR 9.72 Crore), while each losing semi-finalist will take home \$560,000 (INR 4.86 Crore). The total prize pool has increased to \$6.9 Million (₹60 Crore approx).

"The substantial prize pot underscores the ICC's ongoing commitment to investing in the sport and maintaining the global prestige of our events," ICC chairman Jay Shah said in a statement ahead of the tournament which will be held in Pakistan and the UAE.

Each group stage win would



be worth over \$34,000 (INR 30 Lakh) for the victorious team. Teams finishing in fifth or sixth place will receive \$350,000 each (INR three Crore), while the seventh and eighth-placed sides will take home \$140,000 (INR 1.2

Crore). Additionally, all eight teams will receive a guaranteed \$125,000 each (INR 1.08 Crore) for participating in the event. This tournament marks the first time Pakistan will host an ICC event since 1996.

However, India will play all their matches in Dubai owing to security concerns related to travelling to Pakistan. Rohit Sharma's men will begin their campaign on February 20 against Bangladesh. The Pakistan leg will feature games in Karachi,

Lahore and Rawalpindi. The 2025 edition features eight teams split into two groups of four, with the top two from each group advancing to the semi-finals. "The ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025 represents a pivotal moment for cricket, reviving a tournament that highlights the pinnacle of ODI talent, where every match is critical," the ICC chairman emphasised in his statement.

"Beyond the financial incentive, this tournament ignites fierce competition, captivates fans worldwide, and plays a vital role in fostering the growth and long-term sustainability of cricket for future generations," Shah added.

The men's Champions Trophy was held every four years from 2009 to 2017 before a COVID disruption and deliberations on its relevance led to it being postponed. The tournament was first introduced as a biennial event in 1998. The women's Champions Trophy will make its debut in 2027 in the T20 format.

Injury rules out Ben Sears from Champions Trophy

PTI ■ CHRISTCHURCH

Pacer Ben Sears has been ruled out of the Champions Trophy (CT) due to a hamstring injury, a significant setback for New Zealand ahead of the ICC event which kicks off on February 19.

New Zealand Cricket (NZC) has named Jacob Duffy as Sears' replacement.

"Sears felt some pain in his left hamstring at the team's first training in Karachi on Wednesday and a subsequent scan revealed a minor tear that would require at least two weeks' rehabilitation," NZC said in a statement.

"The rehabilitation timeframe means that Sears would likely be available for only the team's final Group A match against India in Dubai, and so the decision was made to rule him out." Sears' absence has paved the way for Duffy, who is currently with the squad for the ODI Tri-Series against Pakistan and South Africa.

"We're all really feeling for Ben. It's always tough being ruled



out of a major event at such a late stage, and it's especially tough in Ben's case given it would have been his first major ICC event," said New Zealand head coach Gary Stead.

"The timeframes for Ben to be fit to play again meant he would likely miss the majority of the group stage, and given the short nature of the tournament, we felt it was appropriate to bring in a player who is fully fit and ready to go."

"Ben is a player with huge potential and given the short rehabilitation timeframe, we're sure he'll be fit and raring to go for the home series against

Pakistan back in New Zealand." On Duffy's inclusion, Stead said, "Jacob showed with his performances in the recent home series against Sri Lanka that he is more than capable at international level."

"He's been part of the squad for the ODI Tri-Series so he's fully acclimatised and he's got plenty of experience in these conditions and is fit and ready to go."

"He's another player who will be experiencing his first senior ICC event, so it will be an exciting few weeks ahead for him."



Playing 10 months a year will lead to more injuries: Kapil Dev

PTI ■ KOLKATA

World Cup-winning captain Kapil Dev on Friday expressed concern over the rising number of injuries among Indian cricketers, attributing it to the demanding schedule that keeps players in action for almost 10 months each year.

The National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru has turned into a rehabilitation hub, with players spending more time recovering than training.

The latest casualty being India pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah who was forced to sit out of the second innings of the final Test in Sydney due to a back injury.

Initially named in the Champions Trophy (CT) squad, Bumrah has now been ruled out.

Mohammed Shami, India's top wicket-taker in the 2023 ODI World Cup (24 wickets), suffered a leg injury post-final and underwent surgery.

His 14-month recovery ruled him out of the BGT series, which India lost for the first time in a decade. Shami's absence left Bumrah without



a reliable bowling partner. "The only thing that worries me is that they play for 10 months a year -- injuries will be much more common," the 1983 World Cup-winning skipper said at the Tata Steel Golf prize distribution ceremony here.

Asked whether Bumrah would be missed in CT, Kapil urged players to focus on supporting each other rather than dwelling on injured players.

"Why talk about someone who is not in the team? It's a team game, and the team has to win, not individuals. This is not badminton, tennis, or golf; we are playing a team sport in the Champions

Trophy. If we play as a team, we will definitely win," said the 66-year-old.

"You never want your main players to get injured, but if it happens, you can't do anything about it. Good luck to my Indian team -- go and play well," he added.

India will begin their Champions Trophy campaign against Bangladesh in Dubai on February 20.

Kapil said he's excited to see so much rising talents in the Indian cricket team these days.

"When you see the youngsters, their confidence is unbelievable. We didn't have this much confidence when we were young. Good

luck to them."

A known golf enthusiast and the current PGTI president, Kapil also made a playful pitch for the sport.

"Tell everyone to play golf. If they are not playing cricket, they should come and play

golf. If they do, their performance will be better. There is a lot of fun in golf."

Emphasising on the importance of infrastructure for young golfers, he said: "If young players get the right facilities, they will improve.

We are trying our best." "LIV Golf will do what IPL did for cricket" The PGTI head further likened Saudi-backed LIV Golf's rise to the IPL's impact on cricket, stressing that more tournaments would only benefit players.

India lose to Japan 0-3 in quarterfinals of BAMTC

PTI ■ QINGDAO

HS Prannoy fought valiantly, but India succumbed to a 0-3 defeat against a second-string Japan in the quarterfinals of the Badminton Asia Mixed Team Championships (BAMTC), ending their campaign on a disappointing note here on Friday.

India, the 2023 bronze medalists in Dubai, struggled to find their rhythm, and trailed 0-1 after going down in the mixed doubles.

Dhruv Kapila and Tanisha Crasto, ranked 37th in the world, showed resilience before going down 13-21, 17-13-21 to world number 12 Hiroki Midorikawa and Natsu Saito.

With PV Sindhu sidelined due to a hamstring injury, India faced an uphill task against Tomoka Miyazaki, who has quickly risen to world number 8 following her triumph at the 2022 World Junior Championships. World number 31 Malvika Bansod, stepping in for Sindhu, put up a brave fight, especially in the second game, but struggled to match the control and consistency of her younger opponent and lost 12-21, 19-21, leaving India 0-2 behind.

It all came down to Prannoy to keep India alive, but despite a determined effort, the 32-year-old, returning after a long

break and struggling with early-season form, couldn't sustain the pressure against world number 16 Kenta Nishimoto.

The Japanese star sealed the rubber with a 21-14, 15-21, 21-12 victory in 1 hour and 17 minutes.

India will be disappointed with the loss, especially as Japan did not field their full-strength team, with several top players absent.

Japan were the inaugural edition champions in 2017 and were runners-up in 2019.

Miyazaki vs Malvika Miyazaki, leading the new-look Japanese team, was sharp and precise, quickly surging to an 11-3 lead after Malvika hit long.

Despite some good net play from the left-handed Indian, Miyazaki's cross-court drops and winners kept Malvika on the back foot.

Malvika narrowed the gap to 12-19, capitalising on unforced errors from Miyazaki.

However, two mistakes from the Indian allowed the Japanese to take the first game. The second game was more competitive as Malvika took a 5-3 lead, engaging in tight rallies. She managed a slim 11-10 advantage after Miyazaki went long.

Malvika stayed sharp, not allowing her opponent to play her usual drops freely, moving to 17-15.

We trained plenty for India tour: McCullum

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

England's head coach Brendon McCullum has dismissed suggestions that his team did not prepare adequately during their white-ball tour of India, calling such claims "factually incorrect".

The New Zealand great was responding to criticism that emerged during TV commentary for the third ODI, where Ravi Shastri and Kevin Pietersen suggested that, apart from Joe Root, England's players had not trained during the ODI series that India swept 3-0.

"Firstly, it's factually incorrect, the whole statement that we don't train," McCullum told "talkSPORT" after England's

third ODI defeat here on Wednesday.

"We've trained plenty right throughout, and guys have come from a lot of cricket as well. I think it's an easy thing to have as a throwaway line that guys don't train enough when the results aren't right."

While England had trained before the first match in Nagpur, they opted against formal sessions ahead of the second and third ODIs in Cuttack and Ahmedabad.

England suffered a 142-run defeat to India in their final ODI before the Champions Trophy slated in Pakistan and Dubai next week.

The ODI series loss came after a 1-4 drubbing by India in the T20I rubber. McCullum also pointed out

the injury setbacks to Jacob Bethell (hamstring) and Jamie Smith (calf).

"We've got a style and a method that we believe in. We've got guys who are battling injuries and trying to make sure that we've got enough bodies out on the field, knowing that we've got a huge assignment coming up in a week or two.

AFFIDAVIT

By virtue of an affidavit before Executive Magistrate Bhubaneswar on dt.7-2-2025, I, Maddi Pratima Rani, W/o-M. Lokanath Patra of Plot No. 1482, Lane-16, Bhatmatangi, P. O. Old Town, P.S-Airfield, Dist-Khordha, Odisha solemnly declare that, I have changed my name from M. Pratima Rani to Maddi Pratima Rani for all purposes.

We want to win every FIH Pro League match: Harmanpreet

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Indian men's hockey team captain Harmanpreet Singh on Friday said his team's target is to win every FIH Pro League match and finish on top of the league to earn a direct ticket to the 2026 World Cup.

India will open their FIH Pro League campaign against Spain on Saturday in Bhubaneswar.

They will next play Spain again the next day, followed by matches against Germany on February 16 and 19 in the opening leg of the India tour.

"Our training is going well from Hockey India League, we have been preparing for months, have learnt a lot from HIL. We have been able to maintain our fitness as well," Harmanpreet said ahead of the FIH Pro League opener.

"We just want to play good hockey, all players in good shape and the target is to win every game (in Pro League) looking at the World Cup," he



added.

The 2026 men's hockey World Cup will be held from August 14 to 30 in Wavre, Belgium and Amstelveen, Netherlands.

Harmanpreet, regarded as one of the best dragflickers in the world currently, praised HIL's top-scorer Jugraj Singh for his flicking abilities and said the rise of next generation of domestic players augur well for the national side.

"We have seen some good

domestic players in HIL. It was an opportunity for youngsters and they performed well," he said.

"Jugraj was the top-scorer and he was brilliant. I am happy for him and it is beneficial for the national team as well."

Harmanpreet, however, was in no mood to take Spain lightly. "Spain is a good team, we can't take them lightly. Our focus is to give our best and win the match," he said.

ODISHA TOURISM DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION LIMITED
(A GOVT. OF ODISHA UNDERTAKING)
PANTHANIVAS (OLD BLOCK), LEWIS ROAD, BHUBANESWAR-14
INVITATIONS FOR BIDS (IFB)

Letter No.2997 CAD-2582 Date: 14.02.2025

NOTICE INVITATION FOR BIDS (NIFB)

E-Procurement Notice No. BP-1/14/2024-25 dt.14.02.2025.

- Nature of Work : Civil & Miscellaneous Works.
- Total No. of Works : 03 Nos.
- Value of Works : Rs. 16.50 lakhs to 54.93 lakhs
- Bid Security : As per NIT
- Class of Contractor : As Per NIT
- Period of Completion: 03(Three) Months to 06(Six) Months.
- Other details as follows :

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of Bid online	Date, Time & Place of Opening of Tender
Superintending Engineer, OTDC Ltd., Bhubaneswar.	BP-1/14/2024-25 dt.14.02.2025	From 24.02.2025 To 10.03.2025	11.30 Hours in dt.11.03.2025 at the office of the Superintending Engineer, OTDC Ltd, Bhubaneswar.

Further details can be seen from the Govt. Website www.etenderodisha.gov.in

OIPR-37002/11/0011/2425

Sd/ Superintending Engineer O.T.D.C. Ltd., BBSR.

GOVT OF ODISHA OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER RURAL
WORKS DIVISION SONEPUR 1st Corrigendum
Letter No 913 Dtd.14.02.2025

O-1479 In continuation to this office tender identification No. SNPR/Online 16 of 2024-25 invited vide this office letter no 821 dtd 11 02.2025, under unavoidable circumstances Sl. No.1 is partial modification of TCN has been made as follows.

Sl. No.	Name of work.	Approximate Estimated cost excluding (Rs in lakhs)	EMD required (in Rs.)	Class of contractor	Cost of Tender Paper (in Rs.)	Time of Completion (in calendar months)	Last date & time of online receipt of bids
1	Construction of Addl. Class Room In Sonepur Degree College.Sonepur in the Dist. of Subarnapur for the year 2024-25.	56.10	Rs. 56100.00	Only "B" Class	Rs. 10,000.00	9 (Nine calendar months)	24.01.2025 up to 5.00 P.M.

OIPR-25054/11/0020/2425

Sd/- Executive Engineer, RuralWorks Division, Sonepur

Odisha Police Office of the D.G. & I.G. of Police, Odisha, Cuttack
Tel. :0671-2304001, Website :www.odishapolice.gov.in, Email :pankaj.odpol@gov.in&iaig-prov.odpol@gov.in

Online Bids through e-Tender Portal <https://tendersodisha.gov.in> are invited from the eligible bidders for purchase of CCTV with Essential Components for Odisha Police during the current financial year 2024-25 as per the particulars mentioned below.

Sl. No.	Name of Item	RFP No. & Date	Quantity
1	CCTV with Essential Components	52-RFP-CCTV with Essential Components-2024-25 Dtd. 12.02.2025	In different quantity

Events Date

RFP Issue Date	12.02.2025
Date & Time of Pre-Bid meeting	In this connection a pre-bid technical committee Queries to be submit on dir.bpspa@nic.in and dir.bpspa.odpol@nic.in, 2 days prior to the pre-bid meeting as per the format prescribed in Annexure 5
RFP Submission Due Date and time	24.02.2025 12:00 Noon
Date & Time of Opening of Technical Bids	25.02.2025 12:00 Noon
Date & Time of Opening of Financial Bids	To be Intimated
Tender Document fee	In favour of A.I.G. of Police (Prov.), Odisha, Cuttack payable at Cuttack. (Demand Draft)
EMD (Earnest Money Deposit)	In favour of A.I.G. of Police (Prov.), Odisha, Cuttack payable at Cuttack. (Demand Draft)

The bid document with all information relating to the bidding process including cost of bid document, Prequalification criteria and terms & conditions are available in the website: <https://tendersodisha.gov.in> The Authority reserves the right to accept / reject any part thereof or all the bids without assigning any reason therefor.

A.I.G. of Police (Provisioning) Odisha, Cuttack (Tender Calling Authority)

OIPR-12029/11/0067/2425

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, MINOR IRRIGATION DIVISION, DHENKANAL
No. 193 Dtd. 02.02.2025
e-Procurement Notice
Bid Identification No.- DMID / 11 / 2024-25
e-mail ID: semidkl@gmail.com

The Superintending Engineer, Minor Irrigation Division Dhenkanal on behalf of the Governor of Odisha invites online percentage rate tender through "e" procurement for the works as detailed in the Annexure to this bid notice.

Name of the work:	Civil works in Different Blocks of Dhenkanal District under Improvement to Tanks & MIPs Scheme for the year 2024-25.
No. of Works:	02(Two) Nos. Only
Estimated Cost:	Varies from 21.98 lakhs to 35.94 lakh (Approximately)
Cost of Tender Paper:	6000/- (Non-refundable)
Period of Completion:	03(Three) Calendar months
Availability of bid documents for on-line receipt through	From dt.15.02.2025, 10.00 A.M. to dt.24.02.2025, up to 5.00 P.M.
Last date / time of receipt of bids in the portal	24.02.2025 (5.00PM)
Date of technical bid opening through online	On dt.25.02.2025 at 11.00 A.M in the Office of the S.E., M.I. Division, Dhenkanal.
Transparent Lottery Date	01.03.2025 (11.30 AM) in the O/o of the Superintending Engineer, M.I.Division, Dhenkanal
Mode of payment of Bid Cost	The Bidder must possess compatible digital signature certificate (DSC).
Digital Signature Certificate of Bidder:	The Bidder must possess compatible digital signature certificate (DSC).

The detail tender call notice can also be seen in the DOWR web site <http://dowrorissa.gov.in>

Name & Address of the OIT: Superintending Engineer, Minor Irrigation Division, Dhenkanal. At / P. O. / District - Dhenkanal. Ph.No / Fax No.-06762-224401, Email ID:semidkl@yahoo.co.in

Further details can be seen from the e-Procurement market place. <http://tendersorissa.gov.in>

The authority reserves the right to cancel any part or whole of the tender without assigning any reason therefor.

Superintending Engineer, M.I. Division, Dhenkanal

OIPR-32027/11/0015/2425

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCE OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, NABARANGPUR IRRIGATION DIVISION NABARANGPUR, DIST. NABARANGPUR (ODISHA)
Email ID: sendivision@gmail.com dated.11.02.2025

E-PROCUREMENT NOTICE
BID IDENTIFICATION NO-SE-NID- 03/2024-25 (01-09)

- Nature of the work - Canal work.
- Total Nos. of works - 09 (Nine) Nos.
- Tender cost of the works - From Rs05.76. lakhs to Rs.10.39 lakhs (excluding GST)
- Class of Contractor - 'D' & 'C' Class
- Period of completion- 01(One) Month
- Other details as follows :

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of Bid on-line	Last date & time of seeking tender clarification	Date & Time & Place of opening of Tender
Superintending Engineer, Nabarangpur Irrigation Division, Nabarangpur.	SE-NID-03/2024-25(01-09)	17.02.2025 (10.00AM) to 24.02.2025 (up to 05.00 PM)	20.02.2025 up to 5.00 PM	25.02.2025 at 11.00 AM in the O/o the Superintending Engineer, Nabarangpur Irrigation Division, Nabarangpur.

Further details can be seen from the Government web site www.tendersodisha.gov.in Addendum Corrigendum Cancellation if any required will be published in Govt. website only.

Superintending Engineer Nabarangpur Irrigation Division Nabarangpur

OIPR-32361/11/0011/2425