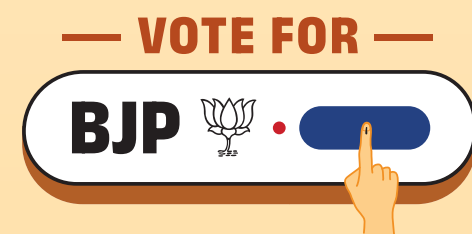




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-  50,000 government jobs for youth
-  13,000 e-buses to hit the roads, making Delhi's air cleaner
-  ₹65,000 crore investment for development of highways around Delhi to decongest Delhi's traffic
-  New colleges to be built, 3 to be ready by 2026
-  Landfills to be cleared in 3 years
-  Yamuna to be cleaned in 3 years
-  ₹10 lakh life insurance for auto, taxi, e-rickshaw drivers, gig (delivery workers/freelancers), and domestic workers
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AAP seeks third term, BJP eyes comeback in Delhi Assembly polls



(Left to right) Polling officials leave after collecting election material from a distribution center on the eve of the Delhi Assembly elections at Gole Market; About 70 pink polling booths managed only by woman in Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The stage is set for the high-stakes Assembly elections between 'Modi ki guarantees' vs 'Kejriwal's guarantees' where the Aam Aadmi Party is eyeing a third straight term, while the BJP and the Congress are looking at resurgence. Over 1.56 crore voters are eligible to cast their ballots from 7 am onwards on Wednesday. Voting will take place across 13,766 polling stations in all the 70 Assembly constituencies to decide the fates of 699 candidates in a contest that could reshape the political landscape of the capital. The voting for the elections will conclude at 6pm on February 5 and the action will

immediately shift to the exit poll predictions before the final results on February 8. The exit poll predictions will give insights into the minds of the Delhi voters and will be closely watched since the contest in Delhi has been tighter than the previous two occasions. Led by Arvind Kejriwal, the AAP is seeking a third straight term, banking on its governance record and welfare schemes. On the other hand, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is making a determined push to reclaim the capital after more than 25 years. The Congress, which ruled Delhi for 15 years in a row till 2013, is striving to stage a comeback after failing to win a single seat in the previous two elections. Polling will begin at 7 am on Wednesday

and continue until 6 pm under tight security arrangements. The Election Commission has deployed 220 companies of paramilitary forces, 35,626 Delhi Police personnel, and 19,000 home guards to ensure peaceful voting. Nearly 3,000 polling booths have been identified as sensitive, and special security arrangements, including drone surveillance, have been made at some of these locations. According to Delhi Police, additional police forces will be deployed for the sensitive booths where Quick Reaction Teams (QRTs) will also be stationed to maintain law and order. Special provisions have been made for senior citizens and persons with disabilities, with 733 polling stations des-

ignated for their accessibility. In an effort to streamline the process, the Election Commission has introduced a Queue Management System (QMS) app, which will enable the voters to check crowd levels in real time. Additionally, 6,980 out of 7,553 eligible voters under the home voting facility have already cast their ballots. The campaigning, which officially ended at 6 pm on Monday, saw a high-voltage battle between the three main contenders. The AAP focused on its governance model, with Kejriwal and Chief Minister Atishi leading rallies across the city. Led by heavyweights like Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit

Shah and party president JP Nadda, the BJP intensified its attack on the AAP over corruption allegations and law and order issues. The Congress, led by Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi, too put up a spirited campaign, targeting both the AAP and the BJP on various issues. The discourse was marked by aggressive name-calling, AI-generated spoofs, and debates over issues such as the "Sheesh Mahal" controversy, Yamuna's water quality, and allegations of voter list tampering. While governance, law and order, and women's welfare were the focal points, freebies dominated the pre-poll promises made by different parties. The AAP has pledged free bus rides for

students, insurance for auto and taxi drivers, and monthly financial aid of Rs 18,000 for temple priests and gurdwara granthis. The BJP, on the other hand, has promised financial assistance of Rs 21,000 for pregnant women and subsidised cooking gas cylinders at Rs 500, while the Congress has vowed to provide a monthly unemployment benefit of Rs 8,500. The poll outcome on February 8 will determine whether AAP retains its stronghold, the BJP breaks its losing streak, or the Congress springs a surprise. With voter turnout likely to play a decisive role, all eyes are now on Delhi's electorate as they hit the polling booths on Wednesday.

Ride hailing platform offers free rides for voters

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Rapido, India's leading shared mobility platform, is making it easier for Delhi residents to cast their votes in the upcoming Delhi Legislative Assembly Elections on Wednesday. As part of its "Sawaari Zimmedari Ki" commitment, Rapido will provide a 100% discount (up to ₹40) on all bike taxi rides to encourage voter participation. Delhi residents can avail of this offer by using the coupon code "VOTENOW", applicable on up to two bike taxi rides. This initiative, launched in partnership with the Delhi Chief Electoral Office, reinforces Rapido's commitment to civic engagement by ensuring affordable and seamless transportation to polling stations. By reducing logistical challenges, Rapido aims to contribute to a higher voter turnout and enable all eligible citizens to exercise their democratic right. "Ensuring access to polling stations is essential for a thriving democracy. At Rapido, we believe in leveraging mobility to empower citizens, and this initiative is a step towards enabling greater voter participation. We are grateful for the support of the Delhi Chief Electoral Office in amplifying this effort and ensuring its success," said Pavan Guntupalli, Co-Founder of Rapido.

AAP deploys team to check voting accuracy, EVMs

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has formed a team of volunteers to verify polling booth setups, cross-check presiding officer details, and monitor the Control Unit ID on polling day. In a statement, AAP said, "The party will deploy its trained volunteers to verify voting proce-

dures, check for irregularities, and remain vigilant against any potential tampering. The party said the volunteers have been trained to verify booth details, confirm the assigned presiding officers, and keep track of the total votes cast to ensure accuracy. The volunteers will also monitor the battery percentage of Electronic Voting Machines

(EVMs) at the end of polling to detect any anomalies and record the presence of party polling agents to maintain accountability, it said. The AAP will launch a web portal where all this data will be uploaded on Wednesday night, after the polling is over. The counting of votes for the Delhi Assembly polls will be carried out on Saturday.

Delhi voters get work-free day to vote

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Electoral Officer, R Alice Vaz on Tuesday said that a paid holiday has been declared for employees working in government and private sectors, as well as for those

employed in shops and commercial establishments. This move, aimed at facilitating voter participation, also applies to voters from bordering states, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, who are employed in Delhi. Voting will take place from 7 AM to 6 PM. All vot-

ers present in the queue by 6 PM will be allowed to cast their vote. The Election Commission of India has issued clear directives, prohibiting the use of mobile phones, cameras, smartwatches, or any electronic items inside polling stations.

Delhi Police records 1,076 cases of MCC violations

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police has recorded 1,076 cases of alleged MCC violations and arrested or detained 34,250 people for it. These are cases lodged between January 7, when the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) came into force, and February 3 which was the last day of campaigning for the Delhi Assembly polls. Voting will be held on Wednesday. Ahead of the polls, police have intensified vigilance at border checkpoints and conducted crackdowns on illegal activities, including smuggling of arms, liquor and drugs.

Delhi Police also confiscated 469 illegal firearms and 513 cartridges with 491 people arrested under the Arms Act, according to a statement. Police have also seized 1,10,093 litres of liquor and 1,381 people were arrested for it. It said 196.602 kg of drugs worth over Rs 77.9 crore and more than 1,200 banned injections were also seized and arrested 177 people for it. Law enforcement agencies have also seized Rs 11.36 crore in cash and 37.39 kg of silver, the statement added. The office of Delhi Chief Electoral Officer also released its data on MCC violations on Monday.

BJP's Sachdeva urges Delhi to vote early

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva on Tuesday said he will vote at exactly seven AM on Wednesday to free Delhi from corrupt, anarchic, and incompetent rulers and urged all Delhi residents to start voting from seven am. He claimed that the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is misleading people by saying that voting will begin at nine AM, whereas the actual polling time is seven AM. He also emphasized that only election officials apply the ink mark, and it is done on a finger of the hand. Sachdeva further stated that the BJP is set to perform exceptionally well on all 12 reserved seats in Delhi, which will form the foundation of the party's significant victory in the Delhi Assembly elections tomorrow. The Delhi BJP President asserted that AAP and Arvind Kejriwal have nothing to show-cases as achievements from their 10 years in power. As a result, Kejriwal resorted to a negative and hate-filled election campaign. For the past two months, Kejriwal has spent his time blaming the BJP, other political parties, the police administration, and even the Election Commission. While Arvind Kejriwal and Atishi Marlina confined their campaign mostly to media appearances, spreading hatred and using offensive language, BJP leaders and workers effectively exposed Kejriwal's scams involving liquor, the "Sheesh Mahal" controversy, and corruption in the so-called free electricity and water schemes.

118 candidates with criminal past

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Out of 118 candidates with criminal record contesting the Delhi Assembly polls, 24 candidates (20 per cent) did not have their records disclosed or justified by their respective parties, poll rights body Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) said on Tuesday. A total of 699 candidates are contesting the upcoming assembly polls in Delhi. The ADR has released a detailed analysis of the Delhi Assembly elections 2025. The report, based on Format C7 data, revealed that many political parties failed to disclose reasons for selecting candidates with pending criminal cases as directed by the Supreme Court. Out of 699 candidates contesting the elections, 118 have declared criminal cases against themselves and among them, 71 candidates face serious crim-

inal charges, including corruption, rioting and violent offenses. While 94 candidates' criminal records were published as mandated, 24 candidates (20%) did not have their records disclosed or justified by their respective parties. The Supreme Court had mandated that political parties provide valid reasons for fielding such candidates beyond just their "winnability" at the polls. However, most parties continue to offer vague or repetitive justifications. The analysis covered 22 political parties that fielded candidates with criminal cases. The major parties such as the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), Congress and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) published Format C7 for most of their candidates. However, the smaller parties, including the Peoples Party of India (Democratic) and Bhartiya Rashtrawadi Party,

failed to comply. Some parties engaged in questionable practices such as providing identical justifications for multiple candidates or claiming cases were "politically motivated" without substantial evidence. The AIMIM and the National Loktantrik Party also copied responses across different candidates, the ADR said. Among the candidates with the highest number of criminal cases are Amanatullah Khan (AAP) with 19 cases, Arvind Kejriwal (AAP) with 15 cases and Mohd. Tahir Hussain (AIMIM) with 11 cases, including 38 serious charges. The political parties justified their selection by citing their political experience, popularity and claims that cases against them were filed due to political vendetta. However, these explanations often lacked substantive reasoning on why cleaner candidates were not considered, the

ADR said. The ADR report also underscores the strong nexus between muscle power, money and politics. Out of the 118 candidates with criminal backgrounds, 84 (71%) are crorepatris and the top three candidates with the highest declared assets, despite having criminal cases, include Manjinder Singh Sirsa (BJP) with Rs 248 crore, Gurcharan Singh (Congress) with Rs 130 crore and Parvesh Sahib Singh (BJP) with Rs 115 crore. The ADR has proposed several urgent reforms to curb the criminalization of politics. These include strict action against non-compliant political parties, fast-tracking criminal cases against politicians, banning candidates with serious charges and imposing financial penalties for non-disclosure. The elections to the 70-member Delhi Assembly will be held on February 5 and the votes will be counted on February 8.

EC, Delhi police abetting BJP's MCC violations, hooliganism: Kejriwal



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With a day to go for polls, APP chief Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday said BJP goons are openly violating the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) in Delhi, and instead of taking action against them, the Delhi Police and the Election Commission (EC) are targeting those who file complaints. Reacting strongly to these incidents, Kejriwal in a social media post said a police case was filed against the Chief Minister of Delhi for lodging a complaint against open hooliganism. "So now, this is the official stance of the Delhi Police and the Election Commission. Their 'job' is to act as hooligans against the Aam Aadmi Party, protect BJP's hooliganism, and facilitate the distribution of alcohol, money, and goods. If anyone tries to stop them from doing this 'job', they will be 'booked for obstructing police and

Election Commission operations," Kejriwal wrote. AAP claimed on Monday night, BJP members violated the Model Code of Conduct in the constituencies of Kalkaji, Jangpura, and Rajinder Nagar. Instead of taking action against BJP workers, the police brutally assaulted two youths who were filming the violations in Kalkaji. Moreover, when a complaint was filed, the police registered an FIR against the Chief Minister of Delhi. This revelation was made on Tuesday by senior leader Manish Sisodia, Delhi Chief Minister Atishi, and Durgesh Pathak. Senior leader Manish Sisodia said the Election Commission of India was once widely respected across the country. "It was once led by figures like TN Seshan, whose name became synonymous with free and fair elections. Today, under Rajiv Kumar's leadership, the Election Commission appears to have handed over the responsibility of contesting elections to the BJP. "In Delhi, the election is not being fought

by the BJP but rather by the Election Commission and the Delhi Police in partnership with the BJP. Numerous reports from across Delhi and videos circulating on social media clearly show BJP goons engaging in open hooliganism for the past three to four days. Meanwhile, the police are harassing complainants and even journalists. However, no action is being taken against those violating the code of conduct and engaging in hooliganism. This has been happening not just now but since before the election was announced," he said. Sisodia warned that if the BJP wins the elections, the government will not be run democratically but by mafia groups. "People of Delhi are receiving benefits such as quality education, free electricity and water, free bus travel, and 24-hour facilities. If BJP wins, all these schemes will be destroyed by the mafia. The future of Delhi can be seen in the videos showing BJP candidates and their goons assaulting women in Jangpura."

Atishi defamation plea to be heard in April

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday issued notice to Delhi Chief Minister Atishi on a BJP leader's plea in defamation case against her for allegedly saying the BJP attempted to poach AAP MLAs. "Issue notice to the respondent," said Justice Vikas Mahajan. The matter would be heard in April. The senior counsel for the complainant Praveen Shankar Kapoor argued a special court exceeded the scope of its jurisdiction while rejecting his defamation complaint and quashing the summons issued by a magisterial court to the AAP leader. He objected to the special court "justifying" Atishi's conduct by calling her a whistleblower and sought a direction to stay the observations. Justice Mahajan however did not pass any direction on the stay and sought Atishi's stand on Kapoor's plea.

Kapoor's counsel said the special court ought to have confined itself to the ingredients of the offence of defamation. He said despite the allegations, Atishi did not come forward with any material to substantiate her claims before the police and could not be given the defence of truth. Kapoor moved the high court on January 30, and said the special judge "ventured into political adventurism" akin to a political discourse by attempting to determine who was a bigger or smaller political entity. "The special judge did not even permit the complainant to have a trial in order to make good his allegations..The impugned order needs to be quashed as there are various legal infirmities in the said order. The Special Judge (MP/MLA Cases) has transgressed from the criminal complaint and has dealt with issues which are of little significance to the case in hand," said

Kapoor's plea. Kapoor, a former media head and spokesperson of the Delhi BJP unit, said Atishi levelled baseless allegations in a press conference held on January 27 and later on April 2, 2024 against the BJP. Atishi, said Kapoor, alleged the BJP was approaching AAP MLAs and offering them bribes to the tune of Rs 20-25 crore for switching sides. Atishi however moved the special judge by filing a revision petition to challenge the summons issued to her by a magisterial court. The complaint also made former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal as an accused in the complaint, but the magisterial court did not find sufficient grounds to proceed against him on May 28, 2024. On January 28, special judge Vishal Gogne held the allegations made by Atishi constituted the exercise of the right to freedom of speech concerning political corruption and not defamation.



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INSIDE

WORLD 09
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AFGHAN REFUGEES BACK TO
THEIR COUNTRY

NEW DELHI, WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 5, 2025; PAGES 12 & 4

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Modi attacks Rahul, Kejriwal ahead of polls



Prime Minister Narendra Modi replies to the Motion of Thanks to President's address in the Lok Sabha during the Budget session of Parliament, in New Delhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a scathing attack on Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said some people are openly speaking the language of urban naxals and asserted that those who "declare a war" against the Indian State can neither understand the Constitution nor about the country's unity. He also took a dig at Arvind Kejriwal and AAP a day before the Delhi Assembly polls, saying "some parties are like 'AAP-da' for the future of the youth". Modi asserted that while his government's schemes saved lot of money, it was not used to build 'Sheesh Mahal'.

around with Constitution in pockets, do they know how they forced Muslim women to live in hardship. We brought in the triple talaq law to give right to them," Modi said. "Today some people are openly speaking the language of urban naxals. The things that urban naxals say (are being said). These people who speak the language of urban naxals, who declare war against the Indian State, can neither understand the Constitution nor about the country's unity," Modi said. Though Modi did not name anyone, his remarks were an apparent reference to Rahul's comments last month that "we are now fighting the BJP, the RSS and the Indian State itself". In a veiled jibe at AAP convenor Kejriwal, Modi said some leaders focus on jacuzzi and stylish showers while his government's focus of providing water to every household. He also said that "some parties are like AAP-da for the future of the youth" as they promise various kinds

PM to visit Kumbh today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit the Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj on Wednesday and take a holy dip at the Sangam around 11 am, his office said. In line with his commitment to promote and preserve India's spiritual and cultural heritage, Modi has consistently taken proactive steps to enhance infrastructure and facilities at pilgrimage sites, said PMO. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath was in Prayagraj and the Maha Kumbh Mela area on Tuesday ahead of the Prime Minister's visit.

a swipe at them for his reaction on the President's address, saying those who entertain themselves by getting photo sessions done in huts of the poor will find the talk about the poor in Parliament boring. Soon after the President delivered her address to a joint sitting of Parliament on January 31, Sonia Gandhi, Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadera were seen discussing the speech in the Parliament complex. During the discussion, Rahul Gandhi was heard asking Sonia Gandhi if the President's speech was "boring". "We did not give false slogans, but real development to people," Modi said. "Till five decades, slogans of 'garibi hatao' were heard and now 25 crore poor have come out of poverty," he said. He said till now poor people have got 4 crore house. "The one who has lived that kind of life knows what it means to have a house with a proper roof," Modi said.

EC dismisses Kejriwal's allegations of partiality

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI



RAJIV KUMAR
CHIEF ELECTION COMMISSIONER

A day before the Delhi Election Commission on Tuesday took cognizance of "repeated deliberate pressure tactics to malign EC", saying it will not be swayed by "such insinuations". The Election Commission issued a statement on X platform, addressing the ongoing efforts to undermine its credibility. This comes after the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief Arvind Kejriwal accused the Election Commission of biased and unprofessional behaviour in handling the election related issues. "The three-member Commission collectively noted repeated deliberate pressure tactics to malign ECI in the Delhi Elections, as if it is a single-member body and decided to have constitutional restraint, absorbing such outbursts with sagacity, stoically and not to be swayed by such insinuations," the Election Commission wrote on X, without naming AAP or Kejriwal. "Action on issues raised by political parties & candidates are taken in each instance by over 1.5 lakh officials in #DelhiAssemblyElection2025 who are functioning within an established legal framework, robust processes & SoPs ensuring fair play and non-partisan conduct," it added. The poll body also warned its poll machinery in Delhi that any partisan conduct disturbing a level playing field

will be held "unpardonable". The poll panel's fresh directions to its officials came after AAP national convenor Arvind Kejriwal approached the EC to raise concerns over alleged intimidation tactics being used in Delhi ahead of the Assembly elections scheduled on Wednesday. Kejriwal, along with Delhi Chief Minister Atishi, met the EC in the evening on Tuesday and raised concerns over alleged intimidation tactics being used in the national capital ahead of the assembly polls. Talking to the media after the meeting, Kejriwal, accompanied by party leader Raghav Chadha, accused the BJP and Delhi Police of engaging in "hooliganism" to create an atmosphere of fear among voters. "We told the EC how Delhi Police is being misused for violence and intimidation. Many people are scared, and it is possible that they may not come out to vote due to fear," he said. The former chief minister also alleged that attempts were being made to suppress voter turnout, particularly among slum dwellers. "There are reports that people's fingers are being marked with black ink in an attempt to disenfranchise them, and that money and threats are being used to influence voters. We raised these concerns with the EC," Kejriwal said. He thanked the EC for granting them a meeting despite the silence period and said that officials have assured them of a free and fair election. "The EC has assured us that they will take necessary steps to prevent any such wrongdoing." Earlier Delhi Chief Minister Atishi accused the BJP of engaging in "hooliganism" and alleged the Election Commission and Delhi Police are shielding saffron party workers, while targeting AAP leaders and members. Atishi, who is contesting from the Kalkaji constituency, claimed at a press conference here that democracy in India was now in the hands of Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar and the country is watching "if it survives in the national capital".

FIR against Atishi for model code violation



Delhi Chief Minister Atishi at a press conference

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A day before Delhi Assembly polls, police on Tuesday registered three FIRs regarding Model Code of Conduct (MCC) violations in Kalkaji -- one against Chief Minister Atishi, another against other AAP members, and a third against two BJP leaders. The AAP leader has been named in a disobedience case registered at Govindpuri police station under Section 223 of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. Meanwhile, the stage is set for the high-stakes Assembly elections in Delhi, with over 1.56 crore voters eligible to cast their ballots from 7 am onwards on Wednesday. Voting will take place across 13,766 polling stations in all the 70 Assembly constituencies to decide the fates of 699 candidates in a contest that

could reshape the political landscape of the capital. Responding to Delhi Chief Minister Atishi's case, Police said AAP's Kalkaji candidate Atishi was accompanying AAP supporters who allegedly interfered with an officer's work at Fateh Singh Marg. Two AAP members were booked for assaulting a police constable on duty. This was preceded by a police case against two BJP leaders -- Manish Bidhuri, a relative of BJP's Kalkaji candidate Ramesh Bidhuri, and Ravi Dayama. Police lodged the FIR against the BJP leaders on a complaint by AAP. Atishi, in a post on X, said Manish was Ramesh Bidhuri's nephew and alleged he was seen "roaming around" in Kalkaji late Monday night though he was not even a voter from the area.



Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel with Home Minister Harsh Sanghavi and others at a press conference

Panel to draft Gujarat UCC law

PTI ■ GANDHINAGAR

The BJP government in Gujarat on Tuesday formed a committee headed by a retired Supreme Court judge to assess the need for the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in the state, and also draft a bill for the same. While the Opposition said the decision was aimed at diverting attention from pressing issues ahead of the upcoming local body polls, the government claimed rights of the tribal communities will be protected if the UCC is implemented. The five-member committee, to be headed by Justice (ret'd) Ranjana Desai, will submit its report within 45 days, following which a decision about implementation of the UCC will be taken, Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel told reporters here. The committee will meet religious leaders, including those from the Muslim community, for consultations. "To assess the need for a Uniform Civil Code and to prepare a draft bill, we have decided to form a committee under a former judge of the Supreme Court," CM Patel said.

Other members of the committee are retired IAS officer CL Meena, advocate RC Kodekar, former vice chancellor of Veer Narmad South Gujarat University Dakshesh Thakar and social worker Gita Shroff. Notably, the BJP-ruled Uttarakhand has already implemented the UCC. CM Patel said his government is committed to fulfil Prime Minister Narendra Modi's resolve of implement the UCC across the country. The panel will examine various aspects and take views of people from different walks of life, and an "appropriate decision" will be taken after perusing its report, the CM said. Minister of State for Home Harsh Sanghavi said that the UCC, if implemented, will protect the rights of tribals. "The UCC implemented by Uttarakhand presented a model before the country because it protects the customs and traditions of tribals. (Union) Home Minister Amit Shah has also clarified in Jharkhand that UCC will protect the traditions followed by tribals," Sanghavi said. The committee will meet religious leaders, including Muslim leaders, to prepare the report, he added. Shroff and Thakar said the state government's approach is sensitive and shows it is committed to closing the loopholes in laws and ensuring justice to all. Leader of Opposition in the state assembly Amit Chavda said the BJP is more interested in the "politics of minority and majority". "In Gujarat, there are 14 per cent tribals. The UCC will affect the culture, customs, religious rites and marriage system of the tribal society. Similarly, the Jain community of Gujarat, and the Devipujaks will also be affected," he claimed. Even the Indian Constitution has given freedom to certain communities to pursue their customs and culture, the Congress leader said. "Implementation of the UCC is in the jurisdiction of the central government, and not the state. But since there is internal fighting in the BJP all over Gujarat, and the government here has failed in every way, this announcement is an attempt to divert people's attention ahead of the local body elections," he claimed.

US flight carrying 205 illegal Indians headed for Amritsar

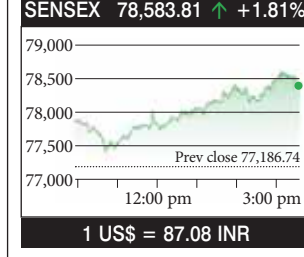


A C-17 aircraft carrying 205 Indian nationals departed from San Antonio, Texas around 3 am IST, sources said.

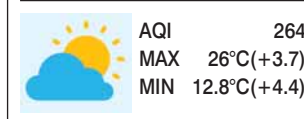
Amidst reports that a US military aircraft is bringing 205 illegal Indian migrants back to country, most likely Amritsar, US said on Tuesday it is rigorously tightening immigration laws. Its embassy also said, "These actions send a clear message: illegal migration is not worth the risk." Asked about the deportation flight bringing back a group of illegal migrants to India, a US embassy spokesperson here did not provide details, but asserted that Washington is removing illegal migrants. "I can't share any details on those inquires, but I can share, on the record, the United States is vigorously enforcing its border, tightening immigration laws, and removing illegal migrants," the official said. "These actions send a clear message: illegal migration is not worth the risk," he added. Incidentally, this action comes days ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's likely visit to the US next week.

A C-17 aircraft carrying 205 Indian nationals departed from San Antonio, Texas around 3 am IST, sources said. The plane, headed to Punjab's Amritsar, is likely to stop at Ramstein, Germany, for refuelling, they said, adding each one was verified before being sent back. This deportation is likely the first of several planned flights, as more batches of illegal Indian immigrants are expected to be flown back in the coming weeks. The first round of deportation of illegal Indian nationals from the US comes around two weeks after Donald Trump became the US president for a second term. Trump has promised a strict policy approach in dealing with illegal immigrants residing in the US and already signed a number of immigration-related executive orders. Following his phone conversation with Prime Minister Modi on January 27, Trump said India "will do what is right" on the deportation of illegal migrants from the US.

MARKETS



WEATHER



SC censures Assam govt on detention centres

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

"Are you waiting for some muhurat", the Supreme Court on Tuesday asked the Assam Government, which was censured for keeping 63 persons declared foreigners in detention centres indefinitely and not deporting them. Observing Assam was suppressing facts, a bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan said once the detainees were identified as foreigners, they ought to be deported immediately. "You have refused to start deportation saying their addresses are not known. Why should it be our concern? You deport to their foreign country. Are you waiting for some muhurat (auspicious time)?" the bench asked. The SC expressed surprise at Assam government's explanation that it was not sending nationality verification forms to the Ministry of External Affairs as detainees' addresses were unknown. "Once you declare a person foreigner, then you have to take the next logical step. You cannot detain them till eternity. Article 21 of the Constitution is there. There are many foreigner detention centres in Assam. How many have you deported?" the bench questioned the Assam government counsel. The top court directed the Assam Government to initiate the deportation process for 63 declared foreign nationals. Their nationality is known.

GRAP controls Delhi pollution, not stubble burning: Study

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi-NCR's pollution during October-November is largely of local origin, with stubble burning in Punjab and Haryana contributing 14 per cent to the overall PM2.5 levels in 2022, a study has suggested. Researchers, led by those at Japan's Research Institute for Humanity and Nature under the 'Aakash Project', said that changes in the national capital's air quality could be related more with the stepping up or down of the 'GRAP' anti-pollution

measures. The study, published in the journal npj Climate and Atmospheric Science, analysed fine particulate matter (PM2.5) data, recorded during the September-November months of 2022 and 2023. For the study, 30 sensors were installed across Punjab, Haryana and Delhi-NCR. Stubble burning, a common practice for clearing land following rice harvest, is often blamed for the sharp and sustained rise in PM2.5 levels, seen in the national capital region during the October-

November months. However, the analysis showed that emissions over Punjab from burning stubbles "contributed only a meagre (nearly) 14 per cent to the overall PM2.5 over Delhi-NCR during October-November 2022". Further, PM2.5 levels remained stable in Delhi, even as stubble fires in Punjab and Haryana (as recorded by satellites) declined by at least 50 per cent during 2015-2023, the authors said. "This indicates that there exists only a very weak coupling between PM2.5

mass over Delhi-NCR and the (crop residue burning) over Punjab, highlighting the effectiveness of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) in controlling air pollution in the region," the authors wrote. GRAP refers to the set of anti-pollution measures, implemented in a staged manner in response to air quality levels. GRAP-4 is the most stringent, imposed when air quality index (AQI) crosses 450 and reaches 'severe plus' category. The researchers observed that PM2.5 levels varied in line with the stepping up or down of the GRAP stages. "The decrease of PM2.5 levels in Delhi-NCR was mainly attributed to GRAP IV when the major PM2.5 emissions from road traffic and construction activities, among other sources, were reduced. However, a rise in

PM2.5 load was recorded after the revocation of GRAP IV for 2022 and 2023," they wrote. "With the measurements at a network of about 30 sites covering Punjab, Haryana and Delhi NCR, we are able to separate the contributions of paddy straw burning to Delhi's PM2.5 variations on the basis of characteristic PM2.5 events and at week-monthly averages," said author Prabir Patra, the leader of Aakash Project and principal scientist at Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology.

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Farooq Abdullah challenges J and K normalcy claims

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Jammu and Kashmir National Conference President and former Chief Minister Dr Farooq Abdullah Tuesday claimed the targeted killing of a retired army soldier by terrorists in the South Kashmir district of Kulgam disputed the Centre's normalcy claims in Jammu and Kashmir.

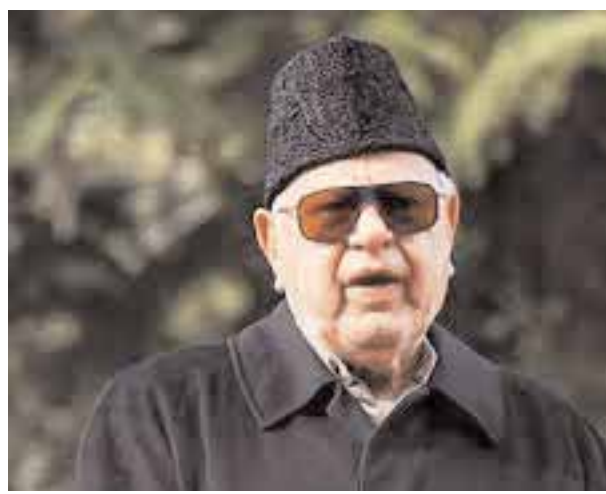
Dr Abdullah's remarks came ahead of the crucial security review meeting chaired by the Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi.

Responding to a question from a media person over incidents of terrorist violence on the sidelines of an event in the Government Medical College, Jammu Dr Farooq Abdullah said, "Question to those who are beating drums in and outside Parliament that militancy has been wiped out and normalcy has returned to Jammu and Kashmir."

Dr Farooq observed if terror activities are still happening in J and K then the government at the Centre should come clean on the facts. "The union government day in and day out is claiming that terrorism has ended in J and K. But this is not the reality. The Central government should come clean on the situation," he said.

In Kulgam, multiple teams have been formed to identify the perpetrators behind the heinous act of violence.

According to ground reports, house-to-house searches were conducted by the security forces in the nearby villages and Behibagh area of Kulgam to track down the footprints of



unidentified terrorists behind the targeted killing of an ex-serviceman.

Official sources claimed the police detained several people to interrogate them to gather vital clues about the presence of terrorists in the area and their sympathisers extending logistics support to them to execute their sinister design.

In Srinagar, Counter Intelligence Kashmir (CIK) Tuesday detained five persons for their alleged involvement in smuggling SIM cards inside the Central Jail for their use by inmates, including terrorists.

A spokesman of the CIK said that the individuals were detained for questioning in connection with the investigation of case FIR No. 06/2023 u/s 153-A, 505, 121 & 120-B IPC r/w 13 & 39 UA (P) Act of Police Station CI-K.

"Five individuals were detained for interrogation/questioning for their involvement in a criminal conspiracy hatched

3 youths try to rob police on Gurugram expressway, nabbed

PTI ■ GURUGRAM

Three youths who mistook a police team on the KMP Expressway for civilians and tried to rob them at gunpoint were nabbed after a chase, police said on Tuesday.

The three arrested were identified as Shahid alias Pola, Imran, and Aamir, all natives of Dhulawat village in Nuh district. They were booked at Sadar Tauru Police Station.

A country-made pistol with a cartridge, an iron rod, and a stick were recovered from their possession. The incident happened Monday night when a police patrol on the Kundali-Manesar-Palwal Expressway was accosted by three youths about a kilometre ahead of Dhulawat Toll Plaza.

"The accused stopped the police vehicle brandishing weapons. One of them pointed a gun at the driver's neck and said, 'take out whatever you have'. When the driver switched on the lights of the car, all three tried to run, realising they were police, but were nabbed," Mahender Singh, the investigating officer, said.

A background check revealed that all three had past criminal records and belonged to a gang of robbers. Shahid alias Pola was found to have been involved in about 10 cases, including under sections of attempt to murder, robbery, theft, and obstruction in government work.

BMC allocates ₹74,427 Crore for 2025-26

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI:

Presenting a whopping Rs.74,427 crore budget for 2025-26 which marks a 14.19 per cent increase from previous year's budget of Rs 65,180.79 crore, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) on Tuesday revived the plan to construct 'Mumbai Eye' along the lines of the famous 'London Eye' or the 'Millennium Wheel' launched in 2000.

Interestingly enough, the BMC has proposed to construct 'Mumbai Eye' during the year when Asia's largest civic body is all set to go to the polls. In fact, this is the third attempt to construct a massive Ferris wheel, along the lines of 'London Eye' --- a 135-meter (443-foot) Ferris wheel on the River Thames. This is the third attempt to construct 'Mumbai Eye' in the country's commercial capital. Earlier, the then ruling united Shiv Sena had proposed to construct 'Mumbai Eye' way back in 2008, but it remained on paper. The state-run Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) had volunteered to construct the giant cantilevered observation wheel during 2022-23. However, the plan was dropped after the local residents opposed the project.

Tabling the Mumbai civic budget for 2025-26, BMC Commissioner Bhushan Gagrani made a brief mention

about the plan to construct 'Mumbai Eye' and said: "The BMC intends to erect 'Mumbai Eye' in line with 'London Eye' at a suitable location under a public-private-partnership (PPP) model".

The Rs 74,427 crore budget for 2025-26, which is the highest-ever outlay, focusses extensively on infrastructure development, enhancing health network, beefing up storm water drains, water supply projects and greening initiatives. The budget lays emphasis on Education and health. It promises transformative changes for the metropolis.

Given that the term of the elected corporators ended on March 7, 2022, the BMC has no elected body and in the absence of an elected body, it is being ruled by the administration.

With the forthcoming BMC election in mind, Gagrani has not proposed any fresh taxes, levies, etc to make it citizen-friendly.

The BMC has made an allocation of Rs 5,807.24 crore for game-changer Mumbai Coastal Road Project (MCRP), which involves the stretch of south Mumbai, six packages in north Mumbai - from Versova to Dahisar, and Dahisar to Bhayandar.

In the south Mumbai stretch, the coastal road from Princess Street to Worli is functional in both directions, while the remaining around six percent work will be finished by May 2025, for which Rs. 1,507

crore has been earmarked. The MCRP-North Project and the Goregaon Mulund Link Road Connector has been aligned from Versova Interchange to Dahisar Interchange with an elevated connector to the GMLR entry point in Goregaon east.

These would help connect south Mumbai with Mulund and Thane, travel time between Versova-Dahisar will be slashed by upto 40 minutes and see massive traffic movements of 140,000 passenger car units per day on the sector besides drastically reducing pollution levels.

The final leg of the MCRP will be through an elevated signal-free road between Dahisar to Bhayander west costing around Rs. 4,300 crore, allowing vehicles to zoom from Mumbai to Thane from the western side. Presently, the sole route is the Western Express Highway.

The BMC is pushing another major infrastructure project -- Goregaon-Mulund Link Road (GMLR), which runs through a twin-tunnel under the Sanjay Gandhi National Park and is slated for completion by 2028. It has allocated Rs 1,959 crore in the 2025-26 budget.

Apart from focusing on a 'Universal Footpath Policy' to provide liveable, pedestrian and differently-abled friendly walkways across the city, the BMC has concretised 1,333 kms of the road networks in two phases to make the commute smoother and snarls-free.

In the first phase started in

Jan. 2023, 698 kms roads (324 Kms) were taken up of which 187 are completed (26 percent) and the rest are in progress. The second phase from Dec. 2024 saw 1,420 roads (377 kms) taken up for concretization and work has been initiated on 720 more roads.

By June this year, the BMC plans to complete 75 percent of the Phase I and 50 percent of Phase II outstanding works, with expert guidance from IIT-Bombay.

To resolve the problems of vehicle parking, the BMC will construct a multi-level robotic 194-capacity car park near Flora Fountain for which the Work Orders are issued.

Another parking lot for 640 cars and 112 two-wheelers will come up at Worli Engineering Hub for which a contractor has been appointed and a budgetary provision of Rs. 200 crore made.

With a focus on education, the BMC has set aside Rs 3,955.64 crore (up by Rs 630 crore from last year), while it has allocated Rs 5,545 crore for the Mumbai Sewage Disposal Project (MSDP), under which seven Sewage Treatment Plants are expected to be completed by 2028.

The BMC has allocated Rs 1,000 crore for infrastructure improvements and purchase of electric buses by the BEST. It plans to open 25 more Aapla Dawakhana clinics and three physiotherapy centers to expand access to free healthcare.

SC censures Assam govt on detention centres

From page 3

The SC has demanded a status report in two weeks. "We direct the State to file a proper affidavit reporting compliance with this order. If the state government finds that nationality verification forms have been sent two months back, the state will immediately issue a reminder to Ministry of External Affairs. As soon as such reminder is received by the ministry, effective action shall be taken by the Ministry on the basis of nationality status verification," it said.

The bench grilled Assam Chief Secretary Dr Ravi Kota, who was directed to appear through video-conferencing, for the delay in deporting

detainees to their respective countries. "Even without address, you can deport them. You can't continue to detain them indefinitely," the bench told the chief secretary. The Assam government counsel expressed helplessness in deporting the foreigners without addresses.

"You deport them to the capital city of the country. Suppose the person is from Pakistan, you know the capital city of Pakistan? How can you keep them detained here saying their foreign address is not known? You would never know the address," the bench responded. The state exchequer is spending on the persons detained for so many years and it was surprising

that this does not bother the government, it added.

Senior advocate Colin Gonsalves, appearing for the petitioner, submitted Bangladesh had refused to accept the detainees as its citizens. "My information is that, attempts are being made to figure out if Bangladesh will take these people out. Bangladesh is refusing. India says they are not Indians. Bangladesh says they are not Bangladeshis. They have become stateless. They are in detention for over 10 years. Bangladesh says they won't accept anyone who lived in India for many years," he informed the bench.

Claiming the detainees were Rohingyas, Gonsalves said the Centre and the State must

disclose the truth to the court. Solicitor general Tushar Mehta expressed apology for the lacunae in the affidavit filed by Assam government and assured he would speak to the highest executive and furnish all details in court.

"Let me sit with Ministry of External Affairs. It is not a State subject. It is a central subject which is diplomatically dealt with the Centre. I will speak with the official concerned," said Mehta. The top court directed the Centre to also give details of those were deported till now and further apprise how it proposed to deal with detainees whose nationality was unknown. The matter would be heard on February 25.

PTI ■ KOLKATA

The West Bengal Cabinet on Tuesday gave its nod to a proposal to provide land to the Border Security Force (BSF) in two more districts in the state to erect fencing and building outposts along the border and with Bangladesh, a senior official said.

It was decided at a Cabinet meeting, chaired by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee at the state secretariat Nabanna, that 0.05 acres at Binnaguri in Jalpaiguri district and 19.73 acres at Narayanpur in Malda district will be handed over to the BSF, he said.

In the previous meeting held on January 27, the Cabinet decided to give 0.9 acres of land at Karimpur in Nadia district to the BSF to set up

outposts or install wired fences.

The chief minister recently alleged month that the BSF was allowing infiltration from Bangladesh. The BJP, on the other hand, accused the TMC government of not helping the authorities in erecting fences along the boundary with Bangladesh.

The Cabinet also decided to bring a Bill in the assembly proposing to impose heavy fines on those spitting in public places after chewing gutka and betel leaves, the official said.

"The CM has expressed her displeasure over the growing practice of publicly spitting after chewing betel leaves and gutka and defacing the freshly painted walls and buildings. On Tuesday, the

Cabinet approved the introduction of a Bill in the assembly, where there would be a provision for imposing fines on those found spitting," he said, adding that the fine could likely be Rs 1000.

The Cabinet, eyeing to speed up the process of police investigations, also approved the creation of 12 new posts of Deputy Commissioner in Kolkata Police, the bureaucrat said.

Of them, five would lead probe teams.

"All the positions for the new 12 deputy commissioners would be non-IPS cadre officers," he said, adding that officers could be promoted to the post from the chair of Assistant Commissioner (AC) of Kolkata Police.

LIC gets GST notice of ₹101.95 Crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) on Tuesday said tax authorities have slapped a demand notice of about Rs 101.95 crore on it for short payment of Goods and Services Tax (GST) for five financial years.

The company has received a communication/demand order for interest and penalty for several states, LIC said in a regulatory filing.

FIR against Atishi for model code violation

From page 3

Responding to the first complaint, police said they found Manish Bidhuri and Ravi Dayama allegedly violating the Model Code of Conduct (MCC). An FIR was registered against them at Govindpuri Police Station, they said.

Later, responding to a second call, police saw a large gathering of AAP workers along with approximately 10 vehicles. Despite repeated requests to disperse, the AAP members refused, violating prohibitory orders and the MCC, DCP (Southeast) Ravi Kumar Singh said. Police took action following a complaint from the Flying Squad Team, the DCP said.

Police added when they began videography of the spot, some AAP workers allegedly assaulted and

misbehaved with a head constable, snatched his phone, and injured him. Police filed a separate FIR in connection with the assault, they said. When asked whether Delhi CM Atishi was specifically named in the FIR, DCP Singh confirmed that action was taken against all people who were present at the spot and violating prohibitory orders.

In a sharp response to the police move, the AAP leader alleged that the family members of Ramesh Bidhuri -- BJP candidate from Kalkaji -- were openly flouting the poll code, but no action was being taken. "The Election Commission is unbelievable. Ramesh Bidhuri's family members are openly flouting the model code of conduct and there is no action. I complained to police and the Election Commission and

they registered a case against me," she said in a post on X. Atishi, taking to X, claimed that the Delhi police "illegally took in custody two people who were reporting and making a video of MCC violations." She further alleged that no action was taken against those for flouting the MCC. Sharing the video on X, Atishi said, The boy who was making the video was beaten and taken away by the police. You can see in this video that the police are kicking him. Action was taken against the person who made the video. Nothing against the person who broke the rules." She claimed her BJP rival from Kalkaji, Ramesh Bidhuri, and members of his family were openly resorting to "hooliganism" but no action was taken against them, instead they lodged a case

against her.

AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal weighed in. He alleged that it is now the "official stand" of Delhi Police and Election Commission to back BJP's "hooliganism" against AAP and protect them as they distribute liquor and money. "If anyone stops them, they will be charged under a case of obstructing work," he said. When asked to leave, she refused, according to the police. Soon after, the senior AAP leader was booked in a disobedience case registered under Section 223 of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. In response, Ramesh Bidhuri said the chief minister was panicking over her "imminent defeat" and suggested that she should not "shred the dignity of" the constitutional post held by her.

Panel to draft Gujarat UCC law

From page 3

Aam Aadmi Party state head Iudan Gadhvi said the BJP raises the UCC issue whenever there is an election.

"Even today, 80 per cent of domestic disputes in Maldhari community are resolved by its own leaders. There is polygamy in the tribal society and all these will end if the UCC is implemented. Therefore, we believe the UCC is going to be a hindrance for Christians, Sikhs, Muslims," he claimed.

If the UCC is implemented in Gujarat, the BJP will not be able to win a single tribal seat, he said.

"I would also like to tell the BJP that it is not right to look at everything from the perspective of Hindu-Muslim or vote bank

politics," Gadhvi said.

He claimed the issue has been raked up as local bodies polls are around the corner, it might be raised again before the assembly polls.

"BJP has done nothing about inflation or unemployment, it does not create jobs," he charged.

AIMIM leader Danish Siddique said the UCC was being used to target the Muslim community, and he does not have much hope from committee formed by the government to consider divergent views without a bias.

If tribals are kept outside the proposed law, it would not be a UCC, he said.

"We will put our side before the panel. When BJP targets Muslims over polygamy, it should know this is prevalent in other communities too. When one

community is allowed (to have polygamy) and not others, then it is not UCC," he asserted.

Committee member Gita Shroff said she "firmly" believed that a common law will have many benefits. "In the past 30 years, I have seen difficulties faced by women and children in their fight for justice. UCC will help resolve this," she said.

Thakar said women are especially adversely affected due to personal laws, and the Supreme Court had directed in the Shah Bano case that contradictions in such cases be removed and a uniform law be framed.

"Even the Constituent Assembly framed guiding principles which have provisions for this. We know that Uttarakhnd has implemented the UCC," he said.

From page 3

"Pain of poor, troubles of common man, cannot be understood just like that; it requires passion and some just don't have it," he said in a swipe at the opposition. "We live by the spirit of the Constitution and do not resort to politics of poison," he said.

In a dig at former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, Modi said a PM who used to chant '21st century was so far from reality that he was unable to provide for needs of 20th century. Modi also hailed his Government's decisions in the Budget. In 2002, there was no tax on incomes of up to Rs 2 lakh and now there is no income tax on earnings up to Rs 12 lakh, he pointed out. Modi said his Government started the Ayushman Bharat for poor, but some states have stalled the scheme, leaving poor people in hardship.

US flight carrying 205 illegal Indians headed for Amritsar

From page 3

Last month, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said it is opposed to illegal immigration and would be ready to take back Indians staying illegally in the US provided their nationality is verified.

India is opposed to illegal immigration because of its links to several forms of organised crime, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said on January 24.

"We will take them back provided documents are shared with us so that we can verify their nationality, that they are indeed Indians," he said. At the same time, Jaiswal said it would be "premature" to talk about the number of illegal Indian immigrants staying in

the US.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar had said India was verifying who from the US can be deported to India, and the number of such individuals cannot yet be determined.

"With every country, and the US is no exception, we have always maintained that if any of our citizens are there illegally, and if we are sure that they are our citizens, we have always been open to their legitimate return to India," Jaishankar said.

Approximately 725,000 illegal immigrants from India live in the US, making it the third-largest population of unauthorised immigrants after Mexico and El Salvador, according to data from the Pew Research Centre.

"When I am reelected, we will

begin the largest deportation operation in American history," Trump had said during his campaign trail.

This large-scale deportation underscores the US government's firm stance on border enforcement and is expected to impact thousands of Indian nationals residing illegally in the country.

Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric was key to his campaign in the run-up to the US elections in 2024. When he took office in January, he reiterated that all illegal immigrants will be sent back.

"All illegal entry will be immediately halted, and we will begin the process of returning millions and millions of illegal aliens back to the places from which they came," Trump said during his

inauguration speech.

The Trump administration has also shut down the CBP One mobile application under the Customs and Border Patrol agency that allowed migrants to schedule appointments at border entry points.

Trump also ended birthright citizenship for children born to undocumented immigrants, and has dismantled refugee programs.

On January 29, Trump announced that they would build a migrant detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, infamous for housing terrorism suspects after the 9/11 terror attack. The facility is expected to house as many as 30,000 migrants. The US military has also offered to use the Buckley Space Force Base in Colorado to detain

migrants.

Last week, House of Representatives Speaker Mike Johnson warned that the US Congress was willing to pass sanctions on countries which refuse to cooperate with the Trump administration's order on deportation of undocumented immigrants.

When Colombia refused to let the military plane land, Trump retaliated with 25 per cent tariffs on all Colombian goods. Colombia promptly sent its planes to bring back deportees, preventing a trade war with its largest trading partner.

On Saturday, Trump announced 25 per cent tariffs on his top trading partners and neighbours, Canada and Mexico, over the flow of illegal migrants and drugs across borders.

EC dismisses Kejriwal's allegations...

From page 3

"The BJP is openly engaging in hooliganism. But instead of taking action against them, Delhi Police is protecting them, while the Election Commission is filing cases against those who are raising complaints," she said.

Kejriwal on Monday claimed the Election Commission had surrendered before the BJP. The former Delhi chief minister asked the top election officer to "do your duty" and "give up the desire" for the post. "Today the way the Election Commission has surrendered before the Bharatiya Janata Party, it

seems as if the Election Commission does not exist. This is raising a very big question. It is justified for people to have questions in their minds that Rajiv Kumar Ji, who is the Chief Election Commissioner, is retiring at the end of this month. What kind of post has been offered to him post-retirement? The post of governor, the post of president, what kind of post can it be?" AAP chief said at a press conference. "I request Rajiv Kumar Ji with folded hands. Do your duty, give up the desire for the post, give up the greed for the post. Now at the end of your career, do not destroy the country, the country's democracy," he added.

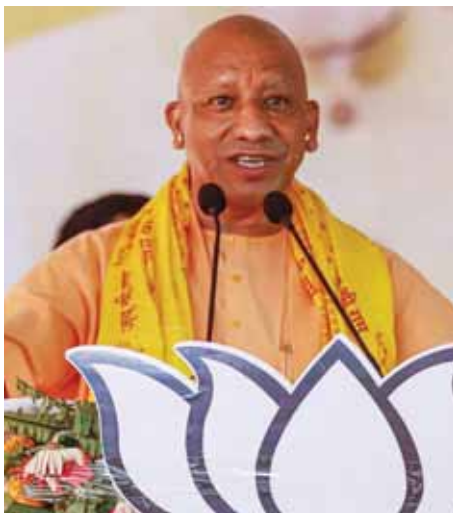
Kejriwal had alleged that Kumar is not taking action against the BJP to bag a post-retirement assignment. Kumar demits office on February 18 on attaining the age of 65 years. Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu are the other election commissioners. Earlier this month, the poll panel sought an explanation from Kejriwal over his remark that the BJP government in Haryana had been poisoning the Yamuna water supply to Delhi. In his reply to the poll panel, the former Delhi chief minister said he made the comments in the context of an "urgent public health crisis" over drinking water quality in the national capital.

Milkipur by-election: A prestige fight between BJP and SP

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■
AYODHYA

The upcoming Milkipur Assembly by-election in Uttar Pradesh has turned into a high-stakes battle between the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Samajwadi Party (SP), with both parties treating it as a prestige contest. This election follows BJP's shocking defeat in the Faizabad Lok Sabha seat, which includes Ayodhya, despite its strong push for the Ram Mandir narrative. SP's victory there was seen as a symbolic setback for the ruling party, making Milkipur the counterstage for BJP's political counterattack.

The seat was vacated after SP's Awadhesh Prasad resigned as MLA upon winning the Lok Sabha election. Now, The BJP is determined to reclaim lost ground, setting up a direct contest between Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's Hindutva-driven campaign and Akhilesh Yadav's caste-based PDA (Picchda-Dalit-Alpsankhyak) strategy. In a surprising move, BJP has fielded Chandrabhan Paswan, a leader from the Pasi community, bypassing more familiar faces like sitting



MLAs Baba Gorakhnath and Ramu Priyadarshi. This reflects a calculated attempt to break into SP's strong Dalit voter base, which played a crucial role in its Faizabad victory. SP, on the other hand, has stuck to its traditional formula by nominating Ajeet Prasad, son of Awadhesh Prasad, banking on his father's goodwill among the backward classes and Dalits. The bypoll has, therefore, become a litmus test for both

BJP's outreach to Scheduled Castes and SP's ability to hold its vote bank together. Sensing the importance of the contest, CM Yogi Adityanath has led BJP's charge in Milkipur, making seven visits to the constituency and deploying seven ministers to supervise the campaign. His speeches have focused on portraying SP as "anti-Sanatan," reinforcing BJP's broader Hindutva narrative. Meanwhile, SP has raised concerns about alleged

electoral manipulation, filing complaints with the Election Commission and demanding stricter polling oversight. The party claims that certain Booth Level Officers (BLOs) and presiding officers are biased towards BJP, an allegation the ruling party has dismissed as an admission of defeat. **Why Milkipur Matters for BJP** This by-election is more than just a contest for a single seat—it is a symbolic fight for BJP to

reclaim its dominance in Ayodhya's political landscape. Losing Faizabad despite the Ram Mandir push was a wake-up call, and a victory in Milkipur would help the party reassert its strength, particularly among Scheduled Caste voters.

For Akhilesh Yadav, defending Milkipur is crucial to proving that his PDA strategy is still effective. A loss here could raise questions about SP's ability to hold onto its recent electoral gains, especially in the lead-up to the 2027 Uttar Pradesh assembly elections. BJP's confidence is bolstered by its recent electoral track record-out of the nine bypolls held in Uttar Pradesh, the party has won seven, further tightening its grip on the state's politics.

As the campaign reaches its final stretch, Milkipur has emerged as the most-watched battleground among the ten assembly by-elections, carrying significant political implications for both BJP and SP. The result will not only determine the fate of this seat but will also shape the narrative for the larger battle ahead in Uttar Pradesh.

Bhutanese King takes sacred dip at Sangam with CM Yogi



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Bhutanese King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, accompanied by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, took a sacred dip at the Triveni Sangam in Prayagraj on Tuesday. He arrived in Lucknow on Monday to a warm welcome from the Chief Minister before heading to Prayagraj for the spiritual ritual.

After the holy dip at Sangam, King Wangchuck and CM Adityanath visited Akshay Vat and Bade Hanuman Temple for darshan. They also toured the Digital Mahakumbh Experience Center, witnessing the spiritual and digital essence of Mahakumbh 2025. The visit of the Bhutanese King is seen as a significant step towards strengthening the cultural and diplomatic ties between India and Bhutan. The Mahakumbh 2025, one of

the largest spiritual events in the world, has drawn global attention, and the King's participation at the Triveni Sangam highlights the international significance of the sacred gathering. During this, several prominent figures were present, including Cabinet Minister Satyendra Dev Singh, Nand Gopal Gupta 'Nandi', and Jagadguru Santosh Das (Satua Baba) of the Vishnuswami Sampradaya, along with other dignitaries.



TMC reading of budget is wrong: Railway Ministry

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■
KOLKATA

The Railway Ministry has roundly refuted the strong criticism made by the Trinamool Congress that the Union Budget has produced a "high sounding nothing" and that it is "full of deprivation for Bengal." This by saying that the Centre has effected a threefold increase in the funds that the Railways allocated to the State when Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was the Railway Minister. The Minister has said that when Banerjee and her TMC nominees like Dinesh Trivedi and Mukul Roy were the Railway Ministers between 2009 and 2014 the central budgetary allocations for Bengal was Rs 4,380 crores whereas this year it has gone up to Rs 13,955 crores. "The allocation which has been in Mamata Didi's time has been increased three times by (Prime Minister) Modi ji," Vaishnav said. Saying that the Railways has invested Rs 68,000 crores in Bengal Vaishnav urged the Bengal government to facilitate land acquisition for the completion of pending projects. "For the development of Railways land acquisition is important and I will request the Chief Minister to help us in land acquisition," the Minister said informing that at present the Railways were

working on Amrit Bharat Station scheme with 101 stations. About 1290 km tracks have been added to the State he said. Also there were 10 Vande Bharat trains running in the State and that about 3,337 km tracks would be covered by Kavach system. Earlier, TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee criticised the Budget saying Bengal was being deliberately neglected by the Centre of which the Budgetary exercise was an example. Calling it an election stunt to bankroll BJP's electoral machine and appease its allies, Banerjee who is also the nephew of the Chief Minister said, "not a single meaningful financial allocation has been made for Bengal... Despite BJP having 12 MPs from Bengal the silence on this systematic deprivation speaks volumes about their complicity in this injustice." Another senior TMC leader and former State Finance Minister Dr Amit Mitra who is also the Financial Advisor of the Chief Minister asked, "what did this Budget do," adding, how, "social services has been reduced by 16 percent... The housing funds have reduced by 4.38 percent... More than 3 percent have been cut off in SC, ST development... And most importantly the allocation in food subsidy has been reduced by 5 percent."

Army, IITG sign MoU for research to replace traditional building materials with bamboo

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
GUWAHATI

The army and the Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati (IITG) have signed an MoU for research, design and fabrication of "Epoxy bamboo-based composites" as replacement of traditional building materials used in the construction of bunkers in High Altitude Areas, a defence release said on Tuesday. The project will culminate in constructing multiple defence works in high-altitude terrain for field trials. The fabricated panels will provide the same level of protection, albeit with reduced weight, decreasing the time and effort required for ferrying of supplies, and ultimately enhancing force preservation. The memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed on Monday evening in the presence of the GOC Red Horns Division Maj Gen Rohin Bawa and IITG Director Prof Devendra Jallihal.



The signing of this MoU is a step towards innovation and collaboration, setting new standards for cooperation between government research, development institutions and military educational bodies to drive technological progress, Maj Gen Bawa said. The partnership is beyond an agreement and represents a shared commitment to exploring new technological frontiers

and addressing modern battlefield challenges, he said. Maj Gen Bawa also highlighted the collaborative role of academia, industry, researchers, and startups in fostering a whole-of-nation approach and expressed confidence that this partnership will contribute to groundbreaking achievements and support the nation's 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' initiative.

Himachal Pradesh receives fresh snowfall

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
SHIMLA

The higher reaches of Himachal Pradesh, including the North Portal of Atal Tunnel in Rohtang, received fresh snowfall prompting the police to ask commuters to avoid unnecessary travel as the roads turn slippery and visibility is reduced. Kalpa in Kinnaur district received 0.2 cm of snow. A western disturbance as a cyclonic circulation lies over west Afghanistan and adjoining Iran, which is likely to move east-northeast wards during the next two days, the Met office said. As a consequence, light snowfall is likely at many places and isolated spells of moderate snowfall are very likely in Kinnaur, Lahaul-Spiti and higher reaches of Kangra, Chamba, Shimla, Mandi, Sirmour and Kullu districts. Light rainfall is expected over many places in the remaining parts of Kangra, Chamba, Shimla, Mandi, Sirmour and Kullu districts from afternoon of February 4 to midnight of



February 5, it added. The local Meteorological station had on Monday issued yellow warning of thunderstorm and lightning at isolated places in Kangra, Shimla, Solan, Kullu and Sirmour districts. Thunderstorms and lightning are likely at isolated places in Una, Bilaspur, Hamirpur Chamba and Mandi districts on February 4. Few spells of light snowfall with one or two moderate spells are likely over tourist destinations of Kufri, Narkanda, Manali, Solang Valley, Dalhousie, Sissu and

adjoining areas from afternoon of February 4 to evening of February 5, the Met added. Tabo in tribal Lahaul and Spiti district was the coldest at night recording a low of minus 7.1 degree Celsius, while Bhuntar in Kullu district with 25.2 degree Celsius was the hottest on Monday afternoon. The winter season rain deficit in the state from January 1 to February 4 was 86 per cent as the state received 13.4 mm of rain against 94.1 mm normal rainfall seen during this period.

7000 people get letter of appointment from Bihar government

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
PATNA

The Nitish Kumar government in Bihar on Tuesday said it filled close to 7,000 posts in various departments, which had been lying vacant for years because of legal wrangles. Appointment letters were given away to a total of 6,341 junior engineers, who will be posted in eight departments, at a function which was attended by the chief minister. Besides, 496 instructors



(anudeshak), to be posted in the Labour Department, got their letters of appointment at the same function. The Department of Water

Resources, currently held by senior JD(U) leader Vijay Kumar Chaudhary, was the nodal authority for recruitment of all JEs. Chaudhary later briefed journalists on the development. "Most of these posts had been advertised way back in 2019 by the Bihar Technical Service Commission. But many aspirants, including those already rendering services on a contractual basis and the ones who held diplomas awarded by non-government institutions,

challenged the process of recruitment in Patna High Court and Supreme Court," he said. "As the nodal department, we reviewed the roadblocks that came in the way of the chief minister's resolve to fill up vacant government posts. On the CM's advice, a proposal for resolving the impasse was submitted before the apex court which gave its nod for the recruitment process," the minister said. Notably, the Water Resources Department also accounts

for the highest number (2,338) of fresh appointees, followed by Planning and Development (1,273) Rural Works (759) and Road Construction (503). "Since 2005, when our leader took over as the chief minister, development has been the government's sole agenda. So much so that the opposition has realised that failure to admit that growth has taken place would be a political blunder and its leaders are now busy trying to claim their share of credit,"

he claimed. The allusion was apparently to RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav, who has had two short-lived tenures as the deputy chief minister, as a result of brief alliances between his party and the JD(U). Asked about Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's visit to Patna scheduled on Wednesday, the JD(U) leader said, "He often harms his own party... His refusal to accept that caste census was a brainchild of Nitish Kumar smacks of dishonesty."

Hindu Munnani holds massive protest in TN over Thiruparankundram hill issue

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
MADURAI

The Hindu Munnani members staged a massive protest at Palanganatham here on Tuesday evening, barely hours after the Madras High Court gave its nod for the agitation at the new venue against the incident of a group of persons consuming non-vegetarian food at Thiruparankundram hill. Though the temple on the hilltop is dedicated to Lord Subrahmanya, there's a Sikandar Badusha Dargah on the hill. Things had been normal in the town until a group of people allegedly consumed non-vegetarian food on the hilltop much to the ire of the Hindu devotees, recently. On Tuesday, several thousands of devotees, Hindu Munnani functionaries, and BJP members participated in the protest raising slogans hailing Murugan (Lord Subrahmanya), the Hindu Munnani said. Some even raised slogans: "reclaim Thiruparankundram hill," and "Murugan's army of



devotees defeats detention" on the occasion. Hindu Munnani state president Kadeshwara Subramaniam and scores of activists were arrested as they proceeded to Thiruparankundram to stage the protest against a group of people who consumed non-vegetarian food on the sacred hill. BJP leader Subramanian Swamy in a letter warned Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin about the dare consequences of supporting the people who trying to create mosque at the holy site. Many DMK Ministers

supported the mosque creation, said Swamy. BJP senior H Raja said the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court granted permission for the Hindu Munnani's protest. The court also directed the police to release all Hindu Munnani and BJP members either detained or kept under house arrest. The court had permitted the agitation to be staged between 5 and 6 pm at Palanganathan and not Thiruparankundram as originally sought by the protesters. BJP state chief K Annamalai

accused the ruling DMK of imposing the prohibitory order in Madurai to prevent the protest aimed to protect the sanctity of the temple and condemning the organisations that were against Hindus. In a post on social media platform X, he said the DMK government was conducting itself in a discriminatory manner in the events related to the Thiruparankundram Arulmigu Subrahmanya Swamy Temple Hill. He said the BJP leaders kept under house arrest should be released immediately. "There is a limit to everything. Are there separate rules for a DMK minister and the public? The DMK government should immediately stop supporting unnecessary activities that continue to harass the people," Annamalai said in the post. Earlier in the day, the scenic Thiruparankundram hill town, where the abode of Lord Subrahmanya graces devotees, had turned into a police citadel with over 4,000 police and officers from 10 districts taking control following the

prohibitory orders clamped by the Madurai district administration. About eight activists from the Hindu Munnani, which had announced an agitation have been detained by the police. Police said eight Hindu Munnani members have been detained as a precautionary measure. Condemning the arrest and also the administration's decision, Raja said when national agencies were involved in arresting terrorists hiding in Tamil Nadu, the state police resorted to arresting members of Hindu organisations that wanted to stage a peaceful protest on the Thiruparankundram hill. "This situation will change one day," he said. Terming the ban order as "suppression of democratic rights and feelings of devotees," Kadeshwara Subramaniam who came to Madurai with a "Vel" (spear) in his hand, said his organisation would not hesitate to launch a freedom struggle for Hindus from Madurai soil.

Revenue officials go on mass leave for a day in Haryana

STAFF REPORTER ■
GURUGRAM

The Naib Tehsildar and Tehsildar were gone on strike after alleged allegations of corruption in the Revenue Department and a case registered against a woman Tehsildar of Faridabad. The Tehsildars have accused that a female Tehsildar named Neha Saran in Faridabad was falsely implicated in a case. However, sources said that after revenue officials went on mass leave, sub-divisional magistrates (SDMs) registered deeds. Due to this, other revenue-related works, including the registry, remained stalled in all the tehsils of the district on Tuesday. People had to face a lot of trouble due to the strike. The Tehsildars alleged that a conspiracy was being hatched to defame them forcibly. Without any investigation



and evidence, they are being shown involved in corruption, which is not only wrong but also an attempt to harm their reputation. A member of the Haryana Revenue Officer Association said that if the government does not pay attention to their demands, the mass strike will continue. This will have a direct impact on the functioning of the tehsils and the common people will have to face problems. It may be noted that the government has included the names of 47 Tehsildars and

370 Patwaris in a list across the state regarding the alleged corruption in the Revenue Department. Apart from this, the names of 404 Tehsildars and 152 Patwaris have also been included in the list. Tehsildars say that despite putting the names on the list, the government has not taken any concrete action so far, due to which anger is increasing among revenue officers and employees. In support of the Tehsildars' strike, Patwaris also expressed their displeasure. They say that whatever allegations are being made regarding corruption, they should be investigated impartially. It is not right to blame all the employees without any basis. On average, more than 60 per cent of registrations take place in the 9 tehsils of Gurugram district on normal days, from which the government gets huge revenue.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Delhi decides

A 'do-or-die' for AAP, a prestige battle for the BJP and a fight for survival for Congress—Delhi heads to the polls today

In a battle of promises, power and prestige, Delhi votes today. The stage is set for the 2025 Delhi Assembly elections, with voters heading to the polls today and results expected on February 8. With 1.56 crore voters across 70 constituencies, the political atmosphere in the national capital is charged, reflective of the high stakes involved. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), led by Arvind Kejriwal, aims for a third consecutive term while the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Congress vie to reclaim relevance and power in the capital. The month-long campaign was intense, marked by fiery rhetoric and personal jabs. The BJP leaders accused AAP of corruption, branding their governance as 'AAP-da' (disaster). In return, Kejriwal took aim at the BJP accusing them of law and order failures and even alleging that the BJP-led Haryana government "mixed poison" in the Yamuna, framing it as a 'genocide' attempt. The Congress, meanwhile, targeted both AAP and BJP with accusations of corruption and inefficiency. This election, like many others, saw a flurry of promises aimed at wooing voters with tangible benefits. AAP pledged monthly payments to temple priests, free bus rides, and extensive schemes for youth and students. Both BJP and Congress promised subsidised cooking gas cylinders and financial support for women and unemployed youth. The BJP additionally promised Rs 21,000 for expecting mothers, while Congress offered Rs 8,500 per month to unemployed youth.

Security for the elections is tight, with over 30,000 police personnel and 220 paramilitary companies deployed across the city. Nearly 3,000 polling booths have been marked as sensitive. While assembly elections are a state matter, the fact that this election is taking place in Delhi, the nation's capital with a cosmopolitan character, gives it national significance. A win for AAP could solidify Kejriwal's model of governance and offer a template for other states and bolster its claim in other states, while a victory for BJP might signal a resurgence of the party in urban governance, reinforcing Modi's narrative of efficient governance. For Congress, a good showing could be the much-needed revival signal after a series of setbacks. As the voters cast their ballots, the outcome of these elections will not just shape Delhi's immediate future but could also influence the national political discourse. The Delhi elections, while significant, are not an ideal model for other states to replicate. The city's unique status as the national capital, with a mix of local and national issues influencing voter behaviour, creates an electoral landscape unlike any other. Additionally, the campaign narratives in Delhi tend to be dominated by high-pitched rhetoric and personality-driven politics rather than substantive policy debates. This makes the Delhi election an exception rather than a benchmark, highlighting the need for states to focus on governance models that prioritise long-term development over short-term electoral gains.

PICTALK



Labourers plant paddy saplings in a field, in Nadia

Imbuing warrior ethos through strength

In Narendra Modi's cabinet, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh enjoys the optics of seniority, but not necessarily the authority that should come with it



ASHOK K MEHTA

In Prime Minister Narendra Modi's cabinet, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh is de jure numero uno. He sits next to him at meetings and in Parliament and like most another minister, regularly invokes Modi's greatness and vision. The optics of seniority are excellent. So is his pedigree. He is a Thakur, dyed-in-the-wool Sanghi and twice President of BJP. His political graph starts as Education Minister to UP, CM Kalyan Singh. As Education Minister in 1992, his signal achievement was ending a regional malaise - copying in exams, sometimes with a knife dug into the desk.

Like infiltrators across LoC, invigilators feared to cross the red line. He had an ordinance passed making copying a non-bailable offence - the onus of proving oneself innocent was on the accused. Fourteen and 15-year-olds were sent to jail on charges of copying. The pass percentage in the UP high school board examination for Class X in 1991 was 58.03. In 1992, after the anti-copying law was put in place, it slipped to 14.7. He lost the 1993 assembly elections.

A great believer in astrology Singh was ambitious and usually took his cue from RSS leadership. He rose to become chief minister of UP, the second Thakur to do so. As president of BJP, he was asked to inform seven times MP, former Finance, Defence and Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh that he was no longer a member of the BJP (expelled). Jaswant had written the offending book - Jinnah - India Partition and Independence.

Following a stint as Home Minister, he became defence minister after Modi had shuffled around Arun Jaitley, Nirmala Sitharaman and Manohar Parrikar as defence minister. Last month at the Republic Day NCC rally he revealed he was in NCC and a physics teacher. His fondness for Dabang - strength and power - is well known but his association with the redoubtable Raja Bhaiyya of Kunda, famous for rearing crocodiles in his pond - is less known.

In the Westminister Parliamentary system cabinet ministers are selected by the PM and have to



be elected either directly or indirectly. But they are not grilled for confirmation as ministers by select committees as in the US presidential system.

Otherwise, few would clear the viva, especially for the Defence Minister. Last week former Fox News commentator, Pete Hegseth former Army National Guard who was President Trump's most endangered cabinet choice went through hell before the Senate Armed Services Committee for his confirmation. Poor Pete! he was facing multiple allegations of abuse including sex and alcohol.

He pledged to never drink alcohol if confirmed. Professionally he was well prepared, answering accurate questions on military equipment like the size of a 9mm bullet and the number of rounds in a carbine magazine. He told his examiners he would restore 'warrior ethos' in the armed services. Americans have much to worry about as the Chinese are catching up in technology, military and economic prowess. Singh has no similar worries. India has abandoned any catch-up with China, its main enemy. It hopes to make up the deterrent and capability gap through diplomacy as was evident from the meagre defence allocations (1.9 per cent of GDP) in last week's budget.

After inflation and foreign exchange fluctuations, mod-



THE ARMED FORCES ARE EXPECTED TO EMPLOY FORCE MULTIPLIERS LIKE INVOKING CHANAKYA, IMBIBING ANCIENT MILITARY CRAFT AND BECOMING CONTEMPORARY THROUGH THE FUSION OF PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

ernisation funds have decreased. In a tweet, Singh described the budget as 'wonderful' and congratulated Sitharaman for fulfilling the resolve of PM Modi for Viksit Bharat. No defence minister, service chief or CDS has ever put his job on the line, asking for additional funds. Recently a French CDS did so. He had to resign when the Euro 1bn extra that he demanded was not provided. Later, President Macron reinstated him along with Euro 1bn.

For the last few years, Sitharaman has ceased mentioning defence allocation in budget presentations. The armed forces are expected to employ force multipliers like invoking Chanakya, imbining ancient military craft and becoming contemporary through the fusion of past, present and future, as reflected by the new painting on this theme that replaced the once-in-1000-year surrender ceremony painting in the Army Chief's annex. For all his virtues - injecting Hindutva in a hitherto secular armed force, venerating weapons with religious symbols and motivating triservice warriors by pledging moolh tod jawab, Singh has ceded his area of responsibility to PMO and NSA. Former Defence Minister AK Antony in contrast was the Rock of Gibraltar, never letting the NSA or even the PM bypass him. So little reform got done. Singh is an affable team play-

er guided occasionally by a Defence Advisor, a retired Lt General. Recently at a function of the Directorate of Civilian Personnel of Naval Head Quarters, he eulogised the 'civilian in armed forces': "you are civilian before you join service; in some ways, you're civilian even while you serve; and civilian even after you have retired. Your families are also civilians". No mention of veterans! I envy Singh for his immaculately starched white kurta and flowing dhoti which reminds me of my era of razor-sharp starched olive greens.

Last month, Singh went to Madhya Pradesh accompanied by Army Chief Gen Dwidivedi. At Ujjain they prayed at the Maha Kaal temple, Dwidivedi kitted like Singh. Later Singh visited military institutions in Mhow. At the Army War College, he began reading his speech: "COAS, Gen Umeshji Dwidivedi; Commandant Armed ...pause...kaun sa hai...?" someone prompted "War". Pause...someone repeated "War". "Yeah. War College, Lt Gen JS Shahi..." Singh might infuse warrior ethos in the armed forces but as an aspiring politician, will remain the bridesmaid, never the bride.

(The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. The views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Retired judges to boost efficiency



The reappointment of retired judges offers several advantages. Their vast experience and familiarity with legal procedures can enhance efficiency, especially in handling complex matters. Time-bound assignments ensure focus on specific case clusters, improving disposal rates without overburdening the regular bench. Additionally, this reduces the dependency on fresh judicial appoint-

ments, which often face administrative delays. However, concerns remain regarding the potential impact on judicial independence, as government approval could raise questions about executive interference. Transparency in the selection process, clear tenure guidelines and defined performance metrics are essential to mitigate these risks. Moreover, the absence of a concrete framework for lower courts highlights a critical gap. Given that the bulk of pending cases lie at the subordinate level, swift policy formulation for these courts is imperative. This initiative reflects the judiciary's proactive stance in judicial reforms, recognising that traditional measures are inadequate for the scale of India's legal backlog.

Gopalaswamy J | Chennai

EGGS ESSENTIAL FOR NUTRITION

Madam — According to the data, around 35-40 per cent of children in rural areas in Maharashtra are underweight, and the highest rate of malnutrition is found in North Maharashtra. Lack of access to nutritious food is one of the major factors behind malnutrition. With this backdrop, it is surprising to learn why the state government dropped eggs from the mid-day meals. Egg is a major source of protein and its substitute, pulses, are costlier than eggs, so eggs should remain a core part of mid-day meals, and if any student does not want to eat it, he can skip it. Earlier states like Madhya Pradesh and Goa also made such decisions, while it should be noted that a few states in Southern India have added the number of eggs given to children to ensure protein requirements are met. Such drastic decisions could prove detrimental to the families living below the poverty line.

Bal Govind | Noida

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

The digital age and the decline of meaningful connections

In a time when relationships are often reduced to fleeting digital interactions, staying connected through phone calls filled with warmth and laughter shows genuine care

There is a remarkable trait I have observed in my 92-year-old mother-in-law, a habit that sets her apart in an age where relationships are often reduced to fleeting digital exchanges. She remembers former colleagues, distant relatives, neighbours who once lived next door. And more than just remembering them, she stays in touch.

At an age when many resign themselves to solitude, she picks up the phone and calls people from decades ago. Not just text messages, voice notes, or hurried "Hope you're well" followed by silence. She calls, she converses, she cares. It is a simple act, yet in today's world, it feels almost extraordinary.

Her phone conversations are not perfunctory check-ins; they are rich tapestries of shared history, laughter, and updates on each other's lives. And the warmth with which she is received at the other end of the line is a testament to the bonds she has nurtured over the years. She is remembered because she remembers. She is loved because she has loved. It makes me wonder: What



are we losing in this hyper-connected yet increasingly impersonal world? Relationships today are often sustained by a string of forwarded messages, impersonal likes on social media, and hastily typed responses to keep up appearances. In the race for efficiency, we have sacrificed depth. Consider this: How many times have we opted to send a WhatsApp message instead of calling, simply because it's quicker? How often do we reply with an emoji rather than words that could convey something deeper? I suspect relationships have become more superficial, and perhaps we are to blame. It is easier to type a quick "Happy birthday!" than to call and hear the person's voice. It is more convenient to react to a post than to ask, "How have you really been?"

And yet, watching my mother-in-law, I realise that relationships, like wealth, require investment. The bonds we forge and sustain over time are the greatest savings we make in life. They are the human equivalent of a well-kept treasure-present when we need warmth, support, and belonging.

One of the reasons we don't stay in touch is because we assume people are busy. They probably don't have time to talk. Or worse, we convince ourselves that if they really cared, they would call us too. And so, we let months slip into years, waiting for the other person to make the first move.

But my mother-in-law doesn't wait. She doesn't hesitate to pick up the phone, regardless of how long it has been. And what's more, people respond to her with the same warmth and eagerness. It reminds me that relationships are not about keeping score; they are about keeping the connection alive.

A strong social network isn't just about having company for celebrations; it is also about having shoulders to lean on in times of need. It is

about knowing that when life throws its uncertainties at us, there will be familiar voices to comfort us, guide us, and remind us that we are not alone. And yet, many people find themselves growing lonelier with age, not because they lack family or friends, but because they did not nurture those bonds.

What would it take for us to revive the lost art of staying in touch? It doesn't take grand gestures. It doesn't require hours of free time. Sometimes, all it takes is a simple phone call. A heartfelt message. A conversation that goes beyond the surface. So here's a small invitation: Think of someone you haven't spoken to in a while—perhaps an old schoolmate, a former colleague, or a distant cousin. Instead of sending a message, call them. Ask about their life. Listen to their stories. Share something about yours. It may feel unfamiliar at first, but you may be surprised at how quickly the warmth returns.

(The author is a Dubai-based columnist and children's writing coach. She has published six books. Views are personal)



ASHA IYER KUMAR

CANCER CASES RISING RAPIDLY

Madam — Cancer is a major health issue in Southeast Asia with high rates of incidence and mortality. WHO has reported that more than 2.3 million people are diagnosed with cancer each year. It is estimated that by 2050 there will be an 85 per cent increase in the number of new cancer cases and deaths in the WHO's South East Asia region. It is unfortunate. Among the new cases, breast, cervix, and lung cancer were the most frequently reported. Economic transitions, lifestyle changes, and rising obesity prevalence are increasing cancer risk in this region with existing risk factors such as tobacco and indoor-outdoor pollution.

Although cancer is a life-threatening disease, it can be prevented and treated if detected early. Screening programmes such as breast self-examination and mammography substantially increase breast cancer survival. Options such as breast-conserving surgery and breast reconstruction surgery should be more available in the SEA region. Cervical cancer is the second most frequent cancer in the SEA region, caused by high-risk human papillomavirus (HPV), and can be prevented by vaccination. Tobacco is another major cause of cancer and preventable deaths worldwide. More actions are to be taken as tobacco and smoking are still the cause of many deaths in the region. Equal attention should be paid to less prevalent types of cancer. Governments need to include cancer treatment in national insurance as done in countries like Indonesia, not restricted to surgeries but allowing lifelong treatment. There is an urgent need for continued efforts from clinicians, researchers, and policymakers to collaborate and find the most effective strategies to serve cancer patients in the best way possible.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

PROMOTE RENEWABLE ENERGY

Madam — India's need and its policy related to power are yet to come close to each other. The allocation of Rs 20,000 crore is

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur



FIRST COLUMN

A DARK CLOUD BEFORE THE GOLDEN DAWN

Are we past the point of no return, or is there still hope for a new dawn?



RAJYOGI BRAHMKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

None of us would deny the fact that the whole world is in chaos today. The human race is in more pain and suffering than ever before. The root cause of this is, because three key powers i.e., religion, politics and science that run the world have miserably failed to function by their essential characteristics to look after the wellbeing of people at large. These powers have deviated from their normal course, lost their essential traits and degraded to the lowest level, which is quite visible from the sorry state of affairs across the world.

The power of religion which was meant to show human beings the righteous path which is necessary to maintain social harmony has today become a perpetrator of conflict. It's evident from the facts that religion has failed to uphold moral values in society which can be seen in the form of ever-increasing molestation and sexual assault cases at homes, workplaces, public places and even at schools and colleges that are considered temples of learning.

The historic Nirbhaya case is still very fresh in the minds of people who were shattered to see the height of barbarism to which a human can



go. Today the power of politics is also in a state of crisis. No government anywhere in the world can claim that they are free from corruption. Laws that are made for the benefit of the common public are turning out to be mere eyewash. People in power go scot-free despite breaking several laws, whereas a common man keeps paying penalties on various occasions for not abiding by the law.

On one side governments talk of clean fuels & make pollution checks mandatory, and on the other side, they continue to add a greater number of vehicles to roads each year to please the automotive sector. So, instead of reducing vehicular traffic by introducing greater modes of public transport, the government is making more and more cars accessible to the public at cheap rates. Is this right? Science, the third key power that runs the world, emerged as a result of man's search for a better life. It harnessed natural resources to channel them into means useful for human consumption. However, today the scenario is such that the energy tapped from nature has gone out of human control.

The use of science in violating the laws of nature has become the root cause of environmental imbalance leading to a rise in natural calamities which is evident by the recent report by the UN Panel on Climate Change making it crystal clear that large-scale global warming has triggered the melting of polar ice caps which is the biggest danger facing humankind. Modern scientific advancement that was meant to help humans live a better life has led to a proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, endangering global peace and harmony. So, in short, we can say that three powers governing the world have gone haywire & they are steering us to mass destruction. But, what's more surprising is that despite ample knowledge of this phenomenon, nobody seems inclined to save the situation. Hence it won't be exaggerating to say that we have surely come to the point of no return, because with scarcity of non-renewable natural resources, spread of diseases, population explosion, social chaos and nuclear threat accompanied by natural disasters, the world scenario looks utterly scary. Under such darkness, the common man is bound to look UP to seek Almighty Supreme's help as the last resort to safety. Just imagine, when the world reaches its highest peak of unrest, it will be a sight that only a few of us would be able to bear because the kind of destruction that the world has prepared for is bound to shake the conscience of the most stone-hearted and guilty. Perhaps this impending destruction and clearing of human conscience is like a silver lining in the dark cloud which is perhaps the only way to the golden morning that we human souls have been endlessly waiting for. Remember !! Many hidden truths are often unobserved, not invisible.

(Writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist; views are personal)

A fierce three-way battle for the capital's throne

With a closely contested fight and shifting voter sentiments, the Delhi election results could send ripples across the national political landscape



RAMAKANT CHAUDHARY

Chilly Delhi, though, the blitzkrieg of a high-octane election campaign, not bordering on the sort of "AAP-da" while going at hammer and tongs of Tu-Tu-Mai-Mai storm during a prime-time TV news show, for claiming Delhi Ki Kursi, has heated the political cauldron. A strong 1.55 crore voters of Delhi are basking in the sunshine of campaign songs for the Delhi Assembly Elections 2025: "Bahane Nahi Badlav Chahiye..." rendered by BJP against the AAP's Bhojpuri-laced tagline "Babua Phir Se CM Hoyihe... Delhi Ke Badal Dihe Surat, Suhawan, Khubsurat Ho, A Rajaji..." From all perspectives, who will win the ballot battle?

Will AAP score a hat-trick? Or will the resurgent Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), relying on Prime Minister Narendra Modi as its face, hit Mauka (anti-incumbency) Pe Chauka? Or will the Grand Old Party deliver the googly of "Har Jarurat Hogi Puri, Dilli Mein Congress Hai Jaruri," an effort to regain its lost electoral ground in the triangular contest? The fate of Delhi will be sealed on February 5 when people exercise their franchise. And the D-day, February 8, when the results will be announced, will blow the conch of the new beginning of the 70-member eighth Vidhan Sabha.

The Phalodi Satta Bazar, which earlier showed AAP crossing the majority mark of 36, has revised its estimates. The Arvind Kejriwal-led AAP—whose mainstay of incorruptibility is being challenged by the Congress and BJP, which have levelled allegations against its top brass leaders—could clock a significantly reduced tally this time around.

According to the latest revised estimates, the BJP—which looks bullish after its recent victories in Maharashtra and Haryana—may bag around 31 seats, a good 5 seats short of the majority mark. A projection of a wafer-thin margin of victory between the AAP-BJP fierce slugfest has made party workers and strategists somersault to pump up their tally amidst the Delhi election campaign hitting its last leg.

To woo voters, manifestos, guarantees, and welfare schemes appear to be tearing apart the atmosphere of the city-state. The Delhi Assembly Elections 2025 appear to be a big freebie face-off. Mahila Samman Yojana, Sanjeevani Yojana, Sankal Patra, Ayushman Bharat Scheme, Yuva Udaan Yojana, Pyari Didi Yojana, et al—innocent voters find themselves in an Alice-in-Wonderland.

BJP Resurgence Winning the Delhi assembly poll has become an Achilles' heel for the PM Modi-led BJP while the saffron juggernaut swept Delhi's seven seats in the Lok Sabha Elections in 2014, 2019 and 2024. Having last won the Delhi election in 1993, the BJP wants to turn the tide this time by dismantling the proverbial equation of Modi for PM and Kejriwal for CM. Riding on the cusp of being the only party among the three in 2020 to have recorded an increased vote share, the BJP is leaving no stone unturned to repeat this achievement in 2025 as well. For the BJP, the road to victory runs through North and Northwest Delhi. In the



HAVING LAST WON THE DELHI ELECTION IN 1993, THE BJP WANTS TO TURN THE TIDE THIS TIME BY DISMANTLING THE PROVERBIAL EQUATION OF MODI FOR PM AND KEJRIWAL FOR CM

Wazirpur constituency, Prime Minister Narendra Modi handed over keys to more than 1,650 flats to slum residents, creating a significant connection with local voters. Key areas like Chandni Chowk, Northwest Delhi, and Northeast Delhi have become pivotal grounds for the BJP's potential resurgence. The BJP should prioritize the 38 constituencies where it secured over 40% of the vote share in 2020. Out of these, the party narrowly lost 17 seats to AAP by less than five percentage points but managed to win eight. These represent easier opportunities to gain ground. For the remaining 21 seats, the BJP will aim to capitalize on anti-incumbency sentiments against AAP to sway voters in its favour.

AAP Strategy AAP of 2025, which might dominate the elections as the C-Voter survey suggests, looks different from its 2020 avatar. The Lok Sabha Elections 2024 speaks volumes that APP, despite an alliance with Congress, drew nought in all seven parliamentary seats of Delhi. Kejriwal's AAP looks lacking in sympathy as experts opine. Besieged with corruption charges and stern anti-incumbency, AAP has meticulously evolved strategies to launch popular welfare schemes to outweigh the allegations. The party leaders are burning the midnight oil to retain floating voters who keep changing allegiance during the Lok Sabha polls and assembly elections. Kejriwal's poll manoeuvre is trying hard to win the hearts of Dalit and Muslim voters. AAP has

viscerally attracted voters from the Purvanchal community—a key demographic in Delhi hailing from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand that account for around 40 per cent of the electorate and holds a significant sway on 27 seats—by connecting the community on the ground level as the party, according to media grapevine, has held around 600 meetings in this context. **Congress Revival** With nothing to lose, Congress, which went from dominating Delhi's electoral landscape from 1998 to 2013 to not having a single MLA since, has entered the poll fray late yet remains determined to lock horns with AAP and dislodge the Kejriwal-led establishment from power, avenging the campaign that cost the UPA government heavily over a decade ago. The results of the 2022 Delhi Municipal polls, in which Congress won five wards in the Northeast district areas that were hit by the riots, buttress the perception that the minority community is disillusioned with AAP.

This electoral scenario could reinforce the poll fortune of the BJP, especially the vote bank of Muslims—21.6 lakh in the national capital—who have Congress in their heart and AAP in mind. The Muslim voters could play a key role in six assembly seats: Babarpur (35 per cent), Okhla (43 per cent), Seelampur (50 per cent), Matia Mahal (48 per cent), Mustafabad (36 per cent), and Ballimaran (38 per cent). In that sense, if Muslims—accounting for 12.86 per cent of Delhi's pop-

ulation—are divided between Congress and AAP, BJP will have the upper hand. The Delhi Elections 2025 is deemed the cynosure of all states' eyes. The domino effect of its results, which will be declared on February 8, could rattle the poll pitch in Bihar, West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, and Kerala, where assembly polls are slated to take place in 2025-26. If BJP wins, it will boost the image of the National Democratic Alliance, positioning BJP on top to record a hat-trick after winning Maharashtra and Haryana. On the other side, the victory of AAP will zoom out the political credibility of Arvind Kejriwal as a principal challenger to PM Modi. Also, if it loses the poll battle, the ramifications of which will give a jolt to Punjab, where AAP is in power. Trying to make the high-decibel contest triangular, Congress has put a concentrated campaign in the boroughs dominated by Dalits and minorities. If the grand old party succeeds in regaining the space it had in 2013—after being relegated to the third position behind BJP and AAP, bagging only eight seats—Congress will muster the courage to reach the position it held in 2008 when it secured 43 seats with around 40 per cent of the votes. So far in the campaign, there is no Kejriwal wave, nor is BJP having tailwinds. In the BJP vs AAP battle, only February 8 will decide who will get the reins of the Delhi Sultanate.

(The writer is a senior journalist and currently working with PRP Group as Content Head; views are personal)

Budget 2025: Bold reforms and innovations to put startups on growth trajectory

Key measures, including an expanded Credit Guarantee Scheme, higher Mudra loan limits, position India as a powerhouse for entrepreneurship and self-reliance

The Union Budget 2025 has laid a strong foundation for a transformative leap in India's startup and MSME ecosystem. At a time when entrepreneurship is fueling economic growth and job creation, the government has introduced a series of strategic measures aimed at fostering financial inclusion, innovation, and global competitiveness.



POOJA SINGH

A key highlight of this budget is the enhanced access to capital. The expansion of the Credit Guarantee Scheme will enable MSMEs and startups to secure funding without collateral, addressing a significant challenge for emerging businesses. Additionally, the substantial increase in the Mudra loan limit will allow early-stage entrepreneurs to scale their

ventures without financial constraints. Simplified tax structures, reduced corporate tax rates, and streamlined GST compliance will further ease cash flow issues, enabling businesses to reinvest in growth. Beyond financial incentives, the budget embraces a futuristic vision by

integrating infrastructure development with digital transformation. The allocation for plug-and-play industrial parks and logistics hubs will provide businesses with ready-to-use infrastructure, significantly reducing setup costs and expediting time-to-market.

The establishment of e-commerce export hubs will open new global opportunities, particularly benefiting sectors such as manufacturing, agritech, and handicrafts. Furthermore, a renewed focus on AI-driven automation and deep-tech innovation ensures that Indian startups remain competitive on a global scale. A crucial aspect of this budget is its emphasis on regulatory simplification and skill development. By easing compliance

norms, streamlining FDI regulations, and encouraging private sector collaboration in skilling initiatives, the government is fostering an environment where startups can concentrate on scaling rather than navigating bureaucratic complexities. These measures position India as a dynamic startup hub, reinforcing the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

Ankit Kumar, CEO of Skye Air, lauded the government's initiatives, stating, "The Union Budget 2025 strengthens India's startup and MSME ecosystem with a Rs 10,000 crore fund, ensuring better access to capital and innovation support. Simplified tax structures and compliance reforms will further ease operations, fostering growth and scalability. By integrating dig-



ital infrastructure with financial incentives, the budget paves the way for startups and MSMEs to expand, innovate, and compete globally." The budget also provides a significant boost to innovation and research.

The extension of the period of incorporation for startups by five years is expected to

encourage entrepreneurship. Additionally, the allocation of Rs 20,000 crore to support private-sector-driven research and infrastructure expansion at IITs will create a fertile ground for technological advancements.

The introduction of the Credit Guarantee Startup Scheme (CGSS) and the Customised Credit Card for Micro Enterprises (ME-Card) will improve access to credit for startups and MSMEs, fueling growth and development. Ashish Gupta, CEO of Fretbox, remarked, "The Mutual Credit Guarantee Scheme for MSMEs (MCGS-MSME) will facilitate collateral-free loans, giving a major boost to the manufacturing sector. These initiatives will empower the next generation

of entrepreneurs, researchers, and innovators, and we look forward to seeing the tangible results of these efforts."

By enhancing geospatial data capabilities, this initiative will equip businesses with better insights for logistics, infrastructure, and resource management. Saurabh Rai, CEO of Aarahs Technologies, highlighted its impact: "Leveraging AI and advanced computing, startups can drive innovation in sectors like agritech, smart mobility, and climate tech. The mission's open data-sharing framework will reduce dependency on foreign sources, fostering self-reliance and accelerating growth."

The budget also prioritizes boosting exports and manufacturing. Dr. Mahesh Gupta, CMD of Kent RO, praised the

initiatives, saying, "By facilitating easy access to export credit, cross-border factoring support, and tackling non-tariff measures, the government is addressing critical pain points for exporters."

The customized credit cards for MSMEs, fund of funds for startups, and expanded fund-of-funds will undoubtedly improve capital access and stimulate growth. Enhancing investment and turnover limits for MSMEs will also provide a much-needed boost to their operational efficiency. Overall, the Union Budget 2025 signals a bold commitment to making India a global leader in entrepreneurship, technology, and innovation.

(The author is a senior technical writer at Ksolves, views are personal)

Rajnath Singh accuses Rahul Gandhi of misattributing Army chief

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday accused Congress leader Rahul Gandhi of making "false allegations" about the statement of the Army chief on the situation at the India-China border. "The words attributed to the Army Chief by Shri Rahul Gandhi were never spoken by him at any time. It is a matter of deep regret that Shri Rahul Gandhi should indulge in irresponsible politics on matters of national interest," he said in a social media post. This reaction came after Rahul Gandhi, who is leader of opposition, in Lok Sabha during the discussion on the Motion of Thanks to the President's address, claimed that the Chinese have intruded on Indian land but Prime Minister Narendra Modi has denied it. The Army disagreed with the prime minister, he had said. "The Prime Minister has denied that Chinese forces are inside our territory but for some rea-

son our army keeps talking to the Chinese about their entry into our territory and our chief of army staff has said that the Chinese are inside our territory," Rahul Gandhi had said. On Tuesday, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said in a social media post regarding certain remarks made in Parliament by Rahul Gandhi about the statement of the Chief of the Army Staff on the situation along the India-China border, officials statement said. A statement by defence ministry about Rajnath's remarks said he stated that the Army Chief's observations pertained to the temporary disturbance of traditional patrolling patterns by both sides along the border. He further emphasised that these patrolling practices have now been restored to their traditional pattern following the recent disengagement efforts. These details were previously shared in Parliament. The defence minister also clarified that the words attributed to the Army Chief in the parliamentary debate were never stated by him at any time. He



underscored the importance of accuracy and responsible discourse on matters concerning national security. Rajnath Singh reiterated that with respect to territorial issues, it is well documented that 38,000 sq. km of Indian territory in Aksai Chin has been under Chinese control since the 1962 conflict. Furthermore,

5,180 sq. km of territory was ceded by Pakistan to China in 1963. These historical facts remain an integral part of India's territorial discourse. Meanwhile, BJP MP Nishikant Dubey on Tuesday wrote to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla for initiating breach of privilege proceedings against Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for "bla-

tant lies and vilification campaign" during his speech in the House. With the Leader of Opposition's speech on Monday during the discussion on the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address drawing strong protests from the ruling BJP, Dubey submitted his notice to the Speaker and claimed that

the Congress leader is using his parliamentary privilege to spread canards without authenticating his charges. The BJP MP said Rahul Gandhi's speech carried mainly claims, including that mobile phones were not made in India but only assembled here and China has captured the Indian territory. He had also alleged that India had sent Foreign Minister S Jaishankar to the US get an invite for Prime Minister Narendra Modi for US President Donald Trump's swearing-in ceremony. In his letter, Dubey touched on the issues as well as the Congress leader's allegations related to his demand for caste census. He alleged, "While raising these issues, Rahul Gandhi has not only shamelessly distorted the historical and substantive facts but also made an attempt to ridicule our country and lowering the prestige of our Republic." Dubey noted that Birla had asked Rahul Gandhi to authenticate his claims while noting that the Congress leader had not done it yet.

In a swipe at the Leader of Opposition, Dubey said, "This 'erudite' person has neither authenticated his gibberish canards nor apologised of using the pious forum of Parliament to defame our country and the elected government." He accused Gandhi of blatantly misusing the Constitution's Article 105, which accords privileges to parliamentarians for their comments made inside the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. Claiming that the privilege is subject to provisions of the Constitution and to the rules and standing orders regulating the procedure of Parliament, Dubey alleged that Rahul Gandhi was misusing Parliament on an "utterly false and imaginary notion" that he as an MP has an inherent privilege to speak whatever he likes on the floor of the House. The Congress leader seemed to believe that even the presiding officer or the Leader of the House or the treasury benches have no authority to discipline his "delinquent" behaviour, he said.

He said, "The fact remains that the Article 105 does not give absolute powers and freedom to any public representative, especially of the ilk of Rahul Gandhi, of there would be anarchy in the House." Dubey said it is an established legal position that MPs broadly enjoy various privileges are subject to various widely accepted "mores". Urging the Speaker to initiate proceedings against Gandhi, he alleged that Parliament's records and proceedings are a testimony to his incessant irresponsible attitude as the "guardian of India Chapter of Foreign Tool-Kit" aimed at destabilizing the country. In his speech, Rahul Gandhi had claimed that the Modi's 'Make in India' initiative had failed. "When we talk to the US, we wouldn't send our foreign minister to (get) our PM invited to his (US President's) coronation. We will not send our foreign minister 3-4 times (to say) please invite our prime minister," he said while levelling several charges against the government.



Prime Minister Modi congratulates new Belgium leader Bart De Wever

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday congratulated Barr De Wever on taking over as the new leader of Belgium. "Heartiest congratulations to Prime Minister @Bart_DeWever on assuming office. I look forward to working together to further strengthen India-Belgium ties and enhance our collaboration on global matters. Wishing you a successful tenure ahead," Modi said in a social media post. De Wever of the Flemish nationalist N-VA party succeeds Alexander De Croo, who had remained in office as a caretaker since the June elections last year.

Delhi court grants bail to accused in Landon High Commission attack



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi court has granted bail to a London resident in a case related to the alleged attack on the High Commission of India in London in March 2023. According to the National Investigation Agency (NIA), the incident on March 19, 2023 and an agitation organised on March 22, 2023, in which Inderpal Singh Gaba, a resident of Hounslow in west London, participated, were part of the same transaction. However, principal district and sessions judge Vimal Kumar Yadav, in an order on January 29, said Gaba's role seemed to be confined to the incident on March 22, 2023. Both the incidents were led and planned by the same set of people with a clear objective of influencing the crackdown on "Waris Punjab De" and its leader Amritpal Singh, the NIA said. "The NIA is unable to establish

any link of the applicant with the incident of March 19, 2023. He was neither present at the spot nor associated with arranging anything for the demonstration and for that matter, nothing could be shown that he was part of the conspiracy to organise the demonstration on March 19, 2023 or for that matter on March 22, 2023," the order said. The court said the allegations over the March 22, 2023 incident even if "taken true" still did not make a case for life imprisonment or death penalty. "He is a young man with clean antecedents as nothing objectionable could be brought on record or shown...His complicity or involvement in any manner could not be shown in the incident of March 19, 2023," the judge said. The court observed though "insult to national honour" was a serious allegation against him, Gaba wasn't accused of violence. It appeared the case's trial, which hadn't commenced yet was likely to take "a very long time", added the court. "In such circumstances, when there is no mechanism available with the human race to return time to anyone, how far then it would be appropriate to keep a person under custody under such allegations?" asked the court. The NIA cited a photograph where Gaba is allegedly posing with an AK47 rifle and claimed "it reflected and was indicative of his tendencies". The court dismissed the argument saying aside from the photo, which was found in the accused's cellphone's photo gallery, neither any such rifle was recovered, nor could it be said conclusively that it was an AK 47 rifle or a dummy. "In this era of deepfake photoshop, etc., there can't be any certainty about what has been shown is correct. More so, it is not very uncommon that people pose for photographs with all kinds of stuff," the judge said. Gaba was detained by the Immigration Authorities at Attari border on December 9, 2023 while he was coming from London via Pakistan. Later on, he was arrested on April 25, 2024 under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), Prevention of Insult of National Honour Act, and IPC.

India-EU ties more important than ever before amid: S Jaishankar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday said in a world that promises to be so volatile and uncertain, a stronger India-European Union (EU) relationship can be an "important stabilising factor", as he asserted that the relationship between the two sides is more important than ever before. In his address at the inaugural session of the IIC-Bruegel annual seminar here, the minister, without naming any country, also said that "in our own continent, international law has been disregarded with significant consequences". "Even on a question like democracy and military rule, different standards have been applied to our neighbours in the east and our neighbour in the west," he said. The second IIC-Bruegel annual seminar is being held at the India International Centre (IIC) from February 4-5. "The world is currently witnessing two major conflicts, these are often presented as matters of principle. We are told that the very future of the world order is at stake. Yet, the record shows how selectively and unevenly these principles have been applied," Jaishankar said. In his address, he also touched upon the aspects of trade and digital technology, climate action, and their interplay with geopolitics. He said today there is much talk about the world order unravelling. "The fact is that the consensus which underpinned it, has done so well before." "There are North-South contradictions as much there is an East-West divide. In



fact, even these broad characterisations are no longer tenable in an era of sharper nationalism," the external affairs minister said. Both economic and political logic of an earlier era needs refreshing, Jaishankar said. "Much of the architecture will undoubtedly continue because we are too deeply invested into it, but some of it, perhaps aspects that are critical and sensitive, will be more nationally driven," he added. Jaishankar asserted, "We are truly entering a time of multipolarity and rebalancing, the sooner we come to terms with this reality, the better for all of us." He underlined that these are some of the questions that India and the European Union confront today. "It is important that as we reflect on appropriate policies and responses, there is a quest for convergence as well as an honesty in conversations. We clearly have common interests and shared values,

there may be some differences on priorities and specifics, but what binds us is a sentiment much stronger," the minister said. "At the end of the day, we are political democracies, pluralistic societies and market economies," he said. The minister said as the two sides take stock of the changes underway, it is likely that "our meeting points will increase". "Moreover, in a world that promises to be so volatile, so uncertain, a stronger India-EU relationship can be an important stabilising factor," Jaishankar said. India is certainly cognisant of the greater strategic awakening of Europe in the last few years, that too can serve as a "driver of deeper engagement", he added. "We already see that happening, for example, in defence and security and technology cooperation. The bottom line is that our India-EU relationship is more important than ever before," Jaishankar said.



India boasts robust system to combat future pandemics: Nadda

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India has a very robust system to deal with future pandemics and public health emergencies, Union Health and Family Welfare Minister J P Nadda asserted in the Rajya Sabha on Tuesday. Replying to supplementary questions in the Rajya Sabha, Nadda highlighted the steps taken by the government in the last 10 years to strengthen India's health system, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. India has proven under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi that we have got a very robust system to address the issue of any pandemic that comes, the minister said. Listing out India's capabilities, Nadda said the country has the National Center for Disease Control (NCDC), which oversees and keeps surveillance. "It is the apex body which takes care of the diseases and the pathogens, and the other emerging virus mutation, which takes place," he added. Under the NCDC, he said the

country has an integrated disease surveillance programme, a platform for disease surveillance. "We have got the RRT, which is called the rapid response team, which is there in the states. And we have got very decentralised multidisciplinary teams for health control and containment. And also, we have got an integrated health information platform where advanced data with analysis and analytical data and data modelling tools are there," the minister said. "We give real-time reporting for all the emerging pandemics or there are chances of having any pandemic." The Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) has 150 labs, he said, adding that there are viral research diagnostic laboratories. India has a world-class National Institute of Virology in Pune. "So, we have got a very robust system wherever any pandemic or any chances of the pandemic are there, these laboratories confirm what type of mutation is taking place, what change, what type of medicine or what type of treatment is to be given," Nadda said.

UN general Assembly President Philemon Yang begins four-day visit to India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

President of the UN General Assembly Philemon Yang is paying a four-day visit to India beginning Tuesday. Yang, who assumed the responsibility at the global body in September, previously served as the prime minister of Cameroon. The President of the 79th Session of the UN General Assembly (PGA) is visiting India at the invitation of External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, according



to an official readout. Under his presidency, the United Nations adopted 'A Pact for the Future' -- a vision document for realising "multilateral solutions for a better tomorrow". "During the

visit, the external affairs minister and the PGA will discuss key multilateral and regional issues of mutual interest," the readout said. Yang will also pay a courtesy call on President Droupadi Murmu. Apart from New Delhi, Yang will be visiting Bengaluru. "The PGA is scheduled to visit Infosys and the Indian Institute of Science, where he would have the opportunity to interact with experts on India's innovations in various fields such as sustainability, digital public infrastructures, etc," the readout said.

India seeks cooperation from Bangladesh to combat cross-border crimes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India has conveyed to Bangladesh that it expects a cooperative approach from the neighbouring country for combating cross-border crimes, the government informed Parliament on Tuesday. India has also informed Bangladesh that it is observing all existing agreements in this regard, including for fencing along this front, the government said.

Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai said in a written reply to Lok Sabha that the total length of the India-Bangladesh border is 4,096.7 km out of which 3,232.21 km has been "covered" with a fence. The minister was asked if border fencing "impacted" bilateral relations between the two countries. "Construction of fencing is an important security measure for securing the border. Fencing helps to ensure a crime-free border by effec-

tively addressing the challenges of cross-border criminal activities, smuggling, movement of criminals and trafficking," Rai said. It has been "conveyed" to the government of Bangladesh that with regard to security measures at the border, including for fencing, India observes all protocols and agreements between the two governments and between the Border Security Force (BSF) and Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), the minister said.

Parliamentary report flags delays in youth empowerment scheme

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A parliamentary report has flagged delays in fund allocations, lack of targeted outreach, and insufficient government action on key recommendations for the youths on disaster preparedness, skilling, and hostel facilities for women. The 360th report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth, and Sports, presented in Parliament on Tuesday, reviewed the government's response to its earlier recommendations on the Rashtriya Yuva Sashaktikaran Karyakram (RYSK), a key youth empowerment scheme. The committee expressed dissatisfaction with the pace of implementation and urged the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports to take urgent corrective



steps. The report flagged concerns over the lack of a structured approach to youth volunteerism in disaster response, citing a 2022 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) assessment. It urged the government to integrate Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan, or NYKS, volunteers into mandatory disaster management committees at the village and district levels and establish Disaster Risk Reduction Teams in every district. While the Ministry reported that over 12,000

NYKS volunteers have been trained, the committee called for better coordination with disaster relief authorities to ensure effective deployment. The committee also criticised delays in transforming NYKS centres into District Youth Resource Centres (DYRCs), which could serve as hubs for skill development, employment, and entrepreneurship. The Ministry of Youth Affairs stated that it had forwarded the proposal to the Finance Ministry, but the committee urged stronger follow-ups to secure the required funding. The report also noted a lack of collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Employment to turn NYKS into a gateway for youth employment. It also called for the creation of 'Girl Child NYKS Centres' to ensure greater participation of young women in skill training pro-

grammes and job placements. The committee found gaps in representation from rural youth and students from tier-2 and tier-3 colleges in international exchange programmes. It recommended tracking the long-term impact of such initiatives and ensuring a more inclusive selection process to provide equal opportunities for marginalised students. The report expressed serious concerns over the lack of youth hostels exclusively for women, particularly in state capitals, educational hubs, and cultural sites. While the Ministry cited the construction of one hostel in Kota, Rajasthan, the committee deemed it inadequate and directed the government to seek additional funds in the 2025-26 Union Budget for dedicated women hostels with Wi-Fi, CCTV sur-

veillance, and round-the-clock security. The committee also noted discrepancies in use of funds under the National Young Leaders Programme (NYLP) and recommended more transparent budgeting and expenditure tracking. It criticised the limited awareness and outreach of Scouts and Guides programmes, recommending an expansion of gender sensitisation, environmental protection, and digital literacy initiatives in rural schools. While the government has acknowledged some recommendations, the committee's report indicates that several key youth empowerment measures remain under-implemented. The committee urged the MYAS to act swiftly and report back on pending issues before the next parliamentary review.

'Sri Lanka must unite to achieve economic freedom'

PTI ■ COLOMBO President Anura Kumara Dissanayake on Tuesday said that Sri Lanka must work in unison to achieve economic freedom rather than yield to vulnerabilities within the global economic system.



Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, center, hoists the Sri Lankan national flag during the country's 77th Independence Day ceremony in Colombo, Sri Lanka, Tuesday.

Pak to send registered Afghan refugees back to their country

Islamabad (PTI): The Pakistan government has devised a plan to move registered Afghan refugees out of Islamabad and Rawalpindi and gradually repatriate them back to their country.

US, Philippine aircraft patrol disputed shoal region guarded by China

Manila (PTI): US and Philippine fighter aircraft staged a joint patrol and training Tuesday over a disputed South China Sea shoal where Chinese fighter jets fired flares last year to drive away a Philippine aircraft, Philippine officials said.

Force said. In August last year, two Chinese air force aircraft flew close then fired flares in the path of a Philippine air force plane on routine patrol over the Scarborough Shoal in actions that were strongly condemned and protested by the Philippine government, military officials said.

Russian attacks near Ukraine's nuclear sites raise preparedness concerns

PTI ■ KYIV Moscow's renewed attacks on Ukraine's electricity infrastructure this winter have heightened scrutiny over the Ukrainian Energy Ministry's failure to protect the country's most critical energy facilities near nuclear power sites.

routing from nuclear power plants are a vital component of Ukraine's nuclear energy infrastructure — powering homes, schools, hospitals, and other critical civilian infrastructure.

Man charged with stabbing Salman Rushdie will soon go on trial

PTI ■ MAYVILLE In 2022, Salman Rushdie was about to deliver a lecture before a live audience in western New York when a man ran towards him and plunged a knife into the author's hand as he raised it in self-defence.

ty to recount the experience as one of the first witnesses in the trial of the man charged with wielding the knife that day, Hadi Matar. Jury selection is scheduled to begin Tuesday.

Government of Odisha "e" Procurement Notice WORKS DEPARTMENT Bid Identification No.CCE-NHC(KJR) - 01/2024-25. Letter No. 131 dt. 29.01.2025

PUBLIC NOTICE My clients Arvind Singh S/o Late Shri Ranvir Singh and Smt. Sadhna Singh W/o Shri Arvind Singh both R/o G-2, Badarpur, Saurabh Vihar, Jait Pur, New Delhi-110044 do hereby sever all their relations with their son Harsh and his wife Smt. Parul and their legal heirs due to their immoral acts and deed as they have been acting contrary to the interest of my clients and want to oust them from their own properties.

PUBLIC NOTICE Be it known to the public at large that my clients Shri Anur Sahni S/o late Shri Joginder Nath Sahni and Smt. Suman Sahni, W/o Shri Anur Sahni, both R/o K-27, First Floor, Hauz Khas Enclave, Delhi-110016 has disowned and severed their all relations with their son Shri Jani Sahni and his wife Smt. Shreem Arora, both R/o K-27, First Floor Hauz Khas Enclave, Delhi-110016 from the right of inheritance in respect of their all movable and immovable properties, at present held singly or jointly or to be held and purchased in future and they shall have no concern, right, interest or lien in the same in any manner whatsoever for all the time to come as they are not taking care of my clients. My clients have no concern with the above named Shri Jani Sahni and Smt. Shreem Arora in future as my clients have severed all their relations, socially and economically with them. Any body dealing with the above named Shri Jani Sahni and/or his wife Smt. Shreem Arora in any manner shall be doing at their/their own risk and my clients are not hold responsible for any loss or damage suffered by them in future as they are not held responsible/invested in disputes of any nature between Shri Jani Sahni and Smt. Shreem Arora between them or with any third person/party of any nature.

PUBLIC NOTICE Be it known to all that I, ASHOK MEHTA S/O LATE SHREE CHAND MEHTA R/O FLAT NO. K-11, LITARA, CHS LTD., PLOT NO. K-3, TARA APPTS, ALAKNANDA, NEW DELHI-19, am the mutatee/legal owner of FLAT NO. K-11, TARA APPTS, PLOT NO. K-3, TARA APPTS, ALAKNANDA, NEW DELHI-19, which is allotted by the DDA. I have lost the Original Allotment-Cum-Demand letter of the above Flat R/W/R to this effect has lodged in P. S. Crime Branch, Delhi vide LR No. 2556956/2025, Dated 04-02-2025. Any person(s) claiming any right/interest having any objection or found in possession of original documents, may write/contact with above named person at above address/phone No. 98931154660 within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice. Any person claiming any right, interest, or having any objections with respect to this property can also personally inform/contact me.

Public Notice This is to inform the general public that Smt. Kamlesh is the owner Plot no. C-17 (old), new Plot no. C-306 out of Kharsa no. 1007, area measuring 186.5 sq. yds., situated at Jarakpuri Hadobast village Paswada, margana, Lohi, Jhansi & Dist. Chhazabad, U.P. through Sale Deed dated 18.10.2006 as coc. No. 11496 executed by Mr. Subhash Chand Ujjain in favour of Mr. Gurnail Chand Bhatnagar in respect of said plot. Later, Mr. Gurnail Chand Bhatnagar died on 15.10.2017. His death. Grit Deed dated 30.01.2025 as coc. No. 1287 was executed by his legal heirs i.e. Mr. Kamal & Mr. Kulvir Singh in favour of Smt. Kamlesh in respect of their share in the said property. Smt. Kamlesh is in the process of mortgage the said Plot with Hero Finance Limited. Any objections or concerns regarding this transaction should be raised within a period of 07 days from the date of this notice. Any objections submitted after the completion of 07 days period will not be considered binding with respect to the said properties or the interests of our client. If anyone wishes to raise an objection, please do so within the stipulated 07 days period by contacting Law Veritas: North (Advocates & Legal Consultants) at Office No. 11, 1st Floor, Building No. A-44A, Sector-16, Noida, Uttar Pradesh-201301, Landline: (+91)120-3161833, e-mail: accounts@lvorth.in

Public Notice Information is given to the general public at large by my client Mrs. Alka Taneja who is the owner of Rear Side Ground Floor built on Property bearing No. 5, total measuring 1575 sq. ft. (covered) 2384 sq. ft. (super) Block No. 34, Kharsa No. 963/767, situated at Western Extension Area, Pusa Road, Karol Bagh, New Delhi-110005, by virtue of Relinquishment Deed Regd. dated 02.03.2022 executed by Mr. Abhishek Taneja and Mr. Ishaan Taneja (Doc. No. 1291). They intend to seek a loan from Aditya Birla Finance Limited and they do not enclose the Original Conveyance Deed dated 23.07.2021, vide its doc. No. 5301. Any person(s), Bank/NBFC/institution(s) having any claim and/or objection/litigation in respect of the said property shall communicate the same to the undersigned at our address within 07 days from the publication of this notice with documentary evidence in support thereof, failing which all the claim of such person(s)/institution(s) shall not be binding upon the said property or purchaser. Vikash Legal, Ram Prakash Pandey, (Advocate), 2E/23, 3rd Floor, Jhandewalan Extn., New Delhi-110055, Mobile: 9711281479

Public Notice My wife Late Mrs. Geeta Bakshshi, R/o 107 D Pocket 1, Mayur Vihar Phase 1, Delhi 110091 booked Flat No. 806 in Nicolas tower 1, SUPERTECH Czar, Plot No. GH-02, Sector Omnicorn 1, Greater Noida 201303. I requested to M/s Supertech Limited to transfer the said flat to my name alone, if anybody has any objection, he/she may contact M/s Supertech Limited office at Supertech E-Square, Plot No C2, Sector 96, Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India 201303 within 15 days of the Published notice. Abhay Bakshshi

Public Notice My clients Arvind Singh S/o Late Shri Ranvir Singh and Smt. Sadhna Singh W/o Shri Arvind Singh both R/o G-2, Badarpur, Saurabh Vihar, Jait Pur, New Delhi-110044 do hereby sever all their relations with their son Harsh and his wife Smt. Parul and their legal heirs due to their immoral acts and deed as they have been acting contrary to the interest of my clients and want to oust them from their own properties. My clients hereby also disown and debar them from all their movable and immovable properties, at present held singly or jointly or to be held and purchased in future and they shall have no concern, right, interest or lien in the same in any manner whatsoever for all the time to come as they are not taking care of my clients. My clients have no concern with the above named Shri Jani Sahni and Smt. Shreem Arora in future as my clients have severed all their relations, socially and economically with them. Any body dealing with the above named Shri Jani Sahni and/or his wife Smt. Shreem Arora in any manner shall be doing at their/their own risk and my clients are not hold responsible for any loss or damage suffered by them in future as they are not held responsible/invested in disputes of any nature between Shri Jani Sahni and Smt. Shreem Arora between them or with any third person/party of any nature. Alok Kumar (Advocate) Off: Ch. No. 321, Western Wing, Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi-110054, Mob: 9069069096

Public Notice Be it known to the public at large that my clients Shri Anur Sahni S/o late Shri Joginder Nath Sahni and Smt. Suman Sahni, W/o Shri Anur Sahni, both R/o K-27, First Floor, Hauz Khas Enclave, Delhi-110016 has disowned and severed their all relations with their son Shri Jani Sahni and his wife Smt. Shreem Arora, both R/o K-27, First Floor Hauz Khas Enclave, Delhi-110016 from the right of inheritance in respect of their all movable and immovable properties, at present held singly or jointly or to be held and purchased in future and they shall have no concern, right, interest or lien in the same in any manner whatsoever for all the time to come as they are not taking care of my clients. My clients have no concern with the above named Shri Jani Sahni and Smt. Shreem Arora in future as my clients have severed all their relations, socially and economically with them. Any body dealing with the above named Shri Jani Sahni and/or his wife Smt. Shreem Arora in any manner shall be doing at their/their own risk and my clients are not hold responsible for any loss or damage suffered by them in future as they are not held responsible/invested in disputes of any nature between Shri Jani Sahni and Smt. Shreem Arora between them or with any third person/party of any nature. Neeraj Suri (Advocate) Ch-211, Civil Side, Tis Hazari Courts Delhi-110054.

Public Notice Public at large is hereby informed that Mr. Dev Raj Mehta died intestate on 12-01-2020 and leaving behind the only legal heirs namely: 1. Mrs. Santosh Mehta (wife) 2. Mr. Munesh Mehta (son) 3. Mr. Bhupesh Mehta (son) And there are no other legal heirs of Late Sh. Dev Raj Mehta except aforementioned. After the demise of Mr. Dev Raj Mehta, all legal heirs sit together and mutual agreed that the Property bearing Flat No. 11, Mayur Bagh Society, 6-6, Paschim Vihar, New Delhi-110055 shall be transferred on the name of Mrs. Santosh Mehta. Other Legal heirs shall give NOC before the competent authority/court. If any person has any objection kindly contact Balraj Tanwar Advocate, Chamber No. 255, Lawyers Chambers, Saket Court Complex, New Delhi-110017. Balraj Tanwar (Advocate), Ch. No. 255, Saket Court Complex New Delhi-110017 Mob. 9811430001

Public Notice This is to inform public at large that M/s Realtown Properties Private Limited has been accorded Environmental Clearance from State Environment Impact Assessment Authority, Haryana (Vide Letter No. EC24C3802HR5942334N: Dated:01.02.2025) for Commercial College Project at Sector-83, Village Sishi, Gurgaon, Haryana. REALTOWN PROPERTIES PRIVATE LIMITED REGISTERED OFFICE 294/1, Vishwakarma Colony, Opposite ICD, M.B Road, Lal Kuan, New Delhi-110044. Place: New Delhi Ashwani Kumar Gupta Date: 03-02-2025 Managing Director

Baba Farid University of Health Sciences Sadiq Road, Faridkot -151203 Ph. 01639-256232, 256236 EXPRESSION OF INTEREST Baba Farid University of Health Sciences, Faridkot hereby invites Expression of Interest from PSUs, Government/Private agencies, Cooperatives for various Civil, Mechanical, Electrical, Public Health Works for Baba Farid University of Health Sciences, Faridkot and other constituent institutes and hospitals at Bathinda, Badal, Fazilka, Jalandhar and Goindwal Sahib for empanelment to execute various works @15% below latest Common Schedule of Rates of Punjab Govt. for various Govt. Department and must submit their financial status and list of works executed by them. Applications must reach in the office of undersigned within 15 days from the date of publishing of EOJ along with application fee of Rs.2000/-. Terms and conditions can be downloaded from the University website i.e. www.bfuhns.ac.in Registrar 00/12/357/2023/41364 Dated CHD - 2/4/2025

Indira Gandhi University Meerpur, Rewari इंदिरा गांधी विश्वविद्यालय मीरपूर रेवाड़ी (A State University Established under Haryana Act No. 29 of 2013) Recognized u/s 12 (B) & 2(f) of UGC Act, 1956 Employment Notice (Advt. No. 01/2025) Indira Gandhi University invites online applications from the eligible candidates for recruitment to the post of Training & Placement Officer against sanctioned vacant post. Detailed instructions, requisite qualifications, pay scales and modalities for selection are given on the University Website www.igu.ac.in. The link for submission of online application shall be available on the University Website w.e.f. 28.01.2025. REGISTRAR 1312/11/43/2025/32289/C/27/77

GOVERNMENT OF HARYANA TENDER NOTICE SR. No. NAME OF BOARD/CORP./AUTH. NAME OF WORK/TENDER. OPENING DATE/TIME. AMOUNT/ EMD (APPROX.) IN RUPEES. WEBSITE OF THE BOARD CORP./AUTH. NODAL OFFICER/CONTACT DETAILS/EMAIL. 1. INDIRA GANDHI UNIVERSITY, MEERPUR, REWARI. SUPPLY AND PURCHASE OF LABORATORY EQUIPMENT/MATERIALS FOR TEACHING AND RESEARCH PURPOSES IN THE DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICS AT INDIRA GANDHI UNIVERSITY, MEERPUR, REWARI. 31.01.2025 04.03.2025. 9.72 LACS. www.igu.ac.in. 8294954077. chairperson.physics@igu.ac.in. FOR FURTHER INFORMATION KINDLY VISIT : www.haryanaeprocurement.gov.in or www.etenders.hry.nic.in 13/2025/4032265/02/77

Indira Gandhi University Meerpur, Rewari इंदिरा गांधी विश्वविद्यालय मीरपूर रेवाड़ी (A State University Established under Haryana Act No. 29 of 2013) Recognized u/s 12 (B) & 2(f) of UGC Act, 1956 Ref. IGU/Gen/2025/2601 Dated: 03.02.2025 NOTICE Indira Gandhi University intends to seek open bids for renting out its CANTEEN in the campus. Interested parties/individuals are requested to see our Notice and "Terms & Conditions of Auction" on University Website www.igu.ac.in. Auction date, time and venue is described below:- Date: 24th Feb. 2025 (Monday) Time: 02.30 PM Venue: Board Room, Sardar Patel Bhawan IGU Meerpur Rewari. Prospective vendors will have to fulfill the requisites of our terms & conditions. Interested individuals/parties are sought to quote their bid in this open auction. Further, vendors are advised to visit and take appraisal before bid, if necessary. Once bid is accepted, thereafter no excuse of ignorance will be accepted. Earnest Money of Rs. 10,000 will have to be deposited by prospective bidder one hour before start of auction in the form of DD/Cash. Cheques will not be accepted. REGISTRAR 1312/11/42/2025/32263/C/27/77

No corruption in foodgrain procurement: Pralhad Joshi junks Opposition charges

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Minister for Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Pralhad Joshi on Tuesday claimed there was no corruption in the procurement of foodgrains and farmers were paid 100 per cent directly into their bank accounts. Responding to supplementary questions on alleged corruption through middlemen in the procurement process, the minister in the Rajya Sabha rejected charges that there was any corruption in the system anymore. During the Question Hour, He also took a swipe at Congress MP Digvijaya Singh on alleged corruption and said he would be probably talking about the



corruption during the UPA tenure. RLM MP Upendra Kushwaha from Bihar also raised the issue of corruption in the

procurement process through middlemen who exploited farmers. He also claimed that there was third-party entry of people in procurement and farmers

were not getting the money meant for them and were being usurped by middlemen. Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge also

raised the issue of alleged corruption, saying those procuring foodgrains are daily wagers and act as mediators between procurement agencies and the government and that is why there is corruption. "We transfer money directly to farmers through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT). We send the money directly to farmers' accounts within 48 hours," the minister said adding that the Centre pays states or central agencies which directly pay to farmers in their accounts. "Earlier it used to happen that only 15 paise out of a rupee sent by the Centre actually reached the beneficiary. This does not happen any more...We are paying directly into the accounts of farmers there is no corruption.

China imposes tariffs on US goods, launches investigation into Google

PTI ■ BEIJING

China countered President Donald Trump's tariffs on Chinese products with tariffs of its own on multiple US imports Tuesday as well as announcing an antitrust investigation into Google and other trade measures. US tariffs on products from Canada and Mexico also were to go into effect Tuesday, though Trump agreed to a 30-day pause on his threats against Mexico and Canada as they acted to appease his concerns about border security and drug trafficking. Trump planned to talk with Chinese President Xi Jinping in the next few days. This isn't the first round of tit-for-tat actions between the two countries. China and the US had engaged in a trade war in 2018 when Trump raised tariffs on



Chinese goods and China responded in kind. This time, analysts said, China is much better prepared to counter. "They have a much more developed export control regime. We depend on them for a lot of critical minerals: gallium, germanium, graphite, a host of others. So ... they could put some

significant harm on our economy," said Philip Luck, a former State Department official and director at the Center for Strategic and International Studies on Monday at a forum. The slew of measures announced Tuesday cut across different sectors of the economy, from energy to individual US companies.

Hindenburg's Nate Anderson defends Adani report, closure not due to threats

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Activist short-seller Nathan Anderson, known for his high-profile campaigns against the likes of Adani Group, said the decision to shut his firm, Hindenburg Research was not because of any legal or any other threat, but due to workload. And that he stands by all its reports including the one against Adani Group. Anderson said that Hindenburg's January 2023 report accusing Adani Group of "the largest con in corporate history" was a result of following "red flags" raised against the conglomerate in media reports. Adani Group had repeatedly denied all allegations in the report. He termed as "goofy conspiracy" the attempts by some to link Hindenburg with alleged anti-India groups like OCCRP and George Soros, saying his outlet never commented on them as it followed the policy of not feeding into "silly conspiracy theories". Anderson, who came to be known for meticulously detailed reports against companies he alleged were committing fraud, last month announced shutting down his forensic research firm nearly eight years after he founded it. Asked why he chose to shut down Hindenburg when he could have stepped back and passed on the reins of the company to someone else, he said there is "no way to separate me from the brand." "Hindenburg is basically synonymous with me," he said. "If it was a software application or a bicycle factory you can sell the application or the factory. But when it's research driven by me, you can't really just hand that off, and so I would not actually be 'done'. But I am happy to support the team if they want to launch a new brand, which I expect they will." Anderson, who first shot to fame with a report against electric truck company Nikola and had gone after the companies of major financial figures, including Carl Icahn's Icahn Enterprises LP, had last month blamed the "intensity and focus" of the job for the decision to wind up. He had spent much of the last eight years either in fights or preparing for the next fight. Many times during this period, he was often trailed and attempts were made to infiltrate his system. "As to why I retired - it is all in the letter (released on January 16 that announced shutting

down of Hindenburg) - it is not based on any threat, health issue, personal issue or otherwise," he said. Conspiracy theories like being on the verge of an investigation by the US Department of Justice and, or US SEC to "concoct a counter-narrative about my retirement is a great example of why I am happy to instead be enjoying more time with family, friends and good music," he said. Hindenburg has said it is not under investigation by the US SEC over anonymous reports linking its founder to a hedge fund for preparing reports targeting companies. Asked if he stood by Hindenburg's reports, particularly against the Adani group, Anderson said, "We 100 per cent stand by all of our research findings." Hindenburg had alleged that Adani Group had used a web of companies in tax havens to inflate its revenue and manipulate stock prices, even as debt piled up. The conglomerate vehemently denied all claims but the damning report at one point sheared over USD 150 billion off its value, losses it eventually recouped in over a year's time. This, as it slashed debt, pared share pledges and won new investors. The issue was agitated before the Supreme Court which did not find any need for a probe other than the one markets regulator, Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) had initiated into certain issues prior to the Hindenburg report. On some seeing the Hindenburg report as against India and India's growth story, Anderson said, "We have always believed in India's potential and view market transparency and strong corporate governance as key factors that can fuel India's growth story." He did not elaborate. "We initially saw media articles outlining red flags, took a closer look, and just kept following the evidence," he said on why the Adani group was chosen. On allegations of being in cohorts with OCCRP and George Soros, he said, "Of course not, but we have a policy of not feeding into silly conspiracy theories. When the main response to 100 plus pages of evidence (presented in the report against Adani Group) is a goofy conspiracy, we view it as a sign that we were right on the mark." Asked about the response of regulatory bodies in India to Hindenburg reports, he said,

"We view our role as researching and writing about issues in need of transparency. The rest is out of our hands." He dismissed allegations of sharing reports with hedge funds, saying, "We have always maintained full editorial control over all of our research." "As we and many other US-based short sellers have discussed in public interviews for years, our model involves investing our own capital and sometimes also bringing on a balance sheet partner. This is one of the most common business models in our industry, it is fully compliant with all applicable laws, and we disclose this in our reports," he added. The 40-year-old son of a university professor and a nurse, Nathan (Nate) Anderson on January 15 issued a personal note that Hindenburg Research was being wound up after it "finished the pipeline of ideas we were working on." The Connecticut man, who worked for 10 months as an ambulance medic in Israel, and studied international business, finance, and accounting, believed he could make money by exposing corporate corruption. Hindenburg, founded in 2017, placed bets against the companies it was researching. And it made money when stock prices of its targets tumbled on disclosure of fraud and other abuses that it unearthed through deep forensic financial research. It however made surprisingly little money -- just over USD 4 million -- from the report on billionaire Gautam Adani's sprawling business empire in January 2023. That figure was disclosed for the first time by Hindenburg on its website last year, along with details of a letter it said it had received from India's markets regulator, SEBI. Anderson appears to be wanting to move on, having achieved what he and his colleagues wanted. "We shook some empires that we felt needed shaking," he wrote in a personal memo last month. But, this did take a toll on him. "It has come at the cost of missing a lot of the rest of the world and the people I care about," he had written. "It wasn't always obvious to me, but I now view all of this as a love story." Hindenburg's research has led to fraud charges and indictments against dozens of individuals but has also resulted in expensive legal battles.

SEBI grants IPO approval to SMPP, Aditya Infotech and six others

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

As many as eight firms including defence equipment manufacturer SMPP, Aditya Infotech, Brigade Hotel and PVC blend-based building material maker Kumar Arch Tech have received market regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India's (SEBI) go ahead to raise funds through Initial Public Offerings (IPOs). Other companies that have received SEBI's approval include Solarworld Energy Solutions, Indogulf Crop Sciences, Globe Civil Projects, and Prostarm Info Systems, an update with the markets regulator showed on Tuesday. Together, these firms aim to raise more than ₹7,800 Crore, merchant bankers said. So far in 2025, six companies floated their maiden public issues. This came after the primary market witnessed a remarkable year when 91 IPOs were launched collectively raising ₹1.6 Lakh Crore. Going by the update on Tuesday, SEBI received preliminary IPO documents from eight firms between October and November, and issued its observations during January 28-31. In SEBI's parlance, obtaining the observations means its go ahead to float the public issue.



Meanwhile, auto component maker Viney Corporation withdrew its draft IPO papers on January 27 without giving a reason. The preliminary documents were filed in October. As for SMPP Ltd, its ₹4,000-Crore IPO includes a fresh issue of equity shares worth up to ₹580 Crore and an offer-for-sale (OFS) of shares worth up to ₹3,420 Crore by promoter Shiv Chand Kansal, according to the draft papers. At present, Kansal holds a 50 per cent stake in the company. Proceeds from the fresh issue will be utilised primarily for capital expenditure of ₹437.04 Crore, which includes constructing buildings, land

development, and procuring plant and machinery for a planned ammunition manufacturing facility through an investment in a subsidiary. The remaining amount will be allocated for general corporate purposes. Aditya Infotech's proposed IPO is a combination of a fresh issue of equity shares worth ₹500 Crore and an OFS of shares valued ₹800 Crore by promoters, as per the draft papers. Proceeds from the fresh to the tune of ₹375 Crore have been earmarked for payment of debt and besides a portion will be used for general corporate purposes. Brigade Hotel Ventures is

looking to raise ₹900 Crore through a fresh issue of equity shares. Proceeds from the issue to the tune of ₹481 Crore will go towards payment of debt, ₹412 Crore will be allocated to the company and ₹69 Crore to its material subsidiary, SRP Prosperita Hotel Ventures Ltd. Additionally, ₹107.52 Crore will be used to purchase an undivided share of land from the promoter, BEL, and the remaining funds will support acquisitions, other strategic initiatives, and general corporate purposes. Kumar Arch Tech's IPO is a mix of fresh issuance of shares worth ₹240 Crore, and an OFS of ₹500 Crore by promoters.

Centre frames schemes to empower exporters

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government is framing schemes for MSME exporters to provide credit at easy terms, promote alternate financing instrument through strengthening factoring services for them, and offer assistance to deal with non-tariff measures imposed by other countries, an official said on Tuesday. The commerce, MSME and finance ministries are working on these schemes, Director General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) Santosh Kumar Sarangi said. These schemes are being formulated under the export promotion mission, announced in the Union Budget for 2025-26. The schemes are expected to be rolled out in about four-five months, he said. The government on February 1 announced the setting up of an Export Promotion Mission with an outlay of ₹2,250 Crore to promote the country's outbound shipments. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has said through the mission, the government will facilitate exporters to get easy access to credit, and cross-border factoring support.

Stock markets surge as Trump postpones tariffs on neighbors

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark stock indices - Sensex and Nifty - rebounded nearly two per cent on Tuesday in line with a recovery in Asian peers after US President Donald Trump delayed tariffs on Mexico and Canada for a month. The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,397.07 points or 1.81 per cent to settle at a month's high of 78,583.81. During the day, it surged 1,471.85 points or 1.90 per cent to 78,658.59. The NSE Nifty soared 378.20 points or 1.62 per cent to 23,739.25, a level not seen since January 3. From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Larsen and Toubro rallied nearly five per cent. Adani Ports, IndusInd Bank, Tata Motors, Reliance Industries, UltraTech Cement and Asian Paints were also among the major gainers. ITC Hotels, Zomato, Nestle and Maruti were among the laggards. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Hong Kong ended significantly higher.

European markets were trading mostly lower. US markets ended in the negative territory on Monday. "Yesterday, the Indian market struggled to absorb the optimism generated by the good Union Budget due to heightened geopolitical risks stemming from 'Trump tariff war'. However, India could outperform in a weak global market, and as a rebound has been triggered in the global sentiment, it has fuelled a sharp surge in domestic equities," Vinod Nair, head of research, Geojit Financial Services, said. Global oil benchmark Brent crude dropped 1.05 per cent to USD 75.16 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹3,958.37 Crore on Monday, according to exchange data. The BSE bellwether index Sensex declined 319.22 points or 0.41 per cent to settle at 77,186.74 on Monday, snapping its five-day rally. The Nifty declined 121.10 points or 0.52 per cent to 23,361.05.

Rupee recovers three paise against USD

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee recovered three paise from its all-time low level to close at 87.08 (provisional) against US dollar on Tuesday, as the American currency index retreated from its elevated level after President Donald Trump agreed to pause tariffs on Mexico and Canada. Forex traders said the US dollar index, which had surged past 109.88 level, retreated to 108 level after Trump announced the temporary pause on tariffs for 30 days. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 86.98 and touched an intraday low of 87.13 against the American currency during the session. The local unit finally settled at 87.08 (provisional), higher by 3 paise over its previous close. On Monday, the rupee plunged 49 paise to close at an all-time low of 87.11 against the US dollar. "We expect the rupee to trade with negative bias over

uncertainty over US trade tariffs. Escalation of the tariff war by China may dent global risk sentiments wherein the US dollar may strengthen and investors would look out for safe haven. However, any central bank intervention may support the rupee," Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said. Investors may remain cautious ahead of the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) monetary policy meeting this week, Choudhary added. The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the RBI will begin its three-day meeting on February 5. The MPC will announce its policy decisions on February 7. Trump on Monday held off on his tariff threats against Mexico and Canada for 30 days after they pledged to boost border enforcement. Meanwhile, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday said the value of Indian rupee is market-determined, and there has been no devaluation, which is a feature of a fixed exchange

rate regime. The rupee has been falling in recent weeks, and on Monday touched an all-time intraday low of 87.29 against the American currency. Finance Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey on Monday said there is no concern over the rupee value and the RBI is managing the volatility of the local currency. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.48 per cent lower at 108.47. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, fell 1.18 per cent to USD 75.06 per barrel in futures trade. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex closed 1,397.07 points, or 1.81 per cent, higher at 78,583.81 points, while the Nifty settled up 378.20 points, or 1.62 per cent, at 23,739.25 points. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹3,958.37 Crore in the capital markets on a net basis on Monday, according to exchange data.

Shein India to keep data local, partner with Reliance Retail for sales

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The new Shein India application, which went live last Friday, has products which are manufactured, marketed and sold only by Nextgen Fast Fashion, a fully owned subsidiary of Reliance Retail Ventures Ltd. Nextgen manufactures these products on the Shein India platform through a wide network of Indian manufacturers, in which most of which are Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME), according to an industry insider.

Shein has re-entered the Indian market almost five years after its ban through the country's leading retailer Reliance Retail. The new Shein Platform is built and hosted in India and its ownership and control will always remain with Reliance Retail, he said. Shein India Fast Fashion App from Reliance Retail currently has over 10,000 downloads on Google's Play Store and is ranked among the top 10 among peers on Apple's store. There is no equity ownership of Shein in the Indian company and application Shein India has been developed by Reliance

Retail and is hosted in the country. The newly launched platforms have no links with the now in-operational Shein app and the former website (Shein.in) which were previously managed and operated directly by Shein, he said. Further, the platform will be hosted on infrastructure in India and all platform data will remain in India. Shein will not have any access to, or rights, over such data, the industry insiders informed. Reliance Retail is now working with Shein to develop a completely localised model for

digitising the supply chain of Indian MSMEs and factories, creating jobs and enhancing the competitiveness of the Indian textile sector globally. Moreover, Nextgen is also scaling up the network of Indian manufacturers so that India can become a supply source for Shein's global operations in future. This will also help to create substantial export opportunities for Indian MSME garment manufacturers, he said. Shein was one of the apps that was banned by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology in June 2020 after

the escalation of tensions with China. Almost three years after getting banned in India, Shein signed a partnership in 2023 with Reliance Retail, led by Isha Ambani, the daughter of billionaire Mukesh Ambani. Reliance Retail Ventures Ltd (RRVL), through its subsidiary Reliance Retail Ltd (RRL), had entered into a technology agreement with Roadget Business Pte Ltd, which owns Shein, to develop an indigenous e-commerce retail platform. In December last year, the government informed the Lok Sabha that the sale of branded

products from Shein was not banned, though its app was blocked. This platform is intended to create a network of local manufacturers and suppliers who will manufacture products under the brand Shein and sell them domestically and globally. Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal had said in a written reply. The Ministry of Textiles consulted with the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), which in turn consulted the Ministry of Home Affairs, and conveyed no objection to the proposal of RRVL, he added.

INBRIEF

POWERGRID POSTS PAT OF ₹3,862 CRORE FOR Q3 FY25 ON CONSOLIDATED BASIS

NEW DELHI: Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (POWERGRID), a 'Maharatna' CPSE has announced unaudited financial results for the quarter and nine months ended 31st December 2024. The company has reported PAT and total income of ₹3,862 Crore and ₹11,743 Crore respectively on consolidated basis during Q3FY25.

VICE CHANCELLOR PROF KARAMJEET SINGH LAUNCHES BOOK ON THEORIES OF PERSONALITY

AMRITSAR: Vice Chancellor Prof Karamjeet Singh graced the launch of Dr Balbinder Singh's book on theories of personality at Guru Nanak Dev University. The event marked a significant moment for the university and in the field of psychology, as it aimed to make complex psychological concepts more accessible to the Punjabi-speaking community.

Man City, PSG and Aston Villa go big in the winter window

PTI ■ LONDON

Manchester City and Aston Villa made big moves just before the midseason transfer window closed. Four-time defending Premier League champion City secured a late deal for Porto midfielder Nico Gonzalez on Monday for a reported \$61.8 million, while three-time Champions League winner Marco Asensio joined Villa on loan to the end of the season. Uncertainty over Bayern Munich forward Mathys Tel finally ended when he completed a loan move to Tottenham with the option of a permanent deal in the summer. Paris Saint-Germain was one of the most active clubs during the window by signing Khvicha Kvaratskhelia from Napoli, and releasing several players. The Columbus Crew completed the permanent transfer of MLS All-Star forward Juan Camilo "Cucho" Hernandez to Real Betis for an undisclosed fee. Man City goes big to salvage

season City usually makes its moves in the offseason. But in a bid to rescue a campaign that unraveled at the end of last year and was derailed again in a 5-1 loss at Arsenal, City spent big in January on five new signings. Gonzalez took its outlay past \$200 million. City signed Egypt forward Omar Marmoush for \$73 million and defenders Abdou Diallo and defenders Abdou Diallo from Lens and Vitor Reis for a combined \$77 million. Christian McAfarlane, an 18-year-old left back, joined from sister club New York City FC while captain Kyle Walker left for AC Milan. Gonzalez's arrival finally gives City a defensive midfielder in the mold of Rodri — the Ballon d'Or holder who was ruled out for the season in September because of an ACL injury. The Premier League title seems well beyond City, which is 15 points behind leader Liverpool, and a Champions League bid has been made extra difficult after being drawn against holder Real Madrid in the playoffs. But City manager



Pep Guardiola will hope the new additions can return the club to the Champions League next season. PSG re-enters the galactico' market Paris Saint-Germain has lost much of its star appeal in recent years following the departures of Lionel Messi, Neymar and Kylian Mbappé. A shift in strategy has seen

the Qatar-backed club focus more on younger and French talents rather than superstar names. But the Kvaratskhelia deal for a reported fee of around \$72 million represents another marquee signing. The Georgia forward isn't at the level of Messi and Neymar but he has long been among the most sought-after

players in Europe with thrilling, match-winning qualities. PSG offloaded striker Randal Kolo Muani — a \$101 million signing last season — to Juventus on loan, and central defender Milan Skriniar to Fenerbahce, and Asensio. Villa's Champions League push

Through to the Champions League last 16, Aston Villa boosted its attacking options in the form of Marcus Rashford and Asensio. Rashford was one of the big stories of the window after falling out of favor at Manchester United. Despite being linked with clubs across Europe, as well as Saudi Arabia, he secured a loan to Villa for the rest of the season. If Unai Emery can get the best out of the former England international, he could prove to be an inspired signing in terms of Villa's Champions League campaign and push for a top four finish. Meanwhile, in former Real Madrid midfielder Asensio, Villa has a player with Champions League-winning knowhow. Saudi recruitment stalls? Neymar's high-profile move to the Saudi league was cut short last week when the Brazil great's contract was terminated by Al-Hilal and he left for boyhood club Santos. Along with Cristiano Ronaldo and Karim Benzema, the former

Barcelona and PSG superstar was a standout signing as the Saudi league launched a recruitment drive to lure the world's top players. But injury meant Neymar was reduced to seven games for Al-Hilal following his 2023 move for a reported \$98 million and his departure brought an underwhelming end to his time there. Previously, Jordan Henderson left Al-Ettifaq after just six months to join Ajax, and Portuguese forward Jota spent a year at Al-Ittihad before leaving for French team Rennes. Jota rejoined Celtic during this window. The big signing for the league during this window was Jhon Duran, the Colombia striker who joined Ronaldo's Al-Nassr from Villa for a reported 64 million pounds (\$80 million). Perhaps bigger is to come in the future, with Liverpool's Mohamed Salah out of contract at the end of the season and repeatedly linked with a move. Relief for Barcelona Rather than bringing in new players, Barcelona's biggest

challenge was registering two it already owned. Dani Olmo and Pau Victor were registered only after the government sports authority intervened. The Spanish league and the federation had denied Barcelona's request to re-register the duo because it missed the end-of-year deadline to comply with salary cap rules. Barcelona accused the league of making unrealistic requests for extra documentation and said payment for VIP seating at the new Camp Nou stadium became available only on Jan. 3. That payment allowed the club to comply with the league's financial fair play rules. Major moves in women's soccer The deals are getting bigger in women's soccer. U.S. Defender Naomi Girman became the first million-dollar player in the women's game when she moved from the San Diego Wave to Chelsea, which also spent big to bring England midfielder Keira Walsh back to the Women's Super League from Barcelona.



Carlsen accuses FIDE chief of coercion, broken promises

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

World number one Magnus Carlsen has demanded that International Chess Federation President Arkady Dvorkovich resign for "coercion of players, misuse of power and broken promises" after talks to thrash out an agreement between the world body and the Freestyle Tour co-founded by him collapsed. The 34-year-old Norwegian superstar was reacting to FIDE's statement on Monday in which it declared that efforts to work out a consensus with the Freestyle Chess Tour, co-founded by Carlsen and German entrepreneur Jan Henric Buettner, had failed over the use of the term world championship. FIDE also asked players wanting to participate in the Tour's events to sign a waiver to remain eligible for the official World Championship cycle. The Freestyle Tour reacted by lambasting FIDE but at the same time, agreed to postpone the use of term world championship for its grand finale this year. The decision means that players will not be required to sign a FIDE waiver anymore. Sharing a few personal messages from Dvorkovich, Carlsen said the Russians had promised to leave players out

of this tug of war in a text to his father before the world rapid and blitz championship in New York last month. "...To convince me to play the Rapid & Blitz in New York, you wrote Dec 19th to my 'Just want to pass a message to you and Magnus that whatever happens between FIDE and Freestyle in terms of recognition, players will NOT be affected in any way. They can decide on their own and FIDE will not take any negative action,'" Carlsen revealed. "You added later that day: 'I will step down if my word will be undermined by the Council.' By forcing players to sign an unacceptable waiver you have reneged on your promise. Will you resign?" Carlsen asked. Neither FIDE nor Dvorkovich did not immediately respond to Carlsen's sharp statement. The first leg of the five-round Freestyle Tour, featuring classical games, starts February 6 in Germany. Tournaments will then be planned in Paris (April), New York (July), New Delhi (September) and Cape Town (December). Reigning world champion D Gukesh is among the players listed to compete in the Tour's events. "Freestyle remains committed to protecting players from FIDE's

questionable tactics. To ensure that no player is forced into a difficult position, we have decided -- effective immediately, as of February 3 -- to postpone the decision to award the title of 'World Champion' to the winner of the Freestyle Chess Grand Slam Tour for an additional 10 months," Buettner said in an open letter to FIDE president. "This decision ensures that no player is forced to choose between signing the unlawful letter FIDE is coercing them into or facing its threatened consequences. The current cycle is officially titled 'The Grand Slam Tour,'" he added. This was after FIDE said no agreement was reached with the Tour despite several concessions from its side. "The Freestyle Chess Tour has chosen not to acknowledge FIDE's existing authority over the World Championship title and has opted to remain a privately organised tournament, primarily featuring hand-picked elite players, rather than an open and transparent qualification process," the FIDE stated. The FIDE said that the waiver "does not impose new requirements on the players but provides them with a one-off exception from their existing contractual obligations."

David Beckham wins gold in National Games

PTI ■ RUDRAPUR

Andaman and Nicobar Islands cyclist David Beckham Elkatochoongo, whose last name saved him from denying entry in the United Kingdom for the 2022 Commonwealth Games, on Tuesday won gold in the men's elite sprint event at the National Games here. The 21-year-old Elkatochoongo clocked a time of 10.691 seconds in two laps to win the gold while Laitonjam Ronaldo Singh (10.724 seconds) of Manipur and another Andaman and Nicobar Islands cyclist Esow Alben (10.826 seconds) took the silver and bronze respectively. It was a tough fight among the three best cyclists of the country competing at the brand new Shivalik Velodrome here, with Elkatochoongo emerging on top ultimately. When Elkatochoongo landed in the UK for the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games, the British immigration officers were



stumped when he told them his name. They asked him if David Beckham was his real name. After double checking of his passport, he was allowed entry by the immigration officers. Elkatochoongo's name was given by his father who was a 'street footballer' and a fan of charismatic English football great and former captain David Beckham. Elkatochoongo's first love was also football but later shifted to cycling which is quite popular in Andaman and Nicobar Islands which has produced the likes of

Deborah Herold, the first Indian cyclist to win a medal in Asian Senior Championships and world number four at one time. Elkatochoongo was the best Indian cyclist at the 2022 Asian Games in Hangzhou, reaching to the quarterfinals. His and 22-year-old Ronaldo's presence in the Indian cycling team for the Hangzhou Asian Games created a lot of buzz in the foreign media because of their names. Ronaldo was given his name by his father as he was born during the 2002 World Cup which Brazil won with

Ronaldinho playing a big role in the triumph. Ronaldo is a sprint silver medalist at the 2022 Asian Championships. Esow Alben was the first Indian cyclist to win an individual medal at the global level, a silver in keirin event at the 2018 junior track world championships. He won a silver in sprint and a bronze in keirin in the 2019 edition also. Esow and Ronaldo were also part of the quartet that won the team sprint gold in the 2019 junior track world championships. In other events of the day, Karnataka's Keerthi Rangaswamy won the gold medal in the women elite scratch 10km race. Assam's Chayanika Gogoi clinched the silver medal, while Meenakshi from Haryana bagged the bronze. In the men's elite scratch race (15km), Services Sahil Kumar won the gold medal. Kerala's Adwait Sankar and Krishna Nayakodi, also of Services, clinched the silver and bronze medals respectively.

Anmol Kharb wins gold in National Games



PTI ■ DEHRADUN

Rising shuttler Anmol Kharb continued her impressive run, defeating top seed Anupama Upadhyaya in straight games in the women's singles final to claim the gold medal at the 38th National Games here on Tuesday. The 18-year-old from Haryana, a member of the gold medal-winning Indian team at the Asia Team Championships, showcased her skill and determination by outclassing world number 43 Anupama 21-16, 22-20 to secure the top prize. The gold medal marked another milestone in Anmol's rising career, following her runner-up finish at the Guwahati Masters Super 100 tournament last December and her victories at the Belgian and Polish Internationals last year. In other events, Satish Kumar Karunakaran and Aadya Variyath battled hard to overcome Deep Rambhiya and Akshaya Warang 21-16, 21-8 in the mixed doubles final and win the gold medal. In men's doubles, Nithin HV and Prakash Raj S defeated Vaibhav and Ashith Surya 21-16, 21-14 in a one-sided final to take home the coveted gold. Later in the day, top seed Sathish Kumar Karunakaran will face Suryaksh Rawat in the men's singles final. Star shuttler and home state favourite Lakshya Sen, ranked world number 10, withdrew from the competition at the last moment on Monday.

Punjab FC look to upset Mohun Bagan Super Giant

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Punjab FC will look to carry forward their winning momentum when they take on league leaders Mohun Bagan Super Giant in the India Super League match here on Wednesday. The Shers, currently ninth in the league table with 23 points from 17 matches, will be aiming to put up a strong fight against Mohun Bagan, who sit comfortably at the top with 43 points from 19 matches. A positive result in this game would provide a significant boost to Punjab's playoff ambitions as they look to close the gap on the teams above them. Speaking ahead of the game, Punjab FC head coach Panagiotis Dilmeris emphasised on the importance of maintaining focus and taking the fight to the league leaders. "Every match is important for us from this point on. We will have to play every match like a final and any point we can take is really important. Tomorrow's match will be crucial like the others. We have to be focused during the entirety of the game and stick to our game plan," said



Dilmeris. The Shers will take confidence from their thrilling 3-2 victory over Bengaluru FC, in which Luka Majcen's injury-time winner secured all three points for the former. The Slovenian striker remains Punjab FC's talisman upfront, with seven goals and three assists this season. Filip Mrzljak, who also found the net in the previous match, has been a vital presence in midfield alongside Ezequiel Pulga Vidal, both of whom have played crucial roles in creating and converting chances. New signing Petros Giakoumakis

impressed on his first start and will be eager to build on that performance. However, the Shers will miss the services of Asmir Suljic, who is suspended after accumulating four yellow cards. Defensively, Ivan Novoselec, who played a crucial role in Punjab FC's last-minute winner against Bengaluru, will need to marshal the backline effectively alongside Nikhil Prabhu, Tekcham Abhishek Singh and Suresh Meitei. The youngsters have racked up 48, 36 and 29 interceptions respectively placing them in the top five of the league statistics. Mohun Bagan enter this match in formidable form, unbeaten in their last five matches, including a dominant 4-0 win over Mohammedan SC in their most recent outing. Under the guidance of José Francisco Molina, the Kolkata-based side boasts of the best home record in the league, with eight wins and one draw. Their attack, led by Dimitri Petratos and Jamie Maclaren, has been lethal, scoring 36 goals this season, while their defense has been equally resolute, keeping 11 clean sheets.

One series does not define the form of whole team: Gill

PTI ■ NAGPUR

India's vice-captain Shubman Gill on Tuesday defended their performance in the Test rubber loss in Australia, saying that one poor series does not define a team and that it is unfair to criticise a side after a rare bad outing. India suffered a 1-3 defeat in the five-match series in Australia, bringing to an end their decade-long dominance in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. Key players such as Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, KL Rahul, Rishabh Pant, and Gill himself are now set to return for the three-match ODI series against England before heading to Dubai for the all-important ICC Champions Trophy. "One series does not define

the form of the whole team. There are a lot of players who, in the past, have performed consistently in a lot of series and tournaments," Gill told reporters here ahead of the first ODI against England. "Definitely, we did not play as per our expectations in the Australian series, but still we played some good cricket. We were unfortunate not to have (Jasprit) Bumrah on the last day and we would have won the match and the series would have been a draw and this talk wouldn't have happened. "One match and one day doesn't define us, we won there twice before and earlier won a World Cup and then reached the final of a World Cup, so we should keep all those things in

mind." Before the reverse in Australia, India were also whitewashed 3-0 by New Zealand at home, unprecedented in the country's cricket history. Rohit's batting in ODIs has been game changing The spotlight is firmly on senior players Rohit and Kohli, who have struggled with the bat in recent times. However, Gill was quick to highlight the skipper's sensational form in white-ball cricket, which played a pivotal role in India reaching the 2023 ODI World Cup final. Even in the Sri Lanka series, Rohit scored two half centuries. "The way Rohit bhai has been batting in the ODIs in the past one year and a half, it's been really game-changing for us. "Taking the momentum



right through from the start and taking the game away from ball one and it makes the job of the non-striker and the batsmen coming in a bit easier and I think it has helped our team a lot." Chopping and changing team will create insecure environment

Karun Nair produced a solid performance in the Vijay Hazare Trophy, averaging 389.50 in the tournament, but was overlooked for the Champions Trophy. However, Gill stressed the importance of continuity to ensure a secure team environment rather than

making frequent changes based on domestic performances. "Karun had a great Vijay Hazare Trophy, but that doesn't mean the current players should be dropped. They have also performed well to reach this stage. "We have lost only one game in the World Cups. The players in the squad have contributed significantly, and while it's unfortunate for those excelling in domestic cricket who weren't picked, constant chopping and changing will affect players' confidence. Without continuity, we can never build a strong team." Gill has been made a part of the leadership group, and on taking up the additional responsibility of being a vice-captain, he said "I take it as a challenge to lead my

way, firstly with my performance and then definitely in the field if Rohit bhai would want my opinions. It's my duty to let him know what my thoughts are." No toxic competition between Yashasvi, Abhishek and me With Yashasvi Jaiswal and Abhishek churning out top performances, Gill is in a scramble for a spot at the top of the order, but the 25-year-old asserted that there is no "toxic competition" between the three. "Abhishek is a childhood friend of mine. Jaiswal is also a friend, I don't think there is any toxic competition between us. Obviously if you are playing for the country, you want to perform in every match, and not think that 'I wish this

guy doesn't perform.' "You are playing for the country and for the team and whosoever performs you congratulate them," Gill said. England are a good side, this series is important The three ODIs against England are the last bit of preparation the Indian team gets before the Champions Trophy, starting February 19. The 0-2 series loss to Sri Lanka in August was the last time India played ODIs last year. "We are playing against a good side and three ODIs and we are not taking this as a practice for Champions Trophy as it is a very important series for us and we are looking to dominate and win this series like any other series."

Varun Chakravarthy added to Indian ODI squad

PTI ■ NAGPUR

In-form mystery spinner Varun Chakravarthy has been included in the Indian ODI squad after his heroics in the just-concluded T20I series against England as the team management wants the KKR mystery spinner to "keep up the momentum".

There is a fair chance that Chakravarthy might just replace one of the four specialist spinners in the Champions Trophy (CT) squad. It could be one among Kuldeep Yadav or Washington Sundar, who could be axed to accommodate Chakravarthy before the final squad is announced. A lot will depend on how he fares in the ODIs.

Chakravarthy, who got 14 wickets in five T20Is against England and was adjudged the 'Player of The Series', has not been picked for the three ODIs against England and the Champions Trophy later this month.

Chakravarthy was seen training and bowling in the nets on Tuesday. "Yes, Varun Chakravarthy is part of the squad," India vice-captain Shubman Gill confirmed in a media interaction after the team's training. It is understood that head coach Gautam Gambhir wants Chakravarthy to remain in rhythm and bowl to the likes of Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, and Rishabh Pant. With the deadline for squad changes



for the Champions Trophy set for February 12, he remains a strong candidate for selection. However, it is unlikely that he will be added to the CT squad without playing a single ODI.

India have got three finger spinners – two left-armers (Ravindra Jadeja and Axar Patel) and one right-arm off-spinner in Washington Sundar. Kuldeep Yadav, who is returning to the Indian team after undergoing a sports hernia surgery in October 2024, is the lone wrist spinner in the squad.

"As of now, the team management wanted Varun to bowl in ODI squad nets ahead of England series. Varun doesn't play red-ball cricket," a senior BCCI source said on conditions of anonymity.

"With domestic white ball season already concluded, he does not have any assignments till start of IPL end March. He is in good rhythm and they want him to continue that," he added.

When asked if there is a possibility of him being selected for the ODI series and subsequent Champions

Trophy based on current form, the source replied. "The selectors have already picked four spinners and you only have three ODI games.

"But if team management wants Varun, it will certainly have to speak to the chairman of selection committee. Whether they intend to or not, is still not known."

The Men in Blue don't have a second wrist spinner and Chakravarthy's strong form could work in his favour.

When he last played on the flatter tracks in Dubai during the 2021 T20 World Cup, Chakravarthy struggled to make an impact.

However, he has significantly improved since then, focusing more on over-spin to refine his variations. The English team has not read him well and in Champions Trophy, one of the opposition is Bangladesh, which was bamboozled by him in October during the T20I series. He could also be an unknown entity for most of the New Zealand and Pakistan teams.

Additionally, he has performed consistently on batting-friendly surfaces in the recent T20I series against England, finishing as the leading wicket-taker at an impressive average of 9.85. India are set to play all their league matches in Dubai.

Chakravarthy picked up 18 wickets for Tamil Nadu in the National One Day Championship.



Dimuth Karunaratne to retire from cricket

PTI ■ GALLE

Former Sri Lanka captain Dimuth Karunaratne is set to retire from international cricket after playing his 100th Test, which will be the second and final match against Australia starting here on Thursday.

The 36-year-old, one of the most prolific batters for Sri Lanka, has scored 7,172 runs at an average of just under 40, with 16 centuries and 34 half-centuries in 99 Tests over nearly 14 years. He has also featured in 50 ODIs, scoring 1,316 runs with one century and 11 fifties.

"It is difficult for a Test player to keep himself motivated to play four Tests for a year and maintain his form," Karunaratne, who made his Test debut in 2012, was quoted as saying by 'Daily FT'.

"In the last two-three years after the WTC (World Test Championship) was introduced, we have been having very little bilateral series. My current form is another reason; completing my 100 Tests, the end of the WTC cycle (2023-25), I thought is the right time to retire."

Karunaratne plans to relocate to Australia with his family next month. Having made his first-class debut for Sinhalese Sports Club (SSC) in 2008, he will play his final match for them against NCC in the SLC Major Club three-Day Tournament from February 14-16.

"I have some personal plans of my own. I've decided to retire after speaking to other senior players like Angie (Angelo Mathews) and Chandni (Dinesh Chandimal)," he said.

"Rather than the three of us retiring at the same time, it will be better for us to go one by one. I thought I will retire first because I know I cannot go for my next target – 10,000 runs – with the lesser number of Tests being played.

"I am happy with what I have achieved so far. I want to announce my retirement with a happy moment like playing in my 100th Test." Karunaratne has been struggling for form of late, managing scores of 7 and 0 in the first Test against Australia in which Sri Lanka slumped to an innings and 242 run defeat to go 0-1 down in the two-Test series.

"Any cricketer's dream is to play 100 Tests and score 10,000 runs. It's a big achievement. When you start playing cricket, you don't think of those targets, but when you continue playing, you come across different targets," he said.

"But as Sri Lanka are playing less Test matches for a year, getting to 10,000 runs seems far away. Appearing in 100 Tests I feel is an achievement," he added.

He would look back at his career as a satisfied man due to its sheer longevity.

"Several players play Test cricket but only a handful are able to go and play 100 Tests. To become a member of that exclusive club I am very happy. To become Sri Lanka's seventh cricketer to play in 100 Tests is also a happy moment," he signed off.



I wanted to lead MI Cape Town: Rashid

PTI ■ GQEBERHA

Rashid Khan said he wanted to lead MI Cape Town in the same manner as he led Afghanistan during the T20 World Cup and credited his improved leadership this season to his familiarity with the team, which helped secure a spot in the SA20 playoffs.

After two forgettable seasons, MI Cape Town now sits at the top of the points table with 30 points from nine matches ahead of the playoffs.

The 26-year-old led Afghanistan to a historic victory over Australia in the Super Eight stage of the T20 World Cup 2024, following which the team made it to the semifinals.

"I wanted to lead MI Cape Town the way I led Afghanistan in the T20 World Cup. Coach Robbie Peterson also encouraged me in this direction," Rashid, who captained MI Cape Town in the first season but missed out last season due to injury, said in a media interaction ahead of the first qualifier against Paarl Royals.

"I think this year I knew the players quite well and spent more time with them so I had the knowledge about which bowler to use at what point of time.

"The most important thing was to have clear communication with the players. To have what is happening in the mind of the captain and to know what is going through in their minds. I think I could have done better in the first year but you just keep learning."

Rashid noted that every player has taken responsibility and risen to the occasion, marking a major shift from the previous seasons.

"In the last couple of years, we played good cricket, but it was just about that we haven't finished well. You know, we haven't hit those points where it was a matter of going to the result," he said.

"I feel like this year we just have done that well. It's an overall team effort. Whoever got the opportunity, they have contributed for the team. Even if it's like he goes for one ball or two balls to hit there, he did it for the team."

Praising the contribution from the bowlers, Rashid said: "Everyone has been contributing with the ball as well. So, I feel like this year, this is a massive difference. The biggest thing is we're enjoying ourselves. You know, we're having fun and we're not much thinking about what the result will be."

Rashid emphasised the importance of having a leadership group in the team.

Shillong to become new ISL venue

PTI ■ SHILLONG

A new venue will be added to the Indian Super League (ISL) when Shillong hosts NorthEast United FC's 'home' match against Mumbai City FC on Friday at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium.

The football loving fans of Meghalaya have been waiting for this ISL's debut match with much anticipation.

The Guwahati-based Highlanders will also host Bengaluru FC and East Bengal at the same venue here on February 21 and March 8, respectively, as the fans look forward to witness Indian football's biggest stars, including Sunil Chhetri, Lallianzuala Chhangte and Naorem Mahesh Singh in action.

NorthEast United CEO Mandar Tamhane on Tuesday shed light on how



the club's move to Shillong came about.

"When we played the semi-final of the Durand Cup against Shillong Lajong here, it was an eye opener for me even though I've been involved in Indian football for over 25 years," Tamhane said.

"The online tickets were sold out in 12 minutes and there were 5km long queues for physical tickets. Fan parks in different districts were also jam-packed.

"We are a club representing eight states and we always wanted to bring football to parts of the Northeast. Seeing the response we got for the Durand Cup, reaffirmed our decision to come to Shillong this season itself," he was quoted as saying by the official ISL website.

He said the Meghalaya

government extended their support to the move.

NorthEast United forward Redeem Tlang, who hails from Shillong, has been one of the ISL's notable domestic talents. With over 100 ISL appearances under his belt and having played a key role in NorthEast United's historic Durand Cup victory in 2024, Tlang is thrilled about the league's arrival in his home city.

"It's a very special moment for me personally and also for the people of Meghalaya to experience ISL matches in Shillong," he said.

"ISL is the top league in the country and to have it come to your home is an incredible feeling. People all over Meghalaya love football. Football is like a religion in Shillong. It's the first game that you play when you grow up here," said Tlang who began his football journey with Shillong Lajong.

Ashwin expresses concern over Sanju Samson's lack of form

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former India spinner R Ashwin has expressed concern at T20 batting star Sanju Samson's lack of form, saying his mind will start "playing tricks" with him if he does not find a way out of the current rut.

The 30-year-old Samson, who will be out of action for a month due to a fracture in his right index finger, endured a terrible series against England's express pace and short balls.

He managed a mere 51 runs in the five-match contest that India won 4-1.

"...If Sanju keeps getting dismissed like this, as a batter, the mind will be playing tricks," Ashwin said.

"(It will force you to think) the bowler is bowling a certain way and I am getting

dismissed like this, is the bowler bowling well or do I have a shortcoming? Will I be able to adapt? Once so many questions arises, then it becomes difficult," he explained.

Ashwin also advised out-of-form skipper Suryakumar Yadav to change his approach to come out of the form slump that he is also enduring right now. Suryakumar could only manage 28 runs in the just-concluded series against England.

"I can understand it happening in one or two games, but it is quite surprising," Ashwin said on his Hindi YouTube channel.

"...When you know you are being attacked in a certain way, there should be a different approach to that ball or just avoid it and force the bowler to bowl at your



strengths."

"Suryakumar Yadav is a very experienced guy. He has a lot of ability. One can say he brought about a change of guard in Indian batting, showing the way. But the time has come for him to take some time out and change his approach," he added.

Ashwin said Samson, who has blown hot and cold throughout his run in international cricket, should take responsive actions to ensure that doubts don't creep into his subconscious mind.

"But Ashwin cited legendary Sachin Tendulkar's advice during last week's BCCI

Naman Awards that players should use their subconscious mind too.

"Sachin Tendulkar also said during the (BCCI) awards function that (you must) do so many repetitions that you allow the subconscious mind to take over," he said.

"But if so much confusion comes over on the subconscious mind, then batting becomes a different ball game altogether."

Ashwin said failing in T20 cricket is not the problem but the manner of dismissals can be a cause of concern.

"As an experienced cricketer I will not focus on someone failing in T20 cricket but on how is he getting out, what is his decision making like, I will focus on that. They are good enough players to find solutions and they will think over it," he said.

Ashwin said a player is always rated on his ability to handle pressure in the shortest formats.

"T20 cricket is (all) about failures, you are bound to fail. You will not be able to play percentage cricket. As per this, I will think (about) the player who can handle pressure and can deliver wins," he said.

"Those players can be given long rope because T20 cricket is not about consistency, it's about excitement, putting fear in the opposition."

Ashwin also expressed surprise at England's approach across formats, saying they are losing more than they are winning due to their aggressive strategy.

"...If I was England, I would be really worried, because they play Bazball, one-day and T20 cricket... All that is fine," he said.

Virat, Rohit's form will be key to India's success in CT: Raina

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

They may have struggled in recent times but the form of skipper Rohit Sharma and his longtime colleague Virat Kohli will be key to India's success in the upcoming ICC Champions Trophy, reckoned former batter Suresh Raina on Tuesday.

The Champions Trophy starts in Pakistan from February 19 and will conclude on March 9 but India will play all their matches in Dubai as per the hybrid model agreement signed by the concerned parties.

Speaking to broadcaster Star Sports, Raina said, "Rohit Sharma's strike rate has improved significantly after

the ODI World Cup in 2023. Since then, he has scored runs at a strike rate of 119-120, making him one of India's best ODI batsmen.

"For Rohit and Virat, I would say that when you have a strong record of past performances, it gives you a lot of confidence. They complement each other well, and both have the skill to score big runs. If they perform well, India's Champions Trophy campaign will benefit immensely."

India have been clubbed with arch-rivals Pakistan, New Zealand and Bangladesh in the group stage of the tournament.

Speaking about the spin department and team combination, Raina said, "I

think (Ravindra) Jadeja will definitely play because of his effectiveness in ODIs. Kuldeep (Yadav) has not played a match since his injury, but we also have Axar Patel, who has been consistently performing well.

"The pitches in Dubai will offer some seam movement, but spin will also play a role. That's why Kuldeep, Axar, and Jadeja need to be in top form. Rohit's choice of team combination will be crucial."

Before the Champions Trophy, India are also playing a three-match ODI series at home against England, and Raina believed it will help the likes of Kohli and Rohit to get some valuable game time before the mega event.

"When it comes to white-ball



cricket, Virat knows how to switch on and switch off. He has scored the most runs against England, so his energy will be at a different level automatically. The three ODIs will be played in Nagpur, Ahmedabad, and Cuttack -- all of which are high-scoring

venues," Raina said of Kohli, who has struggled for runs in the Test series in Australia.

Sharing his thoughts on the upcoming series, Raina said Rohit should continue to go after the bowlers from the get-go as it has also brought him success in the last ODI World Cup in 2023.

Speaking on his expectations from Rohit, Raina said, "I think Rohit should play aggressively. You saw how he batted in the ODI World Cup - he was attacking even in the final. So, I believe his approach will remain the same.

"The key question is who will open alongside him -- will it be Shubman (Gill)? I remember, whenever they play together, they maintain an aggressive intent."

Raina also lauded Rohit's captaincy.

"Rohit Sharma is an attacking captain. The way he utilises his bowlers is commendable -- bringing in Mohammad Shami at crucial moments and relying on spinners strategically.

"When Rohit scores runs, it also reflects in his captaincy. This could be his last ICC trophy as captain, and if he wins, he will become the first Indian player to win four ICC trophies.

"He has already won the T20 World Cup, and securing the Champions Trophy would be a remarkable achievement. He will be motivated to make it happen, but scoring runs will be crucial for him."